



EUROPEAN ASSOCIATION FOR
THE EDUCATION OF ADULTS

Widening Access to Adult Learning through Transnational Paid Education Leave Schemes for All Workers

EAEA Statement

April 2023

**Time constraints due to work are one of the main barriers to learning.
Paid Training Leave helps workers have the time to participate in education.**

Key Recommendations

For the European Union

- Ensure an integrated approach to policies promoting lifelong learning and education in the EU (e.g. Individual Learning Accounts, micro-credentials, Upskilling Pathways, etc.) and their policy coherence with social and workers' rights.
- Introduce policy, legislative and budgetary measures to promote inclusive and effective Paid Training Leave schemes in the EU, especially for transnational learning programmes and, in particular, to enable workers to study or train in another Member State – physically or virtually.
- Facilitate dialogue and knowledge exchange between workers, social partners and stakeholders.
- Promote policies for quality education that start from the needs of the learners.

For National, Regional and Local Governments

- Introduce, strengthen and fund inclusive and effective Paid Training Leave Schemes that are:
 - o Accessible to all workers, regardless of their specific employment status;
 - o Applicable for all forms of learning, including formal/non-formal education, on-site/blended/distance learning programmes, also abroad.
 - o Based on the free choice of the learner to attend trainings that are relevant to them.
- Proactively engage with workers, social partners and stakeholders, including non-formal adult education providers, to design and implement inclusive and effective Paid Training Leave schemes.
- Create a supporting learning environment for all workers, also by providing and funding career and study guidance programmes.
- Ratify and implement the ILO Paid Educational Leave Convention.



Calling for an integrated approach to lifelong learning

In recent years, the European Union has intensified its efforts to build a European Education Area. A large number of policy initiatives and strategies aim to support this objective, including in the area of adult learning and education (ALE): the European Skills Agenda, Upskilling Pathways, the New European Agenda for Adult Learning, Individual Learning Accounts, and micro-credentials, among others. Financial instruments, especially Erasmus+, enable adult learners to participate in transnational learning mobility.

However, also due to the limited use of the Union competence in social matters and the lack of coordination between different levels of governance, these initiatives and strategies have produced sub-optimal or inconsistent outcomes. This also applies to the possibility of European citizens to engage in transnational learning activities through paid educational leave schemes: the right to use Paid Educational/Training Leave is, in many EU countries, restricted to on-site learning within the country or region and/or is limited to a comparatively small number of educational offers, often leaving out non-formal ALE offers (EP, 2022).¹ The European Pillar of Social Rights stipulates that *“everyone has the right to quality and inclusive education, training and life-long learning in order to maintain and acquire skills that enable them to participate fully in society and manage successfully transitions in the labour market”* (Principle 1). Yet, the lack of transnational, inclusive and effective paid training leaves schemes means that, for many people, this right does not become a reality.

EAEA believes that an **integrated approach to policy initiatives and strategies in lifelong learning and education - that ensures coherence with social and workers’ rights - is needed**, at both the European and the national level. This is pivotal to increase adult participation in learning and also to reach adults who are in the labour market and would like to discover new areas, re-orient, upskill and retrain, regardless of (the existence of) training offers at the workplace.

Overcoming barriers to learning: The need for inclusive and effective Paid Training Leave Schemes

EAEA recommends the implementation of inclusive and effective Paid Training Leave schemes to widen participation in adult learning. **The right to individual Paid Training Leave for workers should complement the provision of a universal right to adult learning (guaranteeing access to training for everyone) and employee training (workplace/on-the-job learning that should be organised by employers within working hours).**

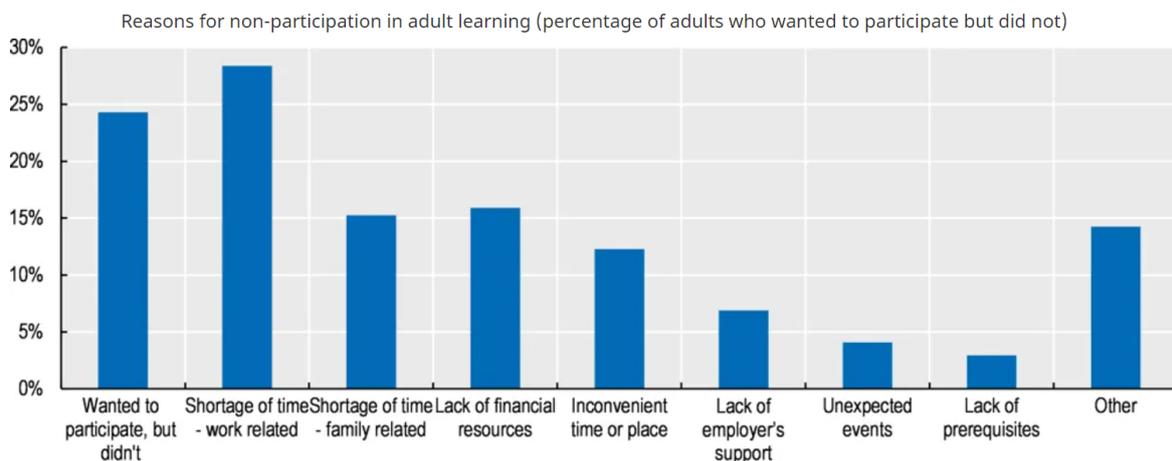
Paid Training Leaves play an important role in giving all workers the opportunity to continue their education in a self-directed way and to discover new horizons, without any loss of income. Transnational and online learning courses contribute to a wider and better choice of learning

