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A3.10 Toolkit didactical scenarios for teaching in diverse courses





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A man and a woman are looking at a document together. The man is on the left, looking down at the document. The woman is on the right, looking at the document. They are both wearing casual clothing. The man is holding a pen and pointing at the document. The woman is looking at the document with a slight smile. The background is blurred, showing what appears to be an office or classroom setting.

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND OF THE TOOLKIT

1



The Diverse Courses Project, an Erasmus+ Cooperation Partnership in Adult Education, aims to enhance inclusion and diversity in adult learning.

With a core objective of supporting educators in addressing the diverse needs of learners, it develops resources for better understanding these needs and provides didactical approaches for effective teaching.

The project aims to contribute to inclusion, supporting equal opportunities and access for all learners and lowering the barriers to successful participation for those with fewer opportunities. On the other hand, educators dealing with the diverse composition of learners face the challenge of responding to their different needs and backgrounds.



The content of the toolkit developed for teaching diverse courses is part of the Diverse Courses Project, an Erasmus+ Cooperation Partnership in Adult Education. This material is designed to enhance inclusion and diversity in adult learning environments.





Diversity

Diversity refers to “people’s differences which may relate to their race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, language, culture, religion, mental and physical ability, class, and immigration status” (UNESCO, 2017, p. 7).

Adult Education

Educational provision targeted at individuals beyond traditional school age, encompassing both formal and non-formal learning settings, aimed at personal, professional, and civic development.

Culturally Inclusive Scenarios

Learning situations designed to acknowledge and integrate the diverse cultural identities, experiences, and perspectives of adult learners into teaching practices.

Didactical Scenarios

Structured teaching frameworks or lesson outlines that educators can adapt to address specific learner needs, diversity considerations, and learning objectives.

Educational Inclusion

An approach and practice that ensures equitable access to quality education for all learners, valuing diversity as an asset and fostering participation in mainstream learning environments.

Heterogeneity in Learning Groups

The condition of having learners with varied backgrounds, abilities, and experiences in the same educational setting, requiring flexible and adaptive teaching methods.

Learner Profiles

Comprehensive descriptions of individual learners’ backgrounds, abilities, needs, and preferences that inform personalised teaching strategies.



List of abbreviations

CEDEFOP – European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training

EC – European Commission

EESC – European Economic and Social Committee

EQF – European Qualifications Framework

EPALE – Electronic Platform for Adult Learning in Europe

E+ / Erasmus+ – Erasmus Plus Programme (EU Programme for Education, Training, Youth and Sport)

EU – European Union

FRA – European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights

NGO – Non-Governmental Organisation

OECD – Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

OER – Open Educational Resources

QA – Quality Assurance

SDG – Sustainable Development Goal (United Nations)

TFEU – Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union

UNESCO – United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

WP – Work Package (within project structure)





1.1 Purpose



The purpose of this Toolkit is to offer educators, trainers, and facilitators a comprehensive collection of practical resources and strategies designed to support teaching in diverse adult education contexts. Its primary goal is to foster inclusion and address the learning needs of heterogeneous student populations, especially those with fewer opportunities.

By presenting tested didactical scenarios, this Toolkit provides educators with adaptable methods that promote effective learning and engagement for all learners, regardless of their backgrounds, abilities, or personal circumstances.

1.2 Target Audience



This Toolkit is principally designed to serve the needs of a broad spectrum of individuals and organisations engaged in the facilitation and delivery of adult education. Its content and guidance have been crafted to support those who work within both formal and non-formal learning environments, recognising the diversity and complexity inherent to adult learning.

Adult educators, trainers, and facilitators form the core readership. These professionals are often at the frontline of educational provision, delivering instruction, guidance, and support to adult learners across a variety of settings.

Whether operating within traditional classroom environments, community centres, workplace training programmes, or online platforms, these practitioners require practical resources that enhance their capacity to engage, motivate, and effectively teach diverse learner populations.



The Toolkit is equally relevant to educational institutions and community organisations committed to fostering lifelong learning. Such bodies encompass further education colleges, adult learning centres, voluntary organisations, and cultural associations, all of which play a pivotal role in widening participation and ensuring equitable access to education. Alongside these, professional development providers who offer training and continuing education to adult educators will find the Toolkit a valuable reference to enrich their curricula and training methodologies.

In addition, the Toolkit addresses the needs of educational policymakers and curriculum developers. These stakeholders are responsible for shaping the frameworks, policies, and curricular content that underpin adult education provision.

By drawing attention to inclusive and diverse pedagogical approaches, the Toolkit aims to influence the development of policies and curricula that are responsive to the varied experiences and needs of adult learners.

Lastly, the Toolkit is intended for practitioners dedicated to creating inclusive and supportive learning environments. These individuals are committed to recognising and accommodating the multifaceted diversity that characterises adult learners. This diversity includes, but is not limited to, differences in cultural backgrounds, linguistic abilities, socio-economic status, educational qualifications, and preferred learning styles.

Through an emphasis on respect, understanding, and adaptability, the Toolkit seeks to empower practitioners to design and implement learning experiences that acknowledge and celebrate this diversity, thereby enhancing learner engagement and success.



1.3 Structure and Use of the Toolkit



The Toolkit is organised into two Volumes:

Volume 1

Introduction and Theoretical Framework, presenting the conceptual foundation of diversity in education, inclusive and personalised teaching approaches, key research findings, and current policy landscapes.

Volume 2

Practical Implementation and Evaluation Tools, offering practical guidelines, step-by-step implementation strategies, evaluation instruments, and adaptable templates to support educators in their daily practice.

INTRODUCTION

Educators are encouraged to engage with **Volume 1** to gain a solid theoretical understanding before applying the practical tools provided in **Volume 2**.

Both volumes are designed to be used flexibly, enabling educators to select, adapt, and implement resources that are most relevant to their unique teaching contexts and learner populations.

A woman with long dark hair, wearing a white blouse and dark trousers, is standing and gesturing with her hands while speaking. She is in a room with bookshelves and a poster on the wall. In the foreground, the back of a person's head and shoulders are visible, looking towards the speaker. A large blue triangle is overlaid on the left side of the image, containing the text 'THEORETICAL BACKGROUND' and the number '2'.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

2



2.1 Understanding Diversity in Education

2.1.1 THE MANY FACETS OF DIVERSITY

European societies are becoming increasingly diverse due to intra-European mobility, international migration and globalisation.



Diversity implies moving beyond the idea of tolerance to a genuine respect for an appreciation of difference"

(Gollob, R., and P., Krapf, (2008), Living in democracy)

Inclusive education is an educational philosophy and practice that aims to provide equal access to quality education for all students, regardless of their background, abilities, or disabilities.

It promotes the idea that every child has the right to be educated alongside their peers in a supportive and nurturing environment that values diversity and fosters the development of every individual's full potential.

The concept of inclusive education is rooted in the belief that diversity should be celebrated, and differences should not be seen as barriers to learning but rather as opportunities for enriching the educational experience.

Diversity in education encompasses a wide range of learner differences, including but not limited to:

Cultural and linguistic backgrounds

Socio-economic status

Prior educational experience

Learning preferences and cognitive styles.

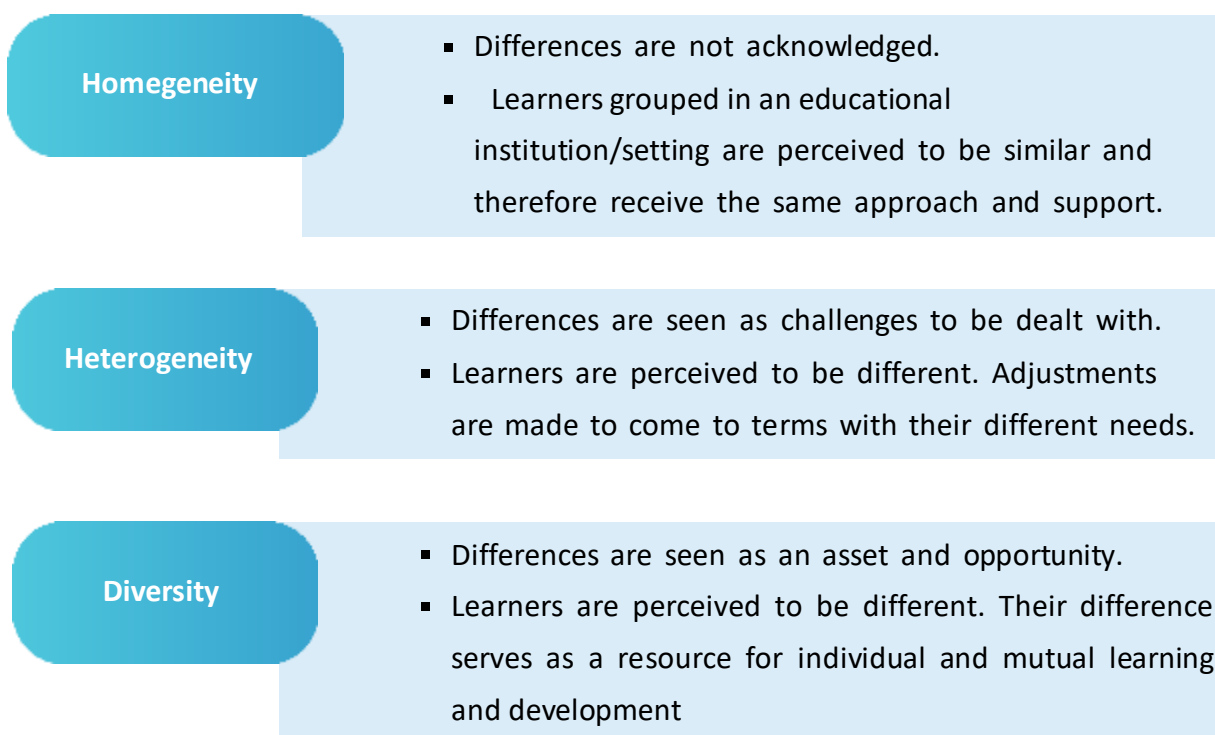


2.1.2 ADDRESSING DIVERSITY THROUGH EDUCATION

Diversity describes the range of human differences and variations, whether they are inherent (by birth) or acquired. These differences can be the basis for different types of exclusion and can result in different forms of discrimination.

Increasingly complex and diverse societies require more and targeted efforts to tackle all kinds of discrimination to improve equality and to use diversity as an asset.

Relevant for this research, are the different paradigm shifts that can be identified over the years in relation to diversity and inclusive education.



Inclusive education is not implemented in a vacuum, “educational institutions are enveloped in socio-historical gravity” (Erickson, 2004).

The development of inclusive education should not be undertaken in isolation as it is difficult to realise when other aspects of the education, social and health systems remain exclusive in their effects.

