

COVID–19: Survey on ALE in times of lock-down – the case of Slovenia

EAEA: To get a better overview of key challenges and difficulties for ALE providers and organisations during this crisis, we would like to collect feedback from you on these questions:

- Which **impact** does COVID-19 have **on ALE provision** in your country?

At the moment of the lock-down enforcement (March 16), ALE was – in addition to other educational levels – subject of a circular letter by the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport (MESS) which recommended to all education providers to organize work from home and on a digital-basis if possible.

Luckily, **flexibility of learning** is an inherent characteristic of ALE, therefore, given the circumstances it was rather easy to accept digital learning as an option. The necessary **infrastructure** (computers – laptops, internet access etc.), however, has been an obstacle – especially on the side of learners from vulnerable target groups, although in some institutions, this is an issue for adult education staff as well.

The Slovenian Institute for Adult Education (**SIAE**) – as the ALE umbrella institution – has been **in touch with the MESS** on the one hand, and with **ALE providers** on the other hand. We know that the latter are trying to do their best to keep in touch with learners and carry out their activities via different on-line tools and environments, even Facebook.

In addition, in our capacity as national coordinator of many ALE forms (literacy programmes for low-qualified employees etc., independent learning, study circles, project learning for young adults (NEETs), and other non-formal ALE) as well as guidance and information, awareness–raising etc., we issued **a circular letter for ALE providers** last week. Its aim is to **empower** specific ALE networks and provide them with necessary information, hints for successful on-line work, guidelines etc. We are quite certain that they appreciate such input and coordination. These connections will also enable us to collect their feedback on what is actually going on in ALE practice these days.

Some activities that require **physical presence** (some trainings, i.e. workshops), the Lifelong Learning Week and the Learning Parade, and similar events have been postponed which will put much pressure on autumn months (especially September, October). Due to the fact, that activities are linked to financing of staff and material costs in line with institutions' work plans via the national budget or ESF funds, nothing has been cancelled until now.

- What does it mean for the **financing** of ALE organisations/providers in your country if activities need to be suspended/cancelled?

As mentioned above, activities have not been suspended but either postponed or put on-line. The problem arises in cases where financing is related to the number of learners present in person or the monitoring of the duration of their presence in educational institutions. Given the exceptional circumstances that we are all facing, our institute is negotiating with the MESS to find appropriate solutions.

Other implications of altered modes of teaching/learning (such as its monitoring, possibly reduced financing etc.) have not been defined by the two ministries in charge yet, therefore we are not able to give more feedback on this question at this point.

- What does it mean for **trainers/educators and other staff of ALE providers**? Can they still continue to work digitally, or do they have to take temporary employment/short-time working/unpaid leave/...?

Following a short survey among members of one of the ALE networks, we can conclude that there are **various modes of operation** put in place in ALE institutions: paid leave – still left from 2019 or leave 2020, paid leave related to emergency (5 days), collective leave (a few days). However, **most of them work digitally** and/or temporarily go to their offices (shared duties). For some institutions digital teaching/learning has been an important part of their educational processes before, others are getting used to it. As said before, they do appreciate support, guidance and clear information by our institute and indirectly by the MESS.

Moreover, we fully agree with the problem of **freelance trainers** mentioned in your [statement](#) and appreciate your lobbying on their behalf. For some of them who have registered self-employment, the state will recover a part of their costs and taxes.

- How is adult learning **organised during the lock-down or similar measures** that have been implemented in many European countries? Which role does **digital learning** play?

Digital learning has taken over whenever and wherever it is possible. However, it is too early for an estimation to what extent it will be able to replace normal teaching/learning.

The SIAE team responsible for developing guidance in adult education is suggesting to the network of Slovenian guidance centres to prepare on-line guidance approaches.

In some cases, for example in Third Age Universities, some amount of actual learning will be compensated for by the **social dimension**, i.e. the mere fact that people will stay connected and overcome problems due to isolation counts a lot as well.

Tools such as Microsoft Teams, Zoom, etc., overview of digital learning options (such as the [Slovenian Educational Network](#)), guidelines for setting up digital environments ([Arnes](#)), other collections, motivational videos with learners stories etc. are of great help.

However, **motivation** of learners to take up digital learning is sometimes quite a challenge and needs special attention. Sometimes to stay in touch or communicate via phone or Facebook can help as well.

Getting **feedback** on learning, its progress and results is an important part of this new situation as well.

- What does the current situation mean for **social inclusion of adult learners** as well as outreach and access to adult learning?

The inclusion of some adult learners' groups does present a **big challenge** – especially the low-qualified, especially those with low (digital) skills, older adults, migrants and asylum seekers, Roma, people with disabilities etc. Here the above mentioned social (sometimes even therapeutic) dimension of ALE plays a crucial role.

We are dealing with these vulnerable groups mainly in two programmes: Primary school for adults and Project learning for young adults (NEETs). It is probably possible but **will take quite some time** to equip them with basic digital **skills** as well as the necessary **infrastructure** (computers and internet access) in order to set up digital learning for these groups. On the other hand we all wish for this situation to be over as soon as possible so that we will not need this adjustment period but will all be able to continue with 'normal' ALE.

Slovenian Institute for Adult Education

Ljubljana, 30 March 2020