¹ <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/petitions/en/petition/content/0825%252F2022/html/Petition-No-0825%252F2022-by-D.M.-%2528Italian%2529-on-denied-access-to-paid-educational-leaves-in-Belgium-for-workers-studying-in-another-Member-State>

opportunities and can be particularly interesting for migrants and skilled workers from other EU countries who would like to learn in their language of origin.

Participation in adult learning in the EU is still below policy targets which, in the New European Agenda for Adult Learning, aim to reach 60% participation by 2030 (from around 42% participation at the time of writing, in a 12-month period). According to the Labour Force Survey, that considers learning activities in the last 4 weeks, only about 11% of the adult population has participated in education or training in the previous month (Eurostat, 2021).² The lack of time due to work commitments and the lack of financial resources are major obstacles that prevent adults from participating in further education, as illustrated below (OECD, 2020).³

Figure 1. **Barriers to participation in adult learning**



To overcome these barriers, most Member States have already one or more Paid Training Leave schemes, however their design, uptake and impact vary widely (CEDEFOP, 2023).⁴ Moreover, as pointed out above, some national and regional frameworks do not allow for participation in non-formal education, on-line and distance programmes, or studies abroad. Twelve Member States have signed the [ILO Paid Educational Leave Convention](https://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:12100::NO:12100:P12100_ILO_CODE:C140:NO),⁵ while the EU has formally endorsed Paid Training Leave as part of the necessary enabling framework for up-skilling and re-skilling in the [Council Recommendation on Individual Learning Accounts](https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2022/06/16/council-recommendation-on-individual-learning-accounts-to-boost-training-of-working-age-adults/) (Article 20)⁶:

² In 2021, the share of people aged 25 to 64 in the EU who had participated in education or training in the last 4 weeks was 10.8 %. (Eurostat) https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Adult_learning_statistics

³ About 28% of adults claim they do not participate in training because they lacked time due to work commitments (OECD) <https://www.oecd.org/coronavirus/policy-responses/the-potential-of-online-learning-for-adults-early-lessons-from-the-covid-19-crisis-ee040002/>

⁴ <https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/tools/financing-adult-learning-db/instrument-types/training-leave>

⁵ https://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:12100::NO:12100:P12100_ILO_CODE:C140:NO

⁶ <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2022/06/16/council-recommendation-on-individual-learning-accounts-to-boost-training-of-working-age-adults/>

Member States are recommended to introduce paid training leave or income replacement provisions or review the adequacy of existing provisions, considering:

- (a) their coverage of all types of employment relationship, and the self-employed;*
- (b) financial and non-financial support for employers (in particular SMEs) whose employees make use of paid training leave;*
- (c) the need to ensure the effective implementation of such provisions.*

Thanks to Paid Training Leave schemes:

- Workers can enjoy **more opportunities to re-skill and up-skill**. Notably, workers with jobs at high risk of displacement, due to automation and/or the green transition, can build a path towards new careers.
- Workers have the **time** to participate in education, while maintaining a sufficient **remuneration**. This is particularly important for workers in low-paid jobs that – despite their prominent need for training – cannot afford to work less to accommodate study commitments.
- If designed to include online trainings (also organised abroad), workers can access education in other **languages** and enjoy a **wider range of studies and trainings**. These features are relevant especially for learners from migrant backgrounds, which can attend trainings in their own language, but also for learners whose learning needs are better met through learning offers in other countries (for instance, training courses in specific skills).

The EU added value to enable transnational Paid Training Leave schemes

Like Individual Learning Accounts, Paid Training Leave schemes can be classified as a demand-side measure to motivate adults to participate in learning (see [OECD Taxonomy](#))⁷. As a right that workers can exercise in many EU countries, it also confers, to a certain extent, empowerment to direct one's own educational path.