Inclusive education should be considered to be part of a wider aim to create a more inclusive society (UN, 2008).



2.1.3 INCLUSIVE EDUCATION IN POLICY FRAMEWORKS AND STRATEGIES

At international level, the right to education has long been recognised in various Declarations, Conventions and Agendas.

EU competence on education in the Member States is rather limited, and so EU secondary law³⁷ in this area is practically non-existent. The EU's powers in the area of education are mainly related to contributing to the development of quality education by encouraging cooperation between Member States as outlined in Article 165 of the Treaty of the Functioning of the EU, which states that (FRA, 2016).

The role of the education system is to educate individuals to participate actively in the community and to shape and maintain a constantly changing society and culture so that everyone is given an equal opportunity to study on the basis of each individual regardless of place of residence, age, gender, education, origin, economy and status.



2.1.4 KEY ELEMENTS AND CONDITIONS FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

Carefully built inclusive learning environments are the basis of education meeting the needs and interests of all learners and education personnel, regardless of their background.



Safe physical, social and **emotional** learning environments respecting freedom of opinion and expression.



Teachers and other education personnel who are prepared and **supported** in managing the diversity in the education institution and intercultural dialogue.



Leadership of education institutions committed to creating an enabling, supportive learning and teaching environment and democratic governance of the educational institution.



Education authorities with a holistic **perspective** on education systems.



The involvement and full commitment of all relevant **stakeholders** to maintain inclusive education institutions and promote diversity and intercultural dialogue in education.



2.2.1 The culturally inclusive scenarios

Adult learners with diverse backgrounds are individuals who may experience exclusion from mainstream education due to factors such as gender, physical or intellectual ability, social or emotional circumstances, language, culture, religion, or other personal characteristics (Harris et al., 2004, p. 10).

These differences can shape their prior educational experiences, access to opportunities, and support needs within adult learning environments. Please refer to the figure below.



Figure 1 - The Culturally Inclusive School (Rashid & Tikly, 2010, p. 9)

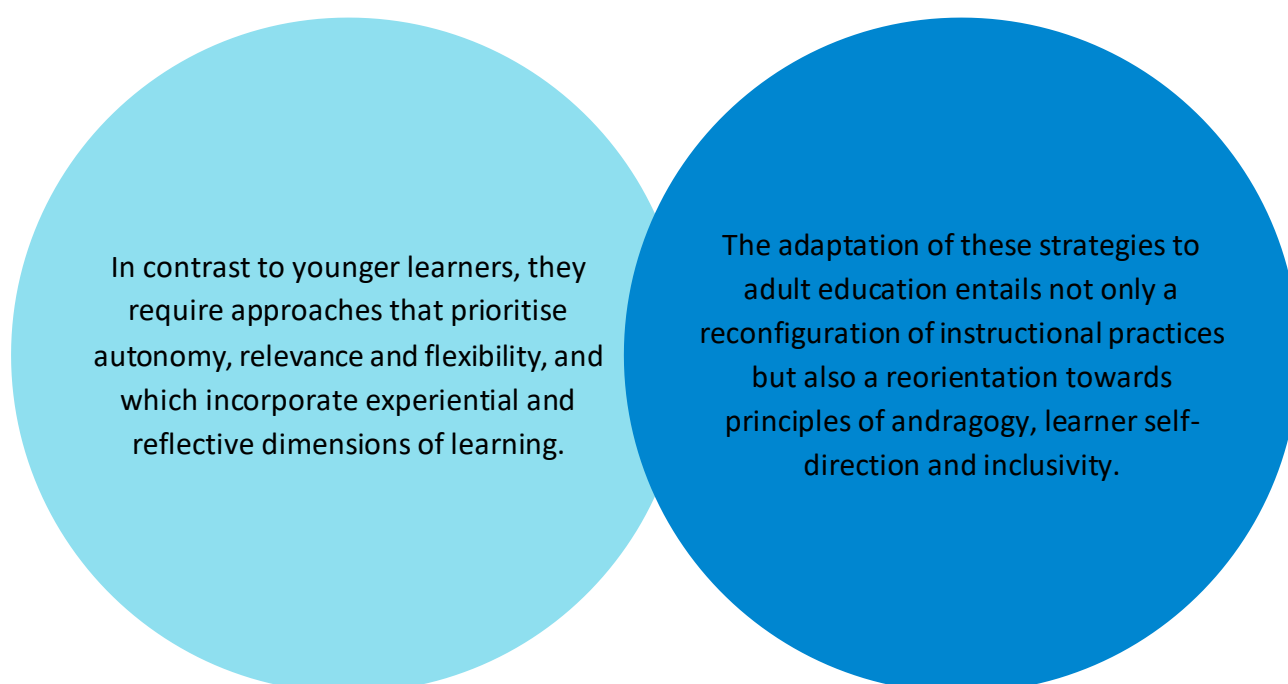
Culturally inclusive scenarios refer to learning situations designed to respect, reflect, and value the diverse cultural identities of adult learners. In adult education, these scenarios are particularly significant, as learners often bring complex cultural experiences shaped by migration, work, family, and community life.



2.2.2 The impact of professional experience for teaching strategies

The development of high-impact teaching strategies is grounded in extensive empirical knowledge which has demonstrated their effectiveness in improving learning outcomes within education contexts. Their adaptation to adult education, however, necessitates a substantial pedagogical and contextual shift, recognising the distinctive attributes, motivations and prior experiences that characterise adult learners.

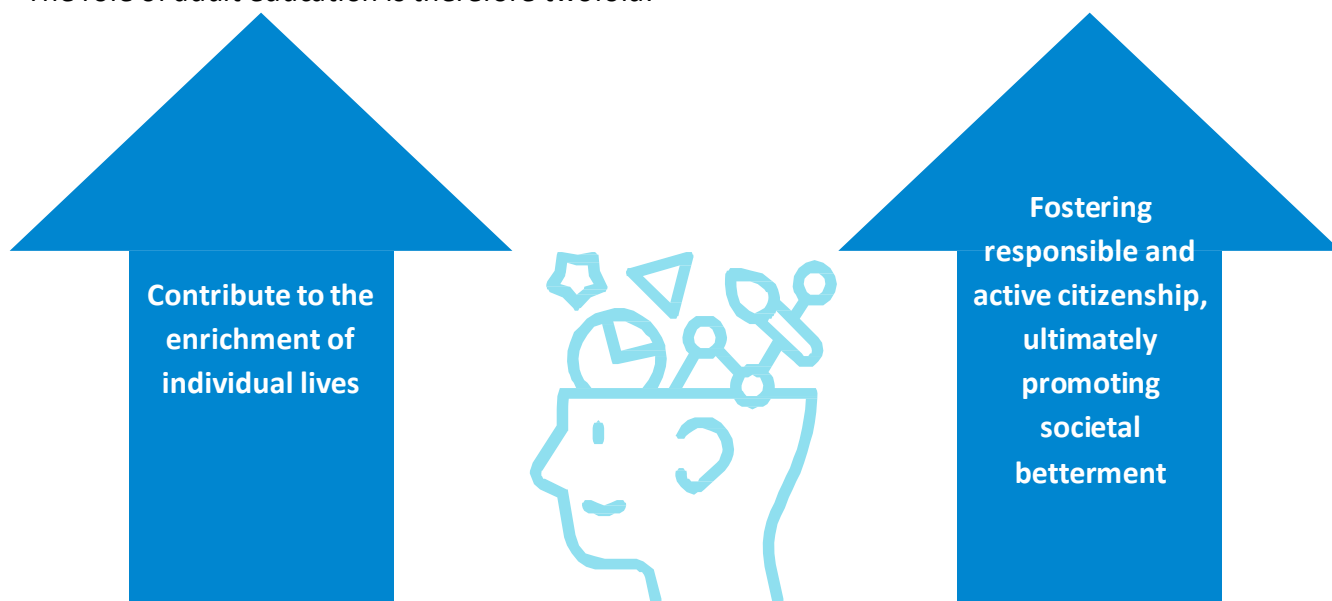
Adult learners frequently bring **extensive life and professional experience, clearly defined personal and vocational objectives**, and a preference for practical, goal-oriented and immediately applicable learning opportunities.



Adult education is equally concerned with addressing pressing societal challenges faced within communities, including poverty, poor health outcomes, crime and violence, political disenfranchisement, social exclusion based on gender, class or other characteristics, the acquisition of work-related skills, and environmental degradation.



The role of adult education is therefore twofold:



Achieving this dual aim requires that learners are both empowered and included in the educational process.



“The adult educator has to move from simply acknowledging and accepting that individual learners are different, to a position where he or she creates an atmosphere of inclusion.”

- Barrett (2012)

2.2.3 Tips and Tricks for Inclusive Teaching Strategies

Reflexivity

Reflexivity in adult education refers to the educator's capacity to critically examine how their own assumptions, beliefs and dispositions shape their attitudes towards teaching and influence their interactions with learners (Barrett, 2012).

This process involves questioning taken-for-granted values and perspectives, as well as recognising how these elements impact relationships within the learning environment.

Effective reflexive practice requires educators to engage in reflection at multiple stages of their work – before, during and after instruction – thereby integrating reflection-for-action, reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action (Dewey, 1933; Schön, 1983; Loughran, 2005).



Reflection-on-action entails retrospective analysis to evaluate alternative approaches, please refer to the figure below, whereas reflection-in-action involves adapting practices in real time, often described as *“thinking on one’s feet.”*

In doing so, it not only deepens professional understanding but also fosters inclusive and responsive teaching approaches, which are central to adult learning environments.

