**EPALE Eesti keskuse ettepanekud Haridus- ja Teadusministeeriumi Täiskasvanuhariduse osakonnale vastamiseks Euroopa Komisjoni Täiskasvanuhariduse töögrupi küsimustikule**

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***Question 1: How are adult learning systems and their providers responding to the COVID-19 crisis?****Please discuss:*

* *The main trends in adult learning systems (e.g. transitions to online adult learning delivery);*
* *Challenges faced by providers (in terms of facilities, skills of adult learning professionals, funding, etc.)*
* *Any good practices in innovative ways to continue adult learning provision and reaching out to learners;*
* *Any policy initiatives in the area of adult learning and COVID-19.*

**The main trends:** From the very first days of the emergency, suggestions, and instructions on how to organize e-learning, what channels to use and how to support the e-learner have been distributed in various information rooms. HITSA has done a lot of work to support e-learning. Transitions to online adult learning delivery, changing the curricula for future situations (part of the course - online, supporting learners in practicing digital tools, more focus on them), rescheduling the current courses (communication, practice and group works on-line; theory - flipped class, sent to the participants in advance), planning new courses, adult educators' co-visions, consultations and support of the community on-line. All the methods, we used to use for conducting traditional offline groups cannot be used and are not that efficient online, that means that educators need to invent new methods how to interact with students, to involve them into active participation and to create efficiently working group. E-modules, MOOCs, webinars are offered as marketing tools. One-hour webinars were set up to attract longer training. Participating in free webinars is the same way to spend time as reading news, spending time on social media. Reasonably spent time online becomes more important. People are taking their acquisition of a new profession more seriously. They are starting to acquire more rare skills for which there was no time before. In the field of Estonian language learning, there are new public procurements for language courses as an online course. Many learners enjoy online learning and take shorter online language courses, such as 3 months. Every trainer recognizes that he or she must be digitally competent and that it is no longer possible to succeed in the training market without digital literacy. Proof of digital skills will be taken more seriously. It is no longer enough to know MS Office. Better IT equipment is acquired in homes to study and train in the home classroom. The home workspace is adapted to a training room - light wallpaper, noise-free, good microphone. An online learning alternative is made to many trainings. More and more books are being ordered and read, because now the habit of ordering books is becoming possible due to big discounts. More educational podcasts are listened to.

**Challenges**: the main challenges relate to low-educated and senior adults (they do not have skills or technical facilities to continue their learning). Most of programmes financed by the Unemployment Foundation stopped and people are not learning or socialising. For adult educators there are also additional costs now: licensed computer programmes, bigger screens for working many hours a day on-line, internet solutions, etc. It is more difficult to teach 8 hours a day on-line than off-line. There was no time to get used to or acquire skills, both learners and teachers were in a new situation from day one. Trainers adapted quickly to the situation and training has been widely offered in various digital environments. At the same time, the skills of trainers, as well as the skills of learners to use digital environments, are at very different levels, so the quality of training (due to the choice of the platform and the ability to use it) can be at very different levels. One, as an adult learning provider, can do all the thinkable and unthinkable preparations for a course, but surprises still emerge. It is impossible to be responsible for the digital competencies of the participators nor the teachers.

**Good practices:** keeping in contact with the learners (at least by phone), using interactive solutions where possible (zoom, mentimeter, kahoot, miro, padlet, loom, etc.) and not forgetting about humour and bright mood - the learners need them more than ever before. It is a great chance now for adult educators to collect a toolbox for making their on-line learning programmes "alive" and effective. Yet it seems that as time passes, people have become more skilful and have also realised to ask for help from others with more competencies.

**Policy initiatives:**

Gathering, translating and delivering to adult trainers of different e-learning resources – research, case studies, communities of practice, webinars, instructions and etc on EPALE

As a public, private and third sector common initiative in Estonia, a dedicated web page for all online training in the country has been created with hundreds of different kinds of e-learning courses published by training providers.

As a response to changed situation, a research of adult educators’ competencies manifestation in online trainings during the emergency situation has been initiated by EPALE National Support Service Estonia. The aim is to identify adult educators’ training needs in this area. Results of the research will be used for training provision for adult educators and can be used for development of competency profile (occupational qualification standard) of adult educator who has suddenly become an instructional designer.