However, current Paid Training Leave schemes tend to be limited to very specific target groups (e.g. employees with permanent contracts) and allow only certain educational opportunities to be funded (mainly vocational programmes, especially for occupations with skills shortages). This excludes a large group of workers who would like to participate in learning but cannot afford to do so because of a lack of time and money (due to the loss of income). Consequentially, as the European Commission itself noted in the Impact Assessment on Individual Learning Accounts, these restrictive eligibility criteria translate into a very low take up, below 1% of workers on average.⁸

⁷ OECD (2017): Financial Incentives for Steering Education and Training. Getting Skills Right. Paris: OECD Publishing. https://read.oecd-ilibrary.org/employment/financial-incentives-for-steering-education-and-training-acquisition_9789264272415-en

⁸ European Commission Impact Assessment Report - SWD(2021)369, Page 8. Also available at [https://ec.europa.eu/transparency/documents-register/detail?ref=SWD\(2021\)369&lang=en](https://ec.europa.eu/transparency/documents-register/detail?ref=SWD(2021)369&lang=en)



EUROPEAN ASSOCIATION FOR
THE EDUCATION OF ADULTS

How National Paid Study Leaves hamper cross-border learning opportunities: the case of Belgium

The Belgian framework, regulated at the regional level, provides an illustrative example of the restrictions embedded in many Paid Training Leaves schemes in the EU. Workers in Belgium, in fact, enjoy the right to a paid study leave, but only if the training takes place within the country and on-site.⁹ These limitations therefore exclude workers that study in another Member State - regardless of the quality and recognition of their study programs. The results are paradoxical and discriminatory towards mobile EU citizens: a worker in Liège does not have the opportunity to attend a training in nearby Maastricht (Netherlands). A single mother from Romania, working in Brussels as a healthcare assistant, cannot participate to an online training in her own language.

The legal framework does not include studies abroad and requires training providers to apply for the eligibility of their educational programmes at the regional level. These different procedures – even within the same country – create unnecessary bureaucratic obstacles that, by design, would prevent the recognition of trainings in other Member States. This case demonstrates the need for common European guidelines on the recognition and quality assurance processes, in order to reduce the administrative burden on training providers, enable the mutual recognition of training programmes, and support an inclusive European Education Area.

Given the current rapidly evolving societal changes - especially through artificial intelligence and the green transition, but also the crisis-ridden nature of the European economy - this restriction to a few target groups and educational offers is no longer in keeping with the times. The development of models for skills forecasting is one of the central goals of research done by international and European organisations,¹⁰ but more and more studies are coming to the conclusion that transversal and life skills must be at the centre of learning and education so that people can prepare for the personal, social and professional future.

For this reason, Paid Training Leave schemes must also offer workers the opportunity to develop their own educational pathways, freely chosen among a very wide range of non-formal and formal courses. Transversal life skills, such as critical thinking, media literacy, active citizenship, and sustainability, equip people to respond to changes in their professional but also social and community life – thereby contributing to European understanding and the promotion of common values.

Plus, Paid Training Leave schemes are also a sustainable economic investment: the Commission estimates the annual cost of a 5% take up at 5.9 billion EUR, significantly smaller than the net benefits of comprehensive policy packages for adult learning – estimated at more than 50 billion EUR after 5 years.¹¹

⁹ For reference, in the Brussels region, see <https://economie-emploi.brussels/conge-education-paye>. For the Wallonia region, see <https://www.wallonie.be/fr/demarches/beneficier-dun-conge-education-paye-dans-le-secteur-privé>. For the Flanders region, see <https://www.vlaanderen.be/vlaams-opleidingsverlof>

¹⁰ See, for instance, research done by CEDEFOP: <https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/tools/skills-forecast>

¹¹ European Commission Impact Assessment Report - SWD(2021)369, Page 216. Also available at [https://ec.europa.eu/transparency/documents-register/detail?ref=SWD\(2021\)369&lang=en](https://ec.europa.eu/transparency/documents-register/detail?ref=SWD(2021)369&lang=en)

Moreover, having Transnational Paid Training Leaves would support the internationalisation of training providers and stimulate new educational partnerships at the European level, while removing the unfair disadvantage resulting from the many national Paid Training Leaves that exclude all educational providers based in another Member State.

In order to build a truly European Education Area, the EU should act to promote policy, legislative and budgetary measures to support Transnational Paid Training Leave schemes, including:

- Recommendations and guidelines to help Member States broadening access to national/regional Paid Training Leave Schemes, especially with regard to cross-border learning mobility programmes and the simplification of administrative requirements for both learners and training providers;
- Financial measures, investing in Paid Training Leaves, also by allocating additional, targeted funding through European Social Fund+ and Erasmus+ Programmes;

Erasmus+ for adult learners: without Paid Study Leave, an impossible equation for low paid workers

The current [Erasmus+ programme](#) provides adult with the possibility to study or train abroad up to 1 month.¹² Inclusion and Diversity are listed as priorities of the programme.