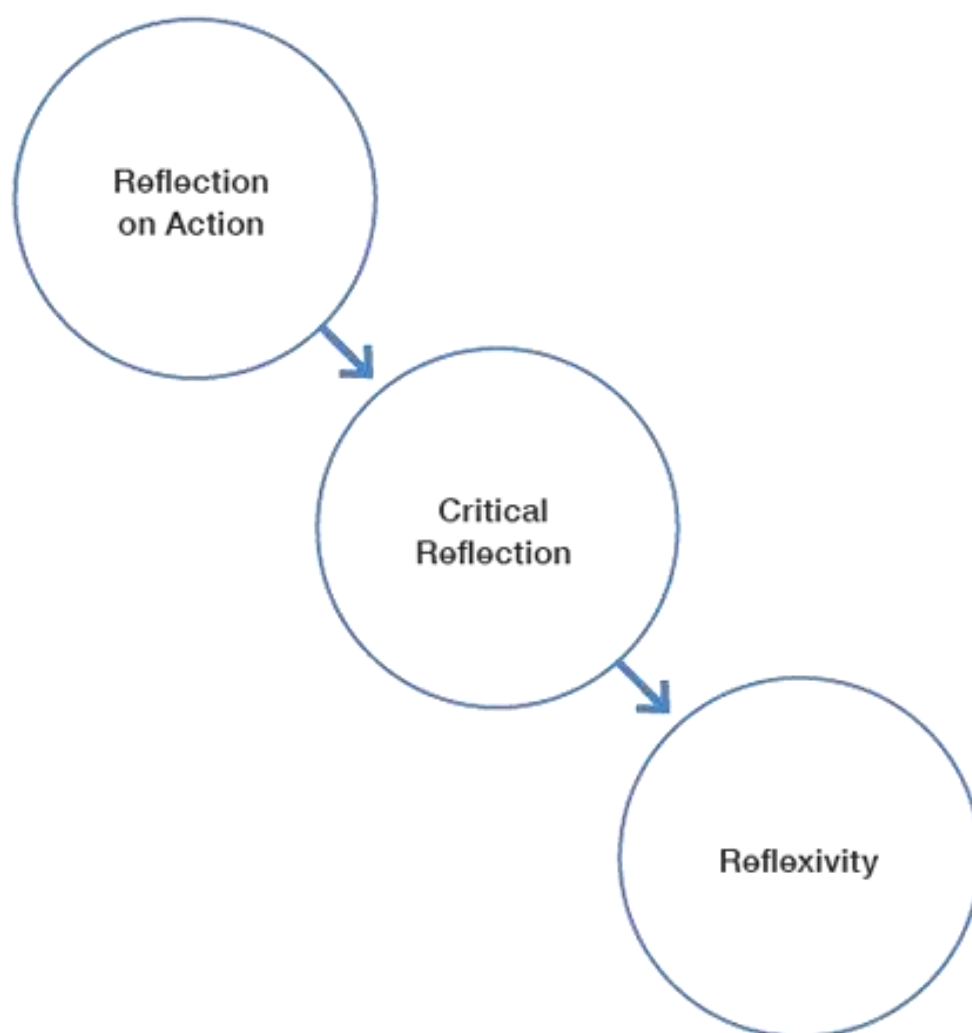


Figure 2 - Reflexivity as a continuum of reflection.



Time to practice



TO-DO List

Critical Incident Reflection

 45min

Specific Goal



To enhance critical thinking and reflexivity in responding to complex teaching situations, enabling more adaptive and inclusive practices.

Instructions



Identify a challenging moment in your teaching where diversity, feedback, or goal alignment was a factor (e.g., a learner disengaging, conflict between learners, misunderstanding instructions).

Analyse your response and consider alternative approaches you could take informed by reflexivity and inclusive strategies.

Reflection Questions

- What assumptions shaped my reaction at the time?
- How could I have responded differently to support all learners?
- What will I do in a similar situation in the future?



2.2.3 Tips and Tricks for Inclusive Teaching Strategies

Setting Goals

Clear objectives in adult education serve as a key motivator, aligning training with personal and professional goals. Unlike in school settings, where learning objectives define what success looks like, in adult learning, they are directly tied to the learners' goals, enhancing motivation and interest in the material.



Well-defined objectives stimulate cognitive engagement and offer a practical roadmap for achieving real-world competencies. Clearly outlining specific goals at the beginning of each session demonstrates how the training directly benefits job performance, thereby boosting motivation and engagement.



SMART goals are a framework for setting effective objectives. The acronym stands for Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-bound. By using these criteria, you can create goals that are clear, focused, and more likely to be achieved.



Figure 3 - SMART Goals - How to use them?



Time to practice



TO-DO List

Goal Alignment Activity

 30min

Specific Goal



To enhance the coherence of lesson design, ensuring every element of the session contributes to meeting defined learning outcomes.

Instructions



Review an existing lesson plan and check whether all planned activities and assessments align with the stated learning goals. Revise any elements that do not directly contribute to achieving the goals.

Reflection Questions

- Are all tasks and assessments aligned with the goals?
- Which elements can be removed or adapted for better coherence?
- How does clearer alignment benefit learners' understanding of objectives?





2.2.3 Tips and Tricks for Inclusive Teaching Strategies

Structured Lessons

Providing structured lessons is particularly beneficial for adult learners who often balance multiple responsibilities. Such organization allows learners to navigate complex topics more efficiently and focus on the most relevant information and activities.



Maintaining a consistent structure in the program reduces cognitive load, enabling employees to focus on and find what is most useful to them. This structured approach simplifies information gathering and processing, aiding adults in effectively applying new knowledge in their work roles.



Planning and structuring effective lessons is a fundamental aspect of successful adult education. For many educators, particularly those new to the field, the complexity of managing diverse learner needs, time constraints and curriculum requirements can be overwhelming.



Figure 4 - 5 tips for successful lesson planning.



Time to practice



TO-DO List

Lesson Flow Mapping

 30min

Specific Goal



Practise organising lessons into a logical sequence (introduction, practice, application, reflection) tailored to adult learners.

Instructions



- Choose an upcoming class topic (e.g., job interview skills, budgeting, language practice).
- Divide a blank page into **four sections** labelled:
- **Introduction:** How will you capture interest and explain the relevance?
- **Guided Practice:** What examples or demonstrations will you provide?
- **Independent Application:** How will learners practise skills themselves?
- **Reflection/Wrap-up:** How will you help learners summarise and connect learning to personal goals?

Reflection Questions

- Did the lesson flow feel natural and connected for learners?
- Were transitions between sections smooth?
- What part of the structure needs more or less time?



Time to practice



TO-DO List

Daily Micro-Structure Routine

 30min

Specific Goal



Build a consistent framework for every session to reduce confusion and improve learner focus.

Instructions



- Create a simple recurring structure for all sessions (e.g., Welcome → Objective → Main Task → Recap).
- Display the structure visually on a board or slide at the start of class.
- Briefly introduce each stage as you transition (“We’ve explored examples, now let’s apply this ourselves”).
- At the end, summarise key takeaways and next steps, linking to learners’ goals.

Reflection Questions

- Did learners appear more settled knowing what to expect?
- Did the routine help with time management and pacing?
- How could the structure be adjusted for more variety while keeping clarity?



2.2.3 Tips and Tricks for Inclusive Teaching Strategies

Explicit Teaching

Explicitly teaching aids in understanding and mastering new skills by offering clear instructions and guidelines for how to accomplish the desired outcome. This approach reduces uncertainties, thereby boosting learners' confidence.

Explicitly teaching strategies respond to what we know about how students learn. Teachers use their professional expertise to choose the right strategy at the right time for the right purpose.



At the centre of the explicit teaching graphic is the teaching and learning cycle. This is surrounded by the enabling factors. Surrounding the enabling factors are the evidence-based strategies.

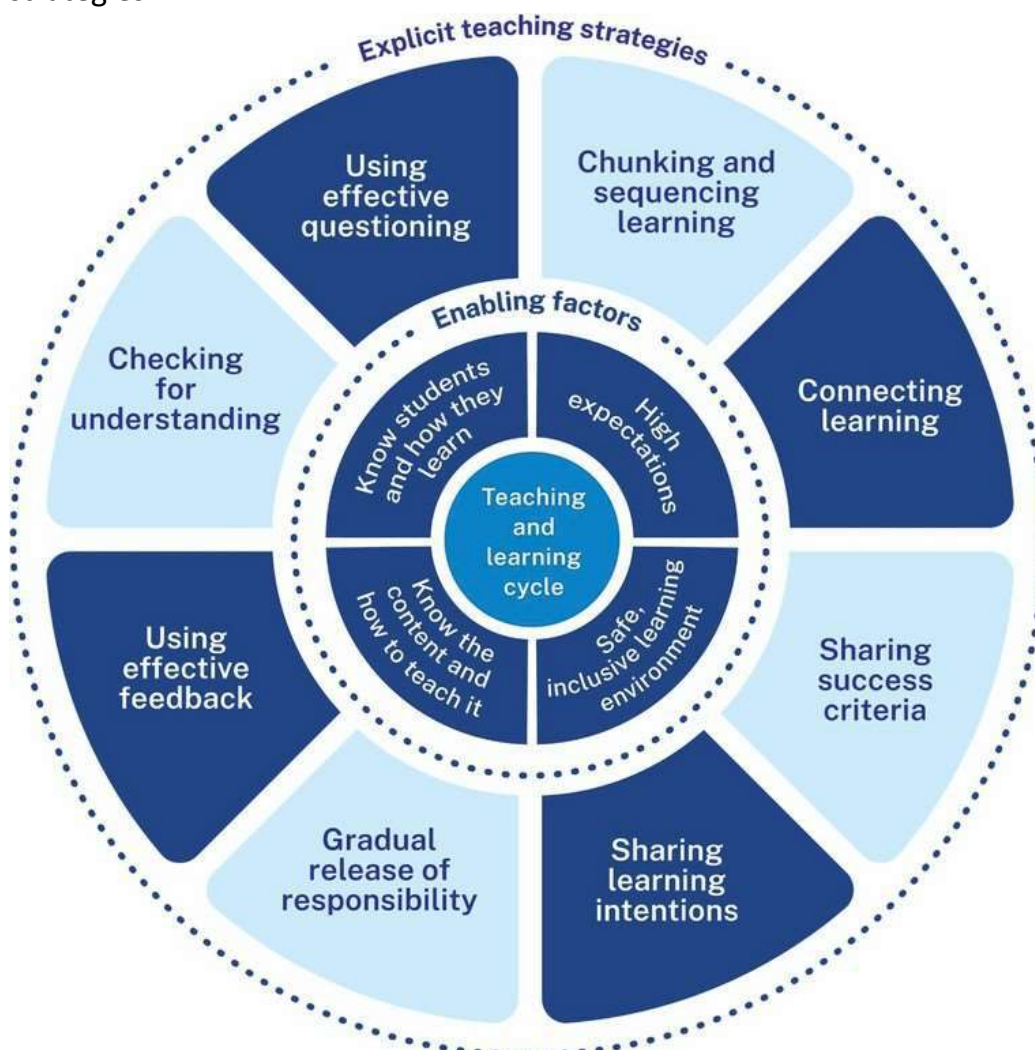


Figure 5 - Tips for Explicit Teaching.



Time to practice



TO-DO List

Explicit Instruction Planning

 45min

Specific Goal



To strengthen the teacher's ability to present information explicitly and systematically, reducing ambiguity and improving learner comprehension.