***Question 2: How does COVID-19 impact the need for learning and the access to learning?****Please discuss:*

* *Challenges faced by learners and specific vulnerable groups (in terms of access to learning material, skills and competences, other barriers for learning (time, caring/working obligations, etc.);*

Necessity to help children in their digital studies, necessity to take care of all the family members staying at home all day long, lack of skills to work on-line (no place at home to work in a silent background, no skills on video, audio performance). Most vulnerable groups are left without support and the risk of their social exclusion is very high now. Learners are different and some of them prefer traditional offline groups. We have received several letters from students asking, if they can proceed with learning when it is over, and they can join offline group. (Mainly it is connected ever with kids at home, what makes concentration impossible or with lack of digital skills or with individual learning processes)

* *Emerging adult learning provision and learning needs (e.g. learning related to social distancing, health literacy, digital literacy etc.).*

It is very important now - these topics are necessary in this period. In my opinion Estonia manages with this task quite well: short videos, simple instructions, recommendations from celebrities, e-mails, translation into English and Russian, support services (psychologists, on-line support for parents, etc.).

As the learner’s skills and competencies to use digital learning tools have gotten better, it is easier to provide a fluent course. People have become familiar with the environments and are more willing to learn. One might say that they are not afraid of the technical issues anymore nor are they terrified by the fact, that they might fail in digital skills while participating. the crisis has given us a clear view, that people are willing to learn and that they want to learn and participate in online courses. As a benefit, now people, who live in remote areas and people who perhaps have trouble travelling from A to B can have access to courses, that previously were held on a classroom. I understand that, there are courses, that cannot be held via Zoom or Skype, but adult educators should consider, that there’s a wide range of people who are unable to come to the classroom, but can very well participate from the comfort of their own home. In time of the crisis began, people, who had the competencies to create online classes and use digital tools, skyrocketed. Now, most people have attained the skills themselves and hopefully the social distancing in not seen as an obstacle, but as an opportunity. Since very many are forced to stay at home, the possibilities to interact and learn are welcomed and appreciated. In the near future, we must be prepared, that there might be another crisis or an outbreak of some kind. It is important for an adult educator, to get acquainted with digital tools and create online courses. Perhaps the crisis has given us an insight to the lives of people who do not have access to the same benefits we are privileged to have on a daily basis. The local municipalities (and of course other organisations) have an opportunity to involve these people, their skills and competencies, who otherwise can’t participate and might not be heard.

Various Facebook groups have already emerged, offering free help to older people, for example. A good example is the "Smart Help for the Elderly" group created on Facebook, which aims to create a virtual community where the digital competences of the elderly can be supported. This group can ask questions and be answered by experts in telecommunications, banking and cyber security, as well as specialists in other areas related to digital solutions. The development of digital competences should be the first step in the future so that low-skilled adults have access to education at all.

***Question 3: What could be the role of adult learning in the recovery from the COVID-19 crisis? Please discuss:***

*• Priorities for adult learning systems and policies to contribute to recovery from COVID-19 in terms of types of provision, modes of delivery, funding, and outreach to specific groups of adult learners.*

Economic sectors are affected differently from the consequences of COVID-19. There are sectors where a large number of people are losing their jobs and sectors where additional manpower is urgently needed. In addition, state measures have restricted the movement and stay of foreign labour in Estonia. This means that there is an urgent need for retraining, which is usually offered by companies on site. There is a clear need to further contribute to the support of in-service training and retraining, to support cooperation between companies and training centres / vocational training centres in order to best combine theoretical knowledge with specific practical skills in the workplace in the very short term. National support measures for organizing and financing retraining would be beneficial. Specific professional skills exist in companies, but often lack adult teaching skills and methodological knowledge, as well as the ability to supervise an adult learner.

It is essential to support adult educators in changing their curricula and paying more attention to learners' digital competences and being a self-directed learner. If this situation happens again we shouldn't have so many people (vulnerable groups) left without opportunity to learn or be in the community. Adult educators need to be ready to change to on-line teaching quickly and flexibly.

I think that crisis will accelerate the processes of digitalization and lead to increasing unemployment not just because of closure of companies, but also because of new digital trends. That means that a huge number of people will stand in front of getting new knowledge and professions. The role of adult learning is to create possibilities for getting it all.

I personally believe in blended learning, where F2F classrooms are linked to different technical tools. Technical tools and learning modules are becoming more cheaper and accessible to everyone. Just delivering info will be free of charge more and more.

Outreaching different groups of adult learners is really important. On my experience new ways of AE such as distance learning has increased the flexibility and for examples mothers with little kids can participate online-courses better than the F2F trainings.

I think that in the future (at least initially) many trainings will take place online, which is more difficult for trainers, but in some ways easier for learners (less expensive, no transport costs for training, accommodation costs, work-based learning, etc.).