



SMALEI Final Conference Report:

Empowering Adult Learning and Education for a Sustainable Future

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Summary

The adult education sector plays a vital role in fostering lifelong learning and empowering individuals to adapt to societal changes. SMALEI recognises the increasing need for ALE institutions to embrace sustainability, not only in their operational practices but also in the learning content they deliver. This necessitates a shift in leadership approaches, management strategies, and organisational culture.

Throughout the project's life, SMALEI has developed a range of valuable resources to support this transition, including the **SMALEI Matrix**, **Workbook**, **MOOC**, and **Digital Academy**. These tools provide practical guidance and frameworks for ALE institutions to integrate sustainable practices into their core functions.

This final conference of the SMALEI project, hosted by the Delegation of the Basque Country in Brussels, served as a platform to:

- **Engage with policymakers and decision makers on how to create supportive frameworks that enable ALE institutions to contribute to Europe's sustainability goals.**
- **Showcase SMALEI's achievements, discover how the project's resources can empower ALE institutions to become drivers of sustainable development.**
- **Share best practices, learn from leading ALE organisations that have successfully implemented sustainable management and leadership models.**

By bringing together ALE organisations, practitioners, policymakers, civil society representatives, and lifelong learning experts, this conference aims to inspire action and foster a collaborative approach to building a sustainable, inclusive, and resilient adult education sector across Europe.

Welcome words

The final conference of the SMALEI project began with a welcome and introduction by **Inge Gorostiaga Luzárraga**, Director General for Digital Transformation and Advanced Learning at the Basque Government's Ministry of Education. She emphasised that education is a cornerstone of progress - adult education is more critical than ever in ensuring lifelong learning and sustainability.



“SMALEI project is a pivotal force of innovation and collaboration, fostering green transformation in adult learning and education.”

Building Sustainability Competences



Ulrike Pisiotis, Education Expert Learning for Sustainability, Policy officer at the EU Commission's Directorate General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture highlighted the importance of sustainability in education, emphasizing GreenComp, the European sustainability competence framework as a guideline for green competences, the need for up-skilling and re-skilling in emerging green jobs, and the role of collective action and critical thinking.

“We can not achieve political agreements on innovations without lifelong learning.”

Bridging Adult Education and Green Policies

Tatjana Babrauskienė, EESC member, Head of International Relations, Lithuanian Education and Science Trade Union emphasized global sustainability challenges, including geopolitical issues, funding cuts, and the green skills gap, highlighting the need for quality adult education, fair transitions, and strong EU initiatives to prepare workers for the 2.5 million green jobs expected by 2030.



SMALEI for You



Andrea Bernert-Bürkle

(Volkshochschulverband Baden-Württemberg) presented the SMALEI project's Sustainability Matrix for Adult Education Institutions, a tool supporting green strategies through five core areas, real-life applications, and interactive resources such as the SMALEI Game, Assessment, best practices, templates, prioritization tools, and workshops to engage educators and learners.

August Nilsson (Glokala folkhögskolan) presented key insights from the SMALEI Workbook, a facilitator-friendly guide for organizations using the Sustainability Matrix, emphasizing key principles such as engagement, flexibility, synergy with existing operations, and a five-phase process to assess, develop, implement, and evaluate sustainability actions.



Erdem Vardar (YUVA), outlined the SMALEI Digital Academy MOOC, offering certification through a badge and featuring modules on SMALEI introduction and practical applications, along with an e-learning platform, discussion forum, and interactive webinars for deeper engagement.

Explore the presentations from the "SMALEI for You" session at the following [link](#).

Charlotte Ede, Capacity Building and Projects Coordinator at EAEA, led an interactive session, which allowed participants to explore five key areas of sustainability: Institutional environmental sustainability, Learner engagement, Awareness raising and involvement, Partnerships for sustainability, Green skills for trainers and staff and to reflect on how SMALEI's tools could be adapted to their institutions. Many expressed particular interest in green skills for trainers, human resource strategies, and cross-sector collaboration. They also highlighted the need for stronger policy support to bridge the gap between adult education and sustainable development.



Charlotte Ede introduced mentoring and peer review guidelines, presented an online workshop: **"Mentor as Your Way to Sustainability" – 26th March, 10:00-11:30.**

Mentor your way to sustainability!

Online Workshop | 26 March 10-11.30 CET

In this **free** workshop, we will:

- Learn about how mentorship and sustainability in **education** can work
- **Present your work in sustainability** and **find peers** interested in the same topics
- Start **planning how you could improve your institution's sustainability!**

Register today!



Agenda →



The workshop is carried out as part of the launch of the Mentorship Scheme of the SMALEI project. Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA). Neither the European Union nor EACEA can be held responsible for them



More about the online workshop you will find [here](#).

SMALEI Policy Recommendations and road map

Leire Oreja from TKNIKA presented SMALEI's policy recommendations and road map, aligned with the European Green Deal and SDG4, developed through research, stakeholder consultations, peer review, and a validation seminar. She highlighted key strategic areas on the road map:



“Aligning policies with the green transition, transforming ALE institutions, equipping teachers for sustainability, engagement and empowering learners, ALE institutions: social activator of sustainability, creating alliances for sustainability”

Reflections on the project outcomes



Charlotte Ede highlighted the positive impact of SMALEI, including strengthened networks, improved self-assessment for institutions, and engagement of over 300 adult education staff, while also addressing challenges such as the need for institutional alignment, staff engagement, resource limitations, and overcoming eco-anxiety.

Karolina Pisz from the NGO Trainers' Association (STOP) as a trainer specialising in gender equality and sustainable development, drawing from her personal experience with the SMALEI outcomes, expressed her enthusiasm for its adaptability and impact.



“The workbook is adaptable across different timeframes and demonstrates strengths in quality, flexibility, universal impact, and usability, while also proving valuable in identifying eco-friendly organizations and serving as a starting point for local projects and design thinking.

SMALEI partners



For more information about SMALEI's partners, visit: <https://smalei.eu/partners/>