Instructions

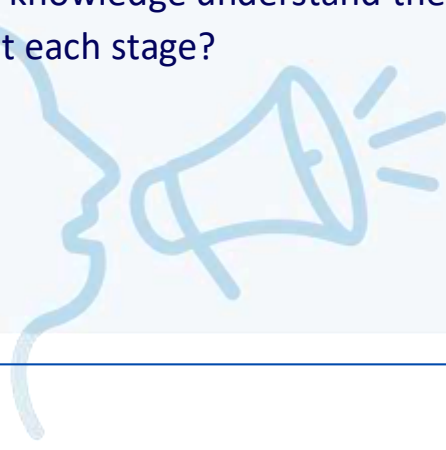


Select a topic you frequently teach in your adult education context (e.g., digital skills, literacy, vocational training). Develop a detailed lesson plan that breaks the topic into small, manageable steps. Clearly outline:

- Learning objectives
- Key points or concepts to be taught
- Sequential steps to present the material explicitly
- Opportunities for guided practice and independent application

Reflection Questions

- Are the instructions logically sequenced and easy to follow?
- Would an adult learner with little prior knowledge understand the steps?
- How might I check for understanding at each stage?





2.2.3 Tips and Tricks for Inclusive Teaching Strategies

Feedback

Feedback is a cornerstone of adult education, pivotal for self-improvement and professional development. Constructive, specific feedback helps learners refine their skills and acknowledges their progress.

In adult settings, such as our training programs, learners often provide valuable feedback to each other, leveraging their diverse experiences. This peer feedback, coupled with guidance from trainers, creates a rich environment for growth and continuous learning.



In adult learning contexts, where participants bring varied experiences, goals and expectations, the provision of feedback must be both personalised and purposeful. Please refer to the following do's and don't's figure.



Figure 6 - What are the main tips for feedback?



Time to practice



TO-DO List

Providing Specific Feedback

 30min

Specific Goal



To practise crafting learner-centred feedback that is specific, constructive and motivating, fostering improvement without discouraging learners.

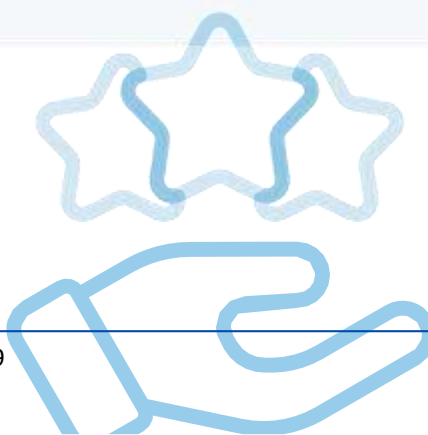
Instructions



Review either real or sample learner work (e.g., assignments, practice tasks). Write personalised feedback that highlights strengths, identifies specific areas for improvement, and provides clear, actionable next steps. Ensure the tone encourages continued effort and progress.

Reflection Questions

- Does the feedback clearly reference the learner's individual performance?
- Does it motivate and support future learning?
- Have I balanced constructive critique with encouragement?





Time to practice



TO-DO List

Peer Observation and Feedback Exchange

 30min

Specific Goal



To improve the ability to identify effective teaching strategies in practice and provide constructive peer feedback that encourages professional growth.

Instructions

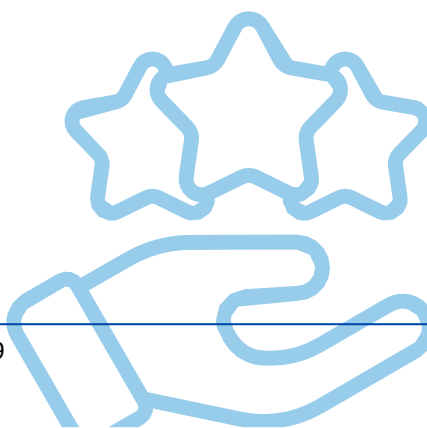


Observe a colleague's lesson (or watch a recorded teaching session). Focus on how they implement explicit instruction, provide feedback, differentiate learning, and set goals.

Write constructive feedback highlighting effective strategies and potential improvements.

Reflection Questions

- What strategies did I observe that I could adopt?
- How does observing another teacher broaden my perspective?
- Was my feedback balanced and constructive?





2.2.3 Tips and Tricks for Inclusive Teaching Strategies

Differentiated teaching

1 In adult education recognises and responds to the diverse needs, backgrounds and aspirations of learners. This approach involves tailoring the educational experience to align with each individual's goals and preferences, thereby maximising engagement and the effectiveness of learning.

2 By adapting both content and pedagogical methods, educators can address the specific requirements of mature learners, ensuring that the learning process is relevant and meaningful.

3 The adaptation of evidence-based teaching strategies to suit adult education contexts enables a more personalised learning journey. Such tailored approaches create more engaging and impactful experiences that foster inclusivity and dynamism within the learning environment.

4 Differentiated teaching respects the varied life experiences and objectives of adult learners, facilitating effective acquisition and application of skills in real-world settings.



Differentiation refers to the responses that teachers make to learners' needs.

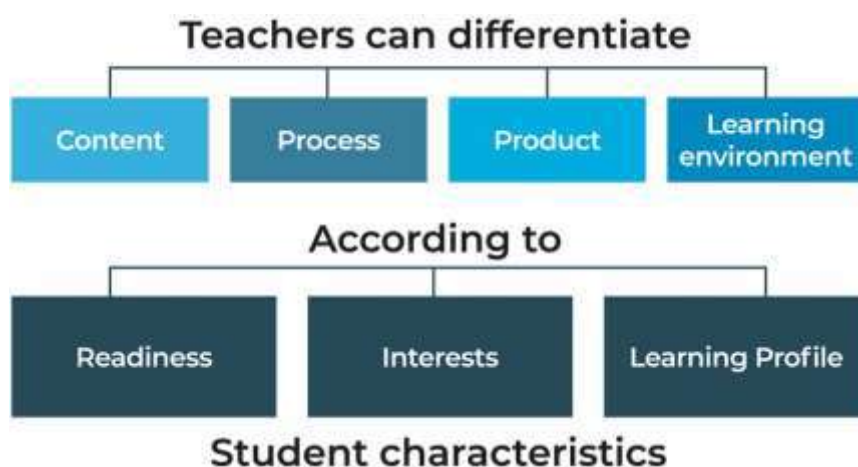


Figure 7 - Effective differentiation functions



Time to practice



TO-DO List

Creating a Differentiated Learning Environment

 60min

Specific Goal



To cultivate the ability to create physical or virtual learning environments that support differentiated learning and remove barriers to participation.

Instructions



Sketch a classroom or virtual learning setup designed to support diverse learners.

Consider seating arrangements, resource accessibility, groupings, and use of technology. Write notes explaining how each element supports inclusion and differentiation.

Reflection Questions

- Does the environment reduce barriers for learners with different needs?
- How does it promote autonomy and engagement?
- What adjustments could further enhance inclusivity?



2.3 Personalised Learning Approaches

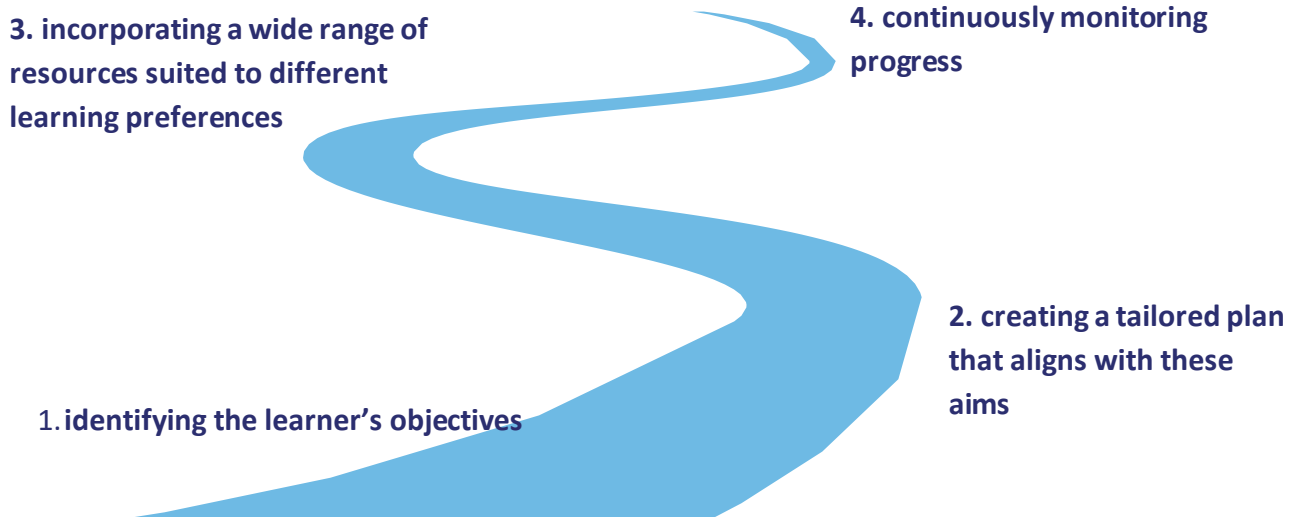
2.3.1 Introduction to personalised approaches

Personalised learning represents a transformative approach within adult education, offering pathways that respond directly to the diverse needs, aspirations, and prior experiences of individual learners.

Rather than delivering uniform content to all participants, personalised learning acknowledges that adults enter the classroom with varying goals, such as career progression, personal development, or skills enhancement.

By carefully tailoring learning plans, educators can foster engagement, improve motivation, and enhance the overall relevance of the learning experience.

The process of personalising learning paths involves several stages:



Rather than delivering uniform content to all participants, personalised learning acknowledges that adults enter the classroom with varying goals, such as career progression, personal development, or skills enhancement.

We will focus now on the advantages and disadvantages.



Advantages

Relevance and Motivation

By aligning content with personal goals and interests, learners are more likely to remain engaged and committed to their studies.

Flexibility

Personalised learning allows learners to study at their own pace and adapt their schedule around personal and professional responsibilities.

Improved Outcomes

Tailored approaches have been shown to enhance skill acquisition and promote deeper understanding of subject matter.

Empowerment

Encouraging learners to participate actively in shaping their learning path fosters self-direction and lifelong learning habits.



Disadvantages

Potential for Isolation

While personalised approaches prioritise individual goals, they may inadvertently reduce opportunities for peer collaboration and shared learning.

Assessment Challenges

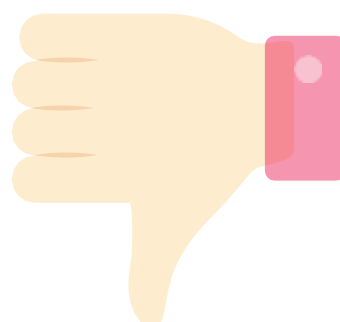
Evaluating progress across varied learning paths can be complex, particularly when outcomes are highly individualised.

Technological Dependence

Evaluating progress across varied learning paths can be complex, particularly when outcomes are highly individualised.

Resource Intensive

Developing individualised plans can be demanding for educators, requiring significant time and access to diverse learning materials.