The [framework of inclusion measures of Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps 2021-27](#) stipulates that *“the Programmes shall provide adequate levels of financial support to participants with fewer opportunities, contributing to removing the barriers that prevent them to participate in Programme’s activities on equal footing to their peers”* (Article 6).¹³

[The Implementation guidelines - Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps Inclusion and Diversity Strategy](#) mentions, among the barriers that participants may encounter, the economic disadvantage experienced by *“learners who need to work to support themselves”*.¹⁴

Despite this category encompasses the majority of adult learners, the dedicated financial support measures available in the framework do not include any targeted instrument to address the loss of income incurred by participating to a learning mobility. This affects disproportionately low paid workers, which also *“have limited bargaining power when asking their employer for time off to participate in training. Further, they often cannot afford to take unpaid leave to pursue training”* ([OECD](#), 2019).¹⁵

The current design of the programme therefore exacerbates the “low-skill trap”, as defined by the OECD: *“Many [adults with low formal qualifications] have low-level positions with limited opportunities for development, frequently step in and out of unemployed and can often expect*

¹² <https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/opportunities/opportunities-for-individuals/adult-learners>

¹³ <https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/document/commission-decision-framework-inclusion-2021-27>

¹⁴ Page 11. <https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/document/implementation-guidelines-erasmus-and-european-solidarity-corps-inclusion-and-diversity-strategy?>

¹⁵ <https://www.oecd.org/els/emp/engaging-low-skilled-adults-2019.pdf>



EUROPEAN ASSOCIATION FOR
THE EDUCATION OF ADULTS

*limited returns to training.*¹⁶ In this regard, it should be noted that these undesirable results are also due to the lack of accessible and high quality career and study guidance services, which could facilitate access to information for these people.

- EU legislation setting minimum standards for an effective and inclusive European Paid Training Leave;

Introducing an EU Directive for a European Paid Training Leave, widening access to lifelong learning

Pertaining to the field of work, Paid Study Leaves are regulated by labour and social law. The EU and the Member States have shared competence in social policy, for the aspects defined in the Treaty (Article 4(2)(b) TFEU, read in conjunction with Article 3(3) TEU), which means that the **EU has the power to deliver legally binding legislation** in this area. Articles 151 and 153(1)(b) TFEU, in particular, provide a legal basis for the EU to issue minimum harmonization directives on working conditions. Moreover, EU action in this field would contribute to achieve the objectives set out in Articles 9, 165 and 166 TFEU, as well as to guarantee *practical and effective* access to the right to education (Article 14 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union).

Based on these provisions, the EU can **set minimum legal standards, common to all Member States, on the right to individual Paid Training Leave**. While Member States will be able to maintain or introduce more generous frameworks, a Directive can effectively open up Transnational and Inclusive Paid Study Leave Schemes for all workers in the EU.

- Strategic dialogues between workers/learners, social partners, formal and non-formal education providers and other relevant stakeholders.

In line with the new European agenda for adult learning, Transnational Paid Training Leave would address both the lack of time for studying and barriers to learning mobility.¹⁷ Additionally, the Union can help mobile workers access Paid Training Leave schemes where they live, also to attend in-person, blended and online trainings in other countries.

According to the Council Resolution on a strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training towards the European Education Area and beyond (2021-2030), priority actions include:

“Promoting the freedom for learners, teachers and trainers, and other education and training staff, to be mobile and for institutions to freely associate with one another in Europe and beyond, through learning mobility and cooperation across borders. Further efforts must be made to remove existing obstacles and barriers to all types of learning and teaching mobility, including issues related to access, guidance, student services and recognition.”

¹⁶ <https://www.oecd.org/els/emp/engaging-low-skilled-adults-2019.pdf>

¹⁷ Council Resolution on a new European agenda for adult learning 2021-2030, para. 37, 42, 43.
<https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/53179/st14485-en21.pdf>



EUROPEAN ASSOCIATION FOR
THE EDUCATION OF ADULTS

Supporting adult learners participating in study mobility programmes, also in the Erasmus+ framework, European Paid Training Leave schemes have the potential to remedy the gaps between these policy objectives and the reality of Europeans from all backgrounds.¹⁸

A European Paid Training Leave can become a bridge between the people of Europe, strengthening language proficiency and intercultural understanding, while building peace and solidarity, contributing to a stronger European cohesion and democracy.

For more information

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The European Association for the Education of Adults (EAEA) is the voice of non-formal adult education in Europe. EAEA is a European NGO with 120 member organisations in 43 countries and represents more than 60 million learners Europe-wide.

¹⁸ Council Resolution on a strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training towards the European Education Area and beyond (2021-2030). [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX:32021G0226\(01\)&from=EN](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX:32021G0226(01)&from=EN)