When designing personalised learning paths in adult education, several themes merit careful consideration:

1

Identifying Learner Goals and Preferences

Using interviews, surveys, or diagnostic assessments to understand individual motivations and objectives.

2

Creating Customised Learning Plans

Outlining clear learning objectives, resources, and timelines that align with each learner's needs.

3

Incorporating Varied Learning Resources

Integrating online courses, simulations, case studies, and collaborative tasks to maintain engagement and accommodate different learning styles.

4

Leveraging Technology and Learning Analytics

Using adaptive learning tools and data analysis to refine instruction and provide timely support.

5

Continuous Monitoring and Feedback

Regularly assessing progress and adapting plans to ensure ongoing relevance and effectiveness.



A woman with long dark hair, wearing a white blouse and dark trousers, is standing and gesturing with her hands while speaking. She is in a room with bookshelves and a poster on the wall. In the foreground, the back of a person's head and shoulders are visible, looking towards the speaker. A large blue triangle is overlaid on the left side of the image, containing the text 'CONTEXTUALISATION AND RESEARCH FINDINGS' and a large number '3'.

CONTEXTUALISATION AND RESEARCH FINDINGS

3



3.1 Educational Diversity: European and National Perspectives

3.1.1 Introduction to european perspectives

Recent data highlight wide disparities in lifelong learning participation among EU member states.



In 2022, only 39.5 % of adults engaged in educational activities, with rates ranging from 9.5 % in Bulgaria to 66.5 % in Sweden (European Commission, 2023).

Participation remains especially low among adults aged 55 and over (29.9 %), those with low qualifications (18.4 %), and individuals in rural areas (34.4 %) (European Commission, 2023).

From a policy perspective.



The European Pillar of Social Rights sets a target of 60 % of adults participating in learning annually by 2030 (European Commission, 2020).

Digital Education Action Plan 2021–2027 prioritises equity in digital skills, with fewer than 40 % of educators reporting confidence in using digital technologies

European Commission continues to emphasise adult learning as a driver of inclusion, digital and green transition, and social cohesion.

Educational diversity constitutes a central challenge and opportunity in adult education across Europe.



3.1.2 Introduction to national perspectives

At the national level, diversity takes specific forms depending on local demographic, cultural, and economic contexts.



Spain and Italy continue to integrate large migrant communities and reflect rich regional cultural identities, such as Catalan and Basque learners, within adult education programmes.



Across Europe, minority groups and people with disabilities remain significantly underrepresented in adult education, despite their greater need for upskilling and civic integration (European Commission, 2023).



Germany, Sweden, and the United Kingdom face challenges related to widening participation in higher education and skills development among mature learners and low-qualified groups (Tavares & Cardoso, 2024; Kurek-Ochmańska, 2023).

This landscape underscores the necessity for pedagogical responses that account for learner heterogeneity. Differences in age, educational attainment, socio-economic status, digital literacy, cultural background, and life circumstances require flexible, inclusive didactical approaches.



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3.1.3 References

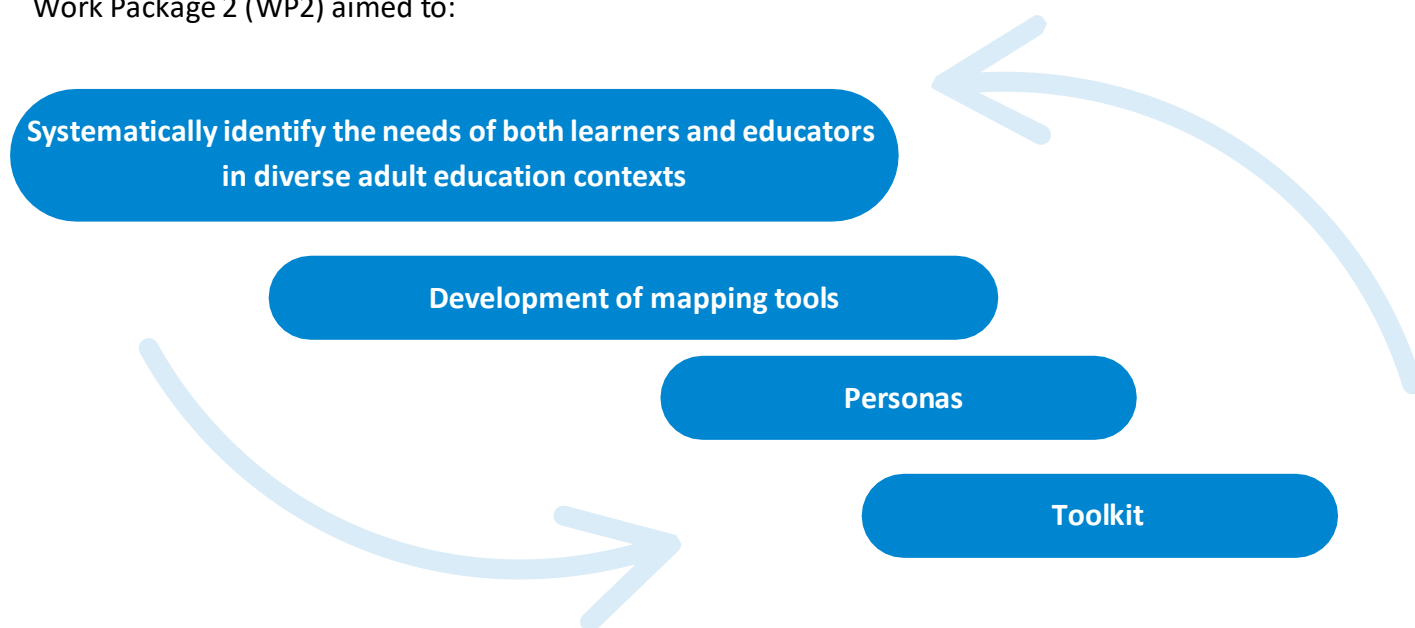
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3.2 Key Findings from WP2: Identifying Learners' Needs

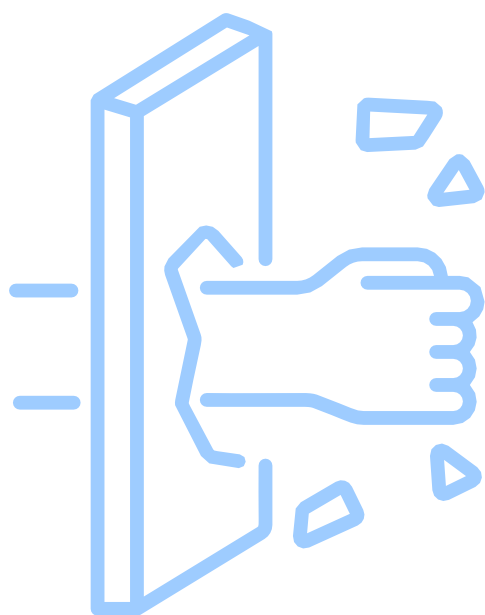
3.2.1 WP2's Purpose

Work Package 2 (WP2) aimed to:



The analysis drew upon qualitative inputs (focus groups, expert interviews, narrative reports) and quantitative data (surveys, documentation of good practices) collected by partner institutions.

3.2.1 Barriers to Success



Accessibility gaps

lack of barrier-free materials for visually/hearing-impaired learners

Digital divide

limited access to technology or low digital literacy

Cultural and linguistic obstacles

language barriers, cultural misalignment in content

Systemic barriers

rigid curricula, insufficient institutional resources



3.2.3 Educators' Needs

The findings of WP2 highlight a critical dimension in fostering inclusive adult education: the readiness and capacity of educators to address increasingly diverse learner groups. While the diversity of learners offers opportunities for enriched learning environments, it simultaneously presents complex pedagogical challenges.

Educators often navigate courses comprising individuals with varying linguistic, cultural, socio-economic, and ability profiles, yet many report insufficient preparation to respond effectively to these differences.

The needs identified are not solely pedagogical but also institutional, reflecting a broader gap between policy ambitions for inclusive education and the practical realities faced in adult learning settings

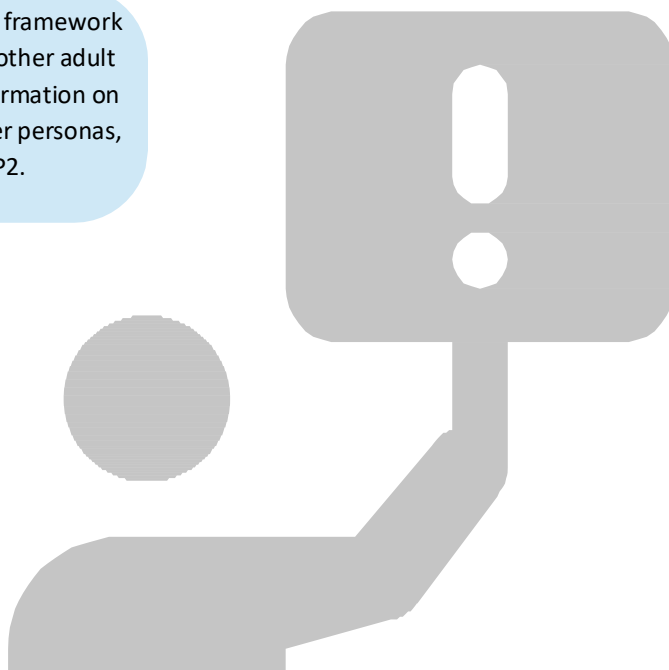
Limited awareness of diverse learner profiles and their specific needs.

A lack of training in inclusive pedagogy and strategies to adapt teaching methods.

Insufficient resources and institutional support for customising materials.

Interest in peer learning and exchange of good practices across European contexts.

Moreover, personas provided a replicable framework that can be scaled beyond the project to other adult education settings. For more detailed information on the development and application of learner personas, please refer to the outputs of WP2.





3.3 Key Findings from WP3: All relevant details

3.3.1 Introduction to WP3

Work Package 3 (WP3) of the Diverse Courses project focused on systematically identifying the needs of adult learners and educators within highly diverse educational contexts.

The methodology adopted for WP3 was grounded in the principles of inclusive adult education promoted by the European Commission and Erasmus+ priorities (European Commission, 2023).

A common framework checklist guided the documentation of good practices, ensuring consistency and comparability across partner contexts.



Each partner organisation contributed a minimum of three documented good practices, developed mapping tools, and piloted these tools across at least three courses per partner. In total, 18 courses involving 18 educators and approximately 180 learners were mapped and evaluated.

3.3.2 Qualitative Indicators

1. **Clarity**, user-friendliness, and relevance of tools.
2. Perceived **usefulness** of personas in adapting didactical approaches.
3. Educator and learner **feedback** on the inclusiveness of proposed scenarios.
4. Observed improvements in learner **engagement** and educator preparedness during pilot testing.



3.3.3 Implications for Inclusive Adult Education

Findings from WP3 underscore the need for adult education systems to move beyond one-size-fits-all approaches and invest in tools that support personalised teaching strategies.

The evidence generated offers scalable insights for future projects seeking to address similar challenges of diversity and inclusion across EU contexts.



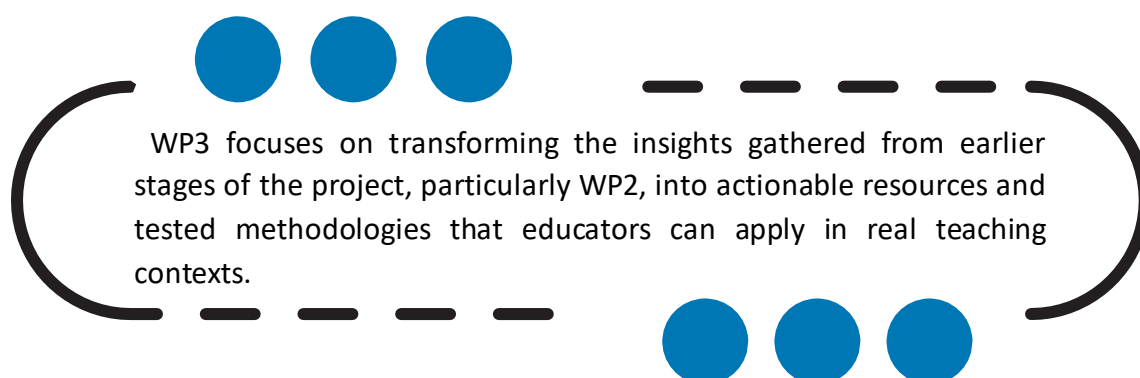
3.3.4 Educator Awareness and Preparedness

The outputs developed under WP3 are central to bridging the gap between identified learner needs and the practical implementation of inclusive teaching strategies.

The outputs increased educator awareness of learner diversity, fostering empathy and more personalised teaching strategies.

3.3.5 Educator Awareness and Preparedness

The outputs developed under WP3 are central to bridging the gap between identified learner needs and the practical implementation of inclusive teaching strategies.

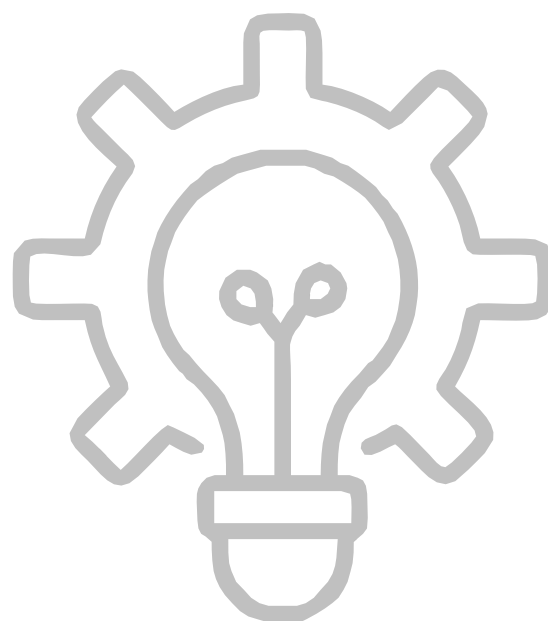


Toolkit for Inclusive Didactical Approaches

The Toolkit serves as the primary resource for educators, offering a structured set of instruments, templates, and guidance for customising teaching to diverse learner profiles.

It integrates elements such as learner personas, mapping tools, and didactical scenario templates, providing a practical framework for lesson planning and course adaptation.

Its relevance lies in translating theoretical principles of inclusivity into concrete, classroom-ready solutions, thus addressing educators' expressed need for hands-on support rather than abstract guidelines.





Focus Groups for Validation and Feedback

Focus groups, involving both educators and learners, were essential to ensure that the tools and methodologies developed are responsive to real-world conditions.

By facilitating dialogue among stakeholders, including experts in inclusion and diversity, the focus groups validated the relevance, usability, and adaptability of the toolkit across different European contexts.

This participatory approach also enhanced ownership and acceptance of the resources among end-users, increasing the likelihood of sustained implementation beyond the project lifecycle.



Course Implementation and Piloting

The piloting of the toolkit in 18 courses across partner organisations (involving 18 educators and approximately 180 learners) provided critical evidence of effectiveness.

Through structured evaluation and feedback mechanisms, the piloting phase allowed for the refinement of tools and highlighted best practices for scaling up inclusive approaches.

This phase also demonstrated how personalised teaching strategies improve learner engagement and success, particularly for individuals facing barriers linked to disability, migration, socio-economic disadvantage, or mental health challenges.



3.3.6 Broader Impact and Sustainability

The WP3 outputs collectively contribute to capacity-building in adult education institutions, equipping educators with sustainable practices to address diversity.



3.4 The Role of Learner Personas in Customising Didactical Approaches



3.4.1 Introduction

The integration of learner personas within the Diverse Courses project represents a key innovation in adapting adult education to the realities of increasingly diverse classrooms.

3.4.2 Development and Implementation of Personas

The integration of learner personas within the Diverse Courses project represents a key innovation in adapting adult education to the realities of increasingly diverse classrooms.

Personas, fictional yet evidence-based representations of learners, were developed to encapsulate the characteristics, needs, barriers, and motivations of specific learner groups identified in Work Packages 2 and 3.

These personas enable educators to anticipate challenges and design tailored didactical approaches, fostering inclusive and equitable learning environments.

This approach aligns with European policy priorities that emphasise personalised learning pathways, digital inclusion, and widening participation (European Commission, 2023).

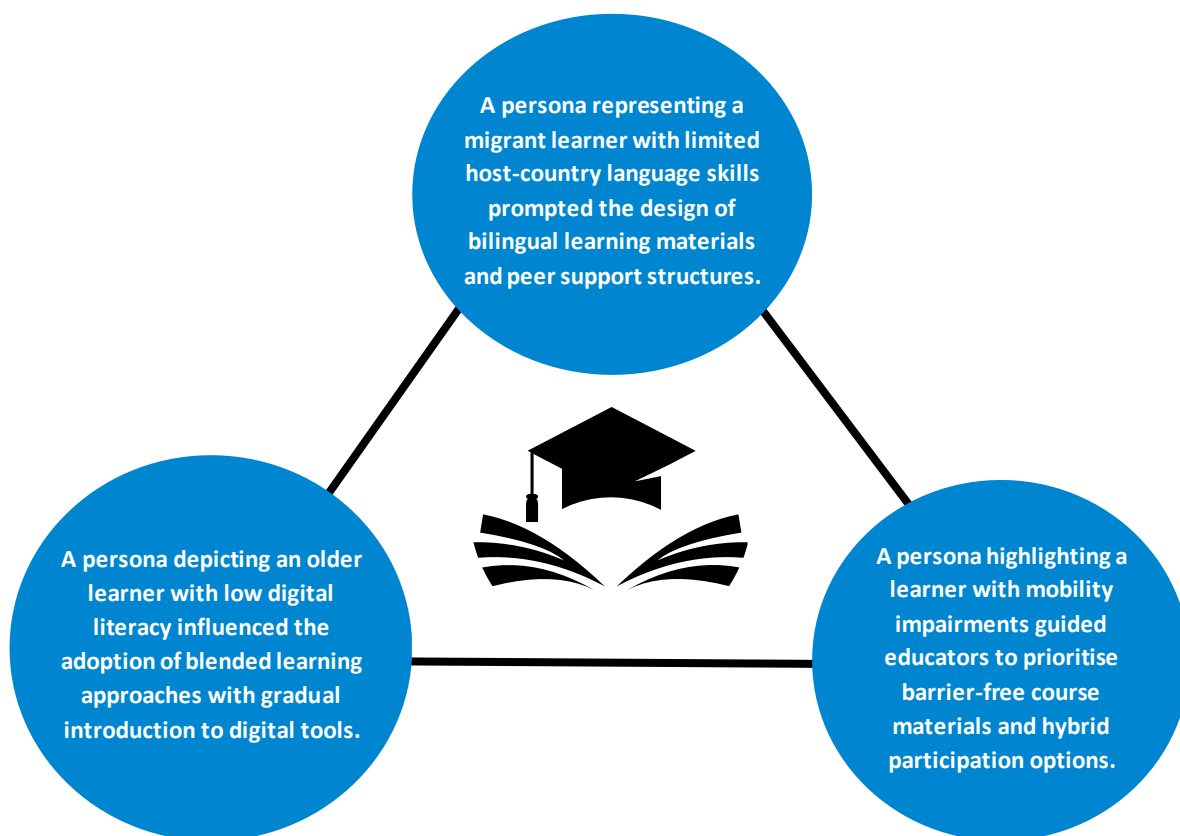
The personas act as a bridge between macro-level inclusion strategies and the micro-level realities of classroom teaching.

By synthesising data from tools, focus groups, and qualitative feedback, the project created personas that reflect multiple dimensions of diversity, including socio-economic status, migration background, disability, and digital literacy.



3.4.3 Development and Implementation of Personas

The use of personas allowed educators to move beyond generalised assumptions about learners and instead develop targeted teaching strategies. For example:



Feedback from pilot evaluations indicated that personas enhanced educators' capacity to:

Identify and empathise with diverse learner challenges

Foster stronger connections between individual learning goals and course objectives.

Anticipate potential barriers and proactively adjust learning materials.

Select didactical scenarios that were both inclusive and context-specific.



A background image showing a classroom setting with several students raising their hands. A large blue triangle is overlaid on the left side of the image, containing the title and the number 4.

STATE OF THE ART AND POLICY OVERVIEW

4



4.1 Current Trends in Teaching Diverse Groups - Quick Reference Guide

4.1.1 Introduction to the quick reference guide

This Quick Reference Guide has been developed as a practical resource to support educators, trainers, and institutional stakeholders in navigating the complex landscape of inclusive and personalised learning policies across Europe.

It provides a concise overview of the most relevant laws, frameworks, and strategic initiatives that underpin educational diversity and equity at both European and national levels.

The primary goal is to equip practitioners with a quick and reliable reference they can consult when designing didactical approaches, adapting materials, or developing inclusive learning pathways. For learners, the guide offers insights into the rights and opportunities they can expect within the European adult learning landscape, promoting greater awareness and self-advocacy.

By synthesising complex policy information into a user-friendly format, this guide complements the outputs of WP2 and provides a foundation for subsequent activities within WP3, including toolkit development, focus groups, and pilot course implementation.

The scope of this guide covers European Union directives and recommendations, as well as selected national policies from the project's partner countries (Spain, Greece, Austria, Italy, and Portugal).

Each entry includes a brief description of its purpose, its relevance to diverse learner groups (such as migrants, low-skilled adults, or individuals with disabilities), and indications on where to access further information or implementation tools.



4.1.2 European and Diverse Courses Reference Guide



European Disability Strategy 2010–2020 (Extended to 2030)

Promotes equal access to education for persons with disabilities, ensuring barrier-free learning environments and inclusive teaching methods.



Reference:

<https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1484>

Actions

Accessibility of learning materials and digital tools, inclusive teacher training.



EU Strategy for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2021–2030

Builds on the previous strategy, reinforcing inclusive education and training as a priority to ensure full participation in society.



Reference:

<https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?atId=1485&langId=en>

Actions

Promoting accessibility and combating discrimination in education.



Council Recommendation on Inclusive Education (2018)

Provides guidance to Member States on developing inclusive education systems at all levels, stressing access and participation of all learners.



Reference:

[https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:32018H0604\(01\)](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:32018H0604(01))

Actions

Removal of barriers, support for disadvantaged learners, and training for educators.



The Erasmus+ Programme (2021–2027)

Supports education, training, youth, and sport across Europe, emphasizing inclusion, diversity, and equal opportunities.



Reference:

<https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/>

Actions

Funding projects that improve access and support for learners with fewer opportunities.



European Qualifications Framework (EQF) (2008)

Facilitates recognition of qualifications across Europe to support lifelong learning and mobility, including for diverse learner groups.



Reference:

<https://europa.eu/europass/en/european-qualifications-framework-eqf>

Actions

Encourages flexible, inclusive educational pathways.



European Commission's Digital Education Action Plan (2021–2027)

Promotes digital skills and inclusive digital education, addressing digital divides among learners of all backgrounds.



Reference:

<https://education.ec.europa.eu/strategy/digital-education-action-plan>

Actions

Accessibility of digital learning tools and inclusive pedagogy.



4.2 Educational Policies and Frameworks in Partner Countries

4.3.1 Introduction

Building upon the broader review of trends in inclusive and diversity-oriented education, this section examines the educational policies and frameworks governing inclusive practices in the five partner countries of the Diverse Courses project: Spain, Greece, Austria, Italy, and Portugal.

Each of these countries operates within the overarching guidance of European Union directives, such as the European Pillar of Social Rights and the Council Recommendation on Key Competences for Lifelong Learning (2018), while also developing national strategies that address specific demographic, cultural, and socio-economic contexts.

The primary goal of this analysis is to map the legislative and strategic frameworks that support the inclusion of diverse learners

By understanding these frameworks, educators and project partners can identify alignment opportunities, gaps, and innovative practices that inform the design of the WP3 toolkit, focus group methodologies, and course implementations.



Provide a reference point for cross-country comparison to inform shared strategies within the project consortium.



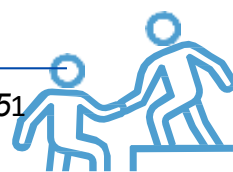
Identify practical implications for educators and adult learning institutions in each partner country.



Highlight key national policies and their alignment with EU priorities on inclusion and diversity.



Support the scalability and transferability of the project's outputs beyond the immediate partnership.





Spain

The Spanish educational system is organised around a central structure of ten years of compulsory education, which comprises the Primary stage (from 6 to 12 years old) and the Compulsory Secondary Education, the “ESO” (from 12 to 16).

While this model guarantees a universal schooling, it also presents us with some important challenges in relation to inclusion. One of the principal difficulties we face is the high rate of early school leaving that happens just when this compulsory period finishes, a situation that has a special impact on students from more vulnerable socioeconomic contexts.

Moreover, another complex matter is the full inclusion of pupils with special educational needs, as we are in a transition from a model of special centres towards their complete integration in the ordinary schools.

In this sense, the most recent educational law, the LOMLOE, is making a significant effort to address these issues. On one hand, it puts forward concrete measures to combat school segregation, for example by giving more resources to the schools that have a high percentage of disadvantaged students.

On the other hand, it aims to reduce the rates of grade repetition, which is another of our historical problems, and supports the progressive transfer of students from the special centres into mainstream ones, with the final objective of ensuring an equitable education for all.



Italy

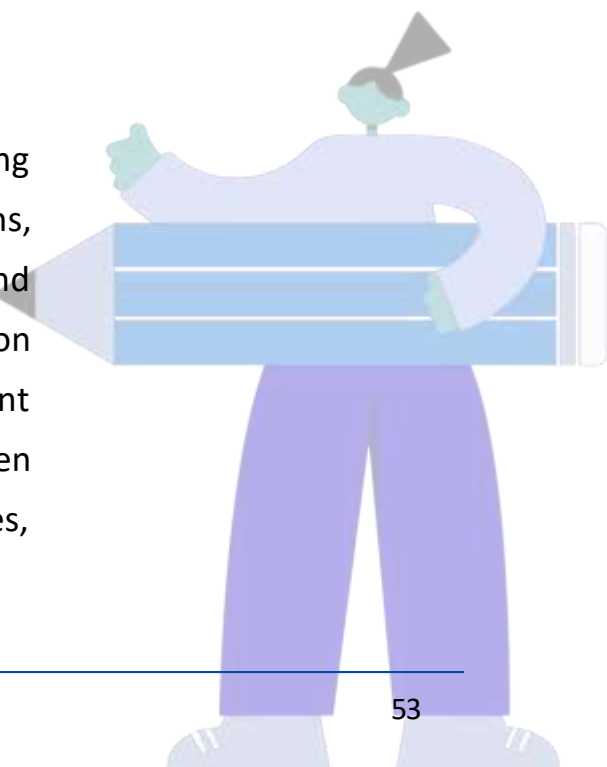
In Italy, educational diversity is not captured through a single formal definition, but it is implicitly embedded within the broader principles of the Italian Constitution and key national policies. The right to education is enshrined in Article 34 of the Constitution, which guarantees equal access to education for all citizens, with a particular focus on overcoming economic and social barriers.

Legislative Decree 66/2017, which governs inclusion in the Italian education system, represents a major step in aligning with European directives, particularly in recognizing the rights of students with special educational needs (SEN), disabilities, and social disadvantage.

Italian policies align with European priorities on inclusion and equal opportunity, although there is often a greater emphasis on integration rather than transformation. For example, while the EU emphasizes structural reforms and systemic equity (including gender, socio-economic background, and LGBTIQ+ inclusion), the Italian approach still tends to rely heavily on compensatory interventions, especially in adult education.

However, recent efforts in lifelong learning strategies and adult skills policies, particularly those under the National Recovery and Resilience Plan (NRRP/Piano Nazionale di Ripresa e Resilienza), signal a closer alignment with European values on educational diversity and inclusion.

Challenges include fragmentation of adult learning offerings across different institutions and regions, uneven implementation of inclusive practices, and insufficient professional training for educators on diversity management. Adult learners with migrant backgrounds, disabilities, or low qualifications often face systemic barriers including linguistic difficulties, bureaucratic obstacles, and limited support services.





Italy

On the other hand, opportunities are emerging thanks to national initiatives such as the Piano Nazionale della Formazione degli Adulti, investment in digital skills, and community-based learning centres (CPIA – Centri Provinciali per l’Istruzione degli Adulti).

Low-tech solutions such as printed workbooks or community radio are still valuable in rural and disadvantaged areas, especially among older adults and low-skilled learners. However, digital literacy and connectivity remain a challenge for certain groups, highlighting the need for continued investment in digital equity.

European strategies have influenced Italy’s education policy through both funding and policy benchmarks. The implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights, Erasmus+ KA2 projects, and recommendations on Upskilling Pathways and Adult Learning have fostered new approaches to personalised learning, validation of prior learning, and professional development.

Institutional collaboration is key, with CPIAs, municipalities, regions, and NGOs working together to implement inclusive adult education. However, systemic fragmentation, limited coordination, and funding shortages can act as significant barriers.

Professional development for adult educators is offered through regional training programmes, CPIA-specific courses, university postgraduate diplomas (e.g. in adult education or L2 teaching), and national initiatives like the Piano Nazionale Formazione Docenti.

Evaluation methods include learner self-assessment, satisfaction surveys, portfolio reviews, and monitoring of course completion and certification rates. Some CPIAs also use narrative reports and focus groups to collect qualitative feedback, especially from learners with complex needs.



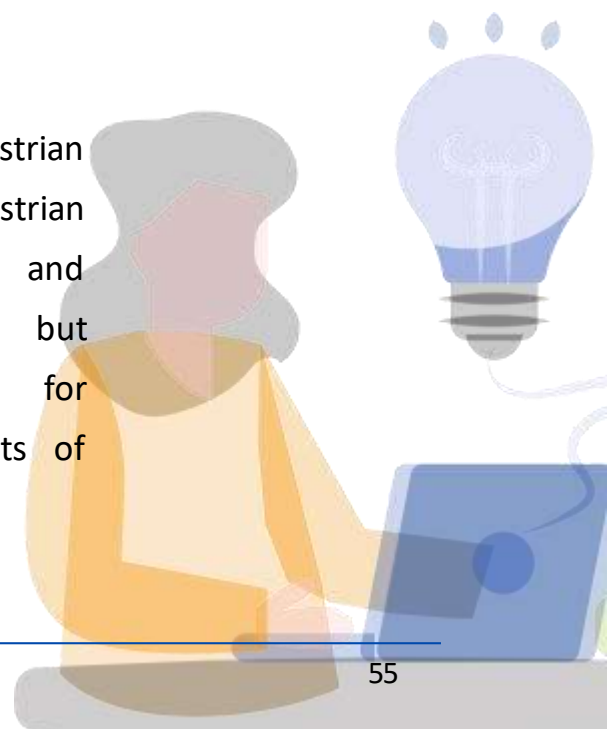
Austria

The education policy does not use a single, explicit definition of “educational diversity”, but the concept is embedded within broader principles and objectives governing the system. For instance, according to Article 14 of the Austrian Federal Constitutional Law, the education system is founded on democracy, humanity, solidarity, peace, justice, openness, and tolerance toward everyone, regardless of race, social status, or financial background.

A central aim of Austrian education is to provide needs-based education that promotes equal opportunities and gender equality. Austria also recognizes the rights of autochthonous ethnic minorities to education in their languages in certain provinces, while migrants have limited rights to native language instruction and support, which are generally voluntary and not strongly embedded in the curriculum.

Both Austria and the EU prioritize equal opportunities, inclusion, and support for individual needs in education, both frameworks recognize the need for targeted measures to support disadvantaged or marginalized groups, and the cultivation of diversity competence and the fight against discrimination are shared objectives.

Differences between European-level definitions and Austrian education policies can be found as well: The Austrian approach is grounded in constitutional principles and emphasizes needs-based, individualised support, but practical implementation (e.g. language support for migrants) can be less robust compared to the rights of recognized minorities.





Austria

Austria has implemented several policies to promote inclusive and personalised learning in adult education, targeting diverse groups like migrants, low-skilled adults, and learners with disabilities. For instance, the Adult Education Initiative (IEB, 2012-2023) is characterized by key features such as free access to basic education (German language, mathematics, digital skills) and compulsory school-leaving qualifications for adults lacking formal credentials.

While governmental bodies and NGOs drive inclusive education through funding and targeted programs, systemic barriers – such as underfunding, institutional resistance, and inadequate teacher training – hinder progress. Addressing these challenges requires shifting resources from segregated systems, enforcing participatory policymaking, and aligning teacher education with inclusive principles.

Austria offers a robust but decentralized system for the professional development of adult educations, anchored by quality frameworks (Ö-Cert), certification pathways (wba), university courses and targeted in-service training. These initiatives collectively support the application of inclusive and learner-centred methodologies in line with national strategies, which also recognizing the diverse backgrounds and needs of adult learners.

Austrian adult education institutions employ a mix of personalised, cooperative, and flexible teaching practices and programme models to deliver inclusive education, The most effective approaches are those that combine individualisation, strong local partnerships, curriculum flexibility, peer learning, digital innovation, and comprehensive support services enabling diverse learners to succeed regardless of background or ability.





Greece

In Greece, the concept of "educational diversity" is addressed through the principles of inclusion, equity, and multicultural education. While the exact term is not consistently used in national policies, its core ideas are present in efforts to ensure access and participation for all learners. Educational diversity encompasses differences in learners' cultural, linguistic, ethnic, and socioeconomic backgrounds, as well as variations in learning abilities, styles, and aspirations.

National strategies aim to address the needs of disadvantaged and minority groups, including students with special educational needs. Greece's education policy aligns broadly with European Union priorities on inclusive and equitable education. However, challenges persist in fully implementing these strategies due to resource constraints, inconsistent teacher training, and systemic limitations.

In adult education, promoting educational diversity poses significant difficulties. Greece has one of the lowest adult learning participation rates in the EU—just 4% of adults aged 25 to 54 took part in learning activities in 2022, compared to an EU average of 14%. Participation remains particularly low among marginalized groups such as Roma, refugees, migrants, and people with low formal qualifications.

Barriers include limited digital infrastructure in rural and island areas, low digital literacy, language difficulties, and social stigma. Moreover, many adult educators lack adequate preparation in inclusive and intercultural pedagogies, making it difficult to meet the needs of diverse learners.





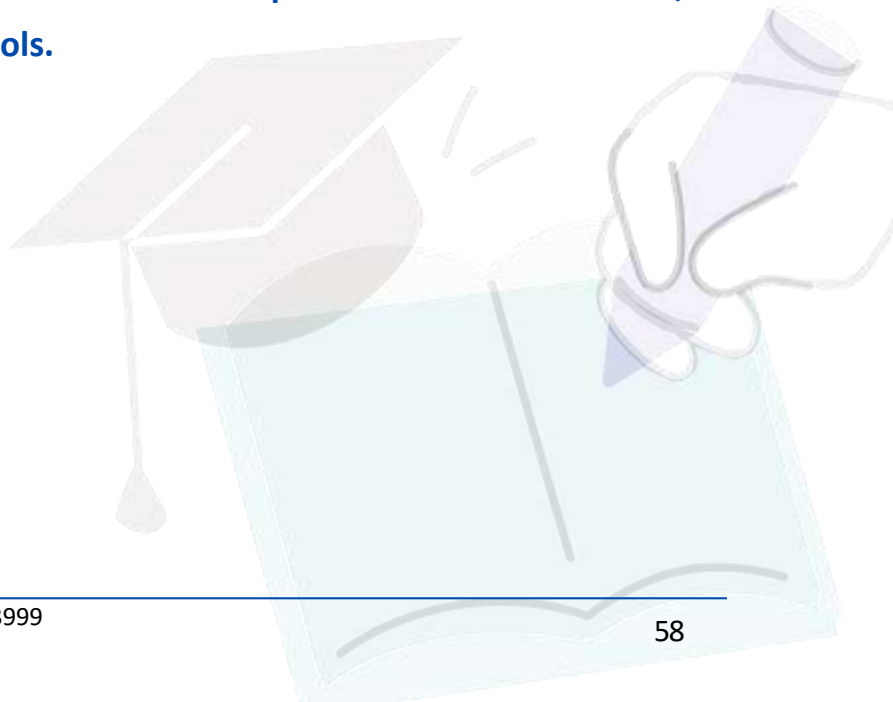
Greece

EU-level strategies have significantly influenced Greece's approach to educational diversity. Through frameworks such as the Lisbon Strategy, Europe 2020, and the European Education Area (EEA) 2025, Greece has developed programs like Reception and Integration Classes, Intercultural Schools, and Zones of Educational Priority (ZEP). These efforts have expanded institutional capacity and introduced practices such as the recognition of prior learning and intercultural training for educators.

In Greek adult education, personalized or individualized learning is central to its pedagogical philosophy and is officially embedded in national strategies and frameworks, such as:

National Lifelong Learning Strategy 2021–2027: Targets the individualization of learning for specific population groups (unemployed, migrants, low-skilled individuals), promotes learner-centered approaches, emphasizing flexibility and individual progress based on prior knowledge and competences (RPL strategies that follows VNFIL approaches)as also by reflecting the basic directions of the European Agenda for Adult Learning (Renewed 2011, extended 2021–2030).

According to the Article 11 of Law 4823/2021, the role of the Centers for Interdisciplinary Assessment, Counseling, and Support (KEDASY) in promoting equal access to education. Their responsibilities include facilitating differentiated instruction, supporting students with disabilities or special educational needs, and collaborating with educators and schools.





Portugal

Educational diversity in Portugal is understood within the framework of national education and training policies that emphasise inclusion, equal opportunities, and lifelong learning. The national perspective broadly aligns with European definitions, particularly those promoted through the European Pillar of Social Rights and the Council Recommendation on Key Competences for Lifelong Learning (2018).

Promoting educational diversity within adult learning in Portugal faces challenges such as limited resources for rural and remote areas, low participation rates among low-skilled adults, and difficulties in adapting existing adult education structures to the rapidly changing needs of migrant and refugee populations. Opportunities arise from the integration of European funding instruments, notably the European Social Fund (ESF+), which supports innovative inclusion projects and digital transformation in adult education. Furthermore, national programmes such as Qualifica have enhanced recognition of prior learning and provided flexible pathways to upskilling, supporting individuals with diverse educational backgrounds.

Implementation of these policies is coordinated through a multi-level governance model. The Ministry of Education sets strategic direction, while regional Qualifica Centres and local training providers operationalise the programmes.

Non-governmental organisations and social partners play a critical role in outreach and support for marginalised communities, although coordination challenges and uneven resource allocation can sometimes create barriers to full implementation.



Portugal

Evaluation of inclusive practices relies on both quantitative and qualitative measures, including participation and completion rates, learner satisfaction surveys, and progression into employment or further education.

Findings are systematically fed back into programme design through ANQEP's quality assurance mechanisms and annual policy reviews. This evidence-based approach has contributed to iterative improvements in adult education, ensuring greater responsiveness to the evolving needs of diverse learner populations in Portugal.

Effective practices in inclusive and personalised adult education in Portugal include individual learning plans, modular certification approaches, and blended learning formats that combine face-to-face and online components.

Community-based projects have successfully integrated intercultural mediation for migrant learners and tailored literacy programmes for adults with low prior schooling.



Digital tools, particularly the Qualifica Passport (an online platform that records and guides learners' qualification pathways), and open educational resources have significantly enhanced personalisation and accessibility, while low-tech solutions such as community-based workshops remain essential for reaching adults with limited digital literacy.



4.3 Best Practices in Inclusive and Personalised Education

4.3.1 Introduction

The increasing diversity of learner populations in adult and higher education settings has prompted a growing body of research and policy initiatives across Europe and globally.

As migration flows, socio-economic disparities, disability inclusion, and lifelong learning imperatives reshape classrooms, educators face the dual challenge of adapting pedagogical strategies and aligning with evolving policy frameworks. The aim of this chapter is to present ten illustrative case studies that highlight innovative practices and policy-driven approaches to teaching diverse groups.

These case studies have been selected to represent a broad geographical spread, with a particular focus on European contexts, where inclusion and diversity have become central themes of the Erasmus+ Programme and the European Education Area objectives (European Commission, 2023).

4.3.2 Finland's Inclusive Education Policy



Goal

To provide equitable, high-quality education for all learners regardless of background, emphasizing inclusion and personalized learning.



Description

Finland has established a comprehensive inclusive education policy that integrates learners with diverse needs, including immigrants and students with disabilities, into mainstream classrooms. The policy focuses on adapting curricula and teaching methods to meet individual learning requirements, supported by continuous teacher training in diversity and inclusion.



Main Outputs

- Implementation of personalized and flexible learning pathways.
- Strong teacher support frameworks promoting inclusivity.
- Positive outcomes in learner engagement and achievement.



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<https://www.oph.fi/en/statistics-and-publications/publications/inclusive-education-finland>



4.3.3 Germany's Integration through Vocational Training



Goal

To provide equitable, high-quality education for all learners regardless of background, emphasizing inclusion and personalized learning.



Main Outputs

- Development of integrative vocational curricula.
- Enhanced employability of participants.
- Successful community and labor market integration.



Description

Germany's vocational training system offers combined language courses, cultural orientation, and job-specific skills training for refugees and migrants. The approach emphasizes learner-centered methodologies and mentorship to increase employability and social integration.



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4.3.4 The UK's "Education for All" Strategy



Goal

To provide equitable, high-quality education for all learners regardless of background, emphasizing inclusion and personalized learning.



Description

The UK's policy framework focuses on personalized learning plans and community engagement to support diverse learner groups. It encourages collaboration between educational institutions, NGOs, and stakeholders to foster an inclusive environment.



Main Outputs

- Personalized learning and support mechanisms.
- Enhanced engagement of marginalized learners.
- Strong partnerships promoting equity in education.



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4.3.5 The Netherlands' Approach to Refugee Education



Goal

To provide targeted educational pathways for refugees incorporating language acquisition and social integration.



Main Outputs

- Effective integration through tailored educational programs.
- Enhanced teacher competencies in diversity.
- Improved learner wellbeing and social inclusion.



Description

The Netherlands offers specialized tracks for refugees including language immersion and culturally sensitive pedagogy. Teachers are trained in trauma-informed methods to support diverse learners.



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