POLICY ROADMAP TO SUSTAINABLE AND INCLUSIVE COMMUNITIES

Table of Contents

1. Project Summary

Just4All – Adult education for a just transition is a two-year project funded by the European Union 's programme European Social Fund+ (ESF+), running from October 2023 to September 2025. The project's objective is to build an inclusive, socially fair, and sustainable green and digital transition in the European Union by leveraging the potential of lifelong learning and adult learning and education (ALE) as a force of equity and empowerment.

Key to the project is the recognition that a just transition must actively address the structural barriers faced by those most excluded from educational and societal opportunities, in particular, migrants, women, and adults with low levels of formal education. These groups were identified from the outset as primary targets for inclusion, both in policy analysis and in the development of educational tools.

Thanks to this focus, Just4All contributes to the implementation of the first principle of the European Pillar of Social Rights (EPSR) on access to education, training, and lifelong learning, as well as the twentieth principle of the pillar on access to essential services. Coordinated by SOLIDAR, the project has been implemented by a consortium of partners working at international and national levels, including:

- European Association for the Education of Adults (EAEA)
- International Council for Adult Education (ICAE)
- CARDET from Cyprus
- La Ligue de l'Enseignement from France
- AONTAS from Ireland
- Arbetarnas Bildningsförbund (ABF) from Sweden

Together with these partners, Just4All performed a mapping and analysis of existing adult education practices that support just transition objectives. A total of **49 practices** were analysed, primarily from the four focus countries of the national organisations participating in the project (Cyprus, France, Ireland, Sweden), but also some implemented or coordinated transnationally or in other countries and regions. Each national partner complemented the mapping process by producing a **national background paper**. These papers addressed the state of adult learning and just transition within their countries, identified structural and policy-level barriers, and offered **targeted, country-specific recommendations**. As a part of this process, **national-level policy dialogues** were held in each country to facilitate exchange between learners, practitioners, civil society actors, education providers, and policymakers, with SOLIDAR building a summary leaflet with policy recommendations for the European level identifying recommendations for the European level common to all national policy dialogue.

The main takeaways from the analysis point to the **importance of participatory and community-based methods**, such as creative arts, practical workshops, and local learning projects, and their effectiveness when **paired with** holistic **systemic support services** (e.g. housing, childcare, mental health support). Stakeholder collaboration, including active engagement of civil society organisations, also proved as a key

factor for the long-term sustainability and impact of adult education initiatives adjusted to the needs of systematically disadvantaged groups.

Throughout the project, Just4All implemented three core activities that generated key insights into how adult education can support a socially just transition: the mapping of best practices across partner countries and beyond; a series of national policy dialogues conducted by consortium partners; and the development and piloting of a Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) with educators across Europe. These activities helped identify policy gaps, innovative methodologies, and the needs of learners facing systemic barriers to participation, such as migrants, women, and adults with low levels of formal education.

Building on the findings from these activities, the project produced three main deliverables aimed at supporting inclusive Adult Learning and Education (ALE) and informing just transition policies at both national and European levels:

- **Massive Open Online Course (MOOC):** Developed and piloted during the project, the MOOC was finalised as a flexible, self-paced, learner-centred course. It introduces educators to sustainability-related education and supports inclusive teaching practices for learners facing structural disadvantage.
- **Toolkit for Policymakers and Practitioners:** This resource offers practical tools to strengthen inclusive ALE systems, enhance policy coherence, and promote cooperation among ALE stakeholders—civil society organisations, education providers, and public authorities.
- **Roadmap and Policy Recommendations:** Presented in this document, the roadmap outlines strategic recommendations for EU and national policymakers, with action points for civil society and practitioners. Drawing on all three project activities, it provides a framework for embedding social justice and inclusion in adult learning systems.

2. Introduction

What is Just Transition and why does it matter?

Over the last decades, the idea of a just transition, first proposed by trade unions in the United States in the 1970s, has emerged as a useful framework to respond to times of fast and sudden shifting social, environmental and economic transitions. The High Committee for a Just Transition (2024) underlines how at the centre of this concept is the recognition that large-scale transitions must be actively shaped by principles of fairness, inclusion, and participation.

We are living through an era of intensifying climate and environmental breakdown. Climate Change and unsustainable economic practices are shaping the lived experiences of communities across Europe and the globe. The need for a green and digital transition is now widely recognised, yet without a parallel commitment to **social justice**, this transition risks deepening the very challenges it has been set out to address. Marginalised communities are disproportionately exposed to the consequences of environmental degradation, while a small share of the global population accounts for most emissions.

Without addressing these injustices, climate policies will not only fall short, but they may also fuel social resistance, inequalities, political polarisation, and declining public trust.

Applying the "Just Transition" lenses to the current political and legislative landscape of the European Union, makes clear the need for a strong and coherent policy framework that embeds **social and environmental justice** into all policy areas.

What is lifelong Learning and Adult Education, and why are they important?

Lifelong Learning (LLL) refers to the continuous and voluntary pursuit of knowledge, competences, and personal development across the lifespan, enabling individuals to adapt to evolving social, economic, and environmental conditions. Within this, **Adult Learning and Education (ALE)** encompasses all structured learning opportunities for adults, whether formal, non-formal, or informal, that support the development of skills, critical awareness, and active citizenship ([EAEA 2023](#))

In the current socio-economic and political landscape, the role of education and lifelong learning, and particularly adult learning, is more critical than ever, especially when the Just Transition is set within the wider context of other societal transformations shaping our present and future. The emergence of a digitally driven society has already transformed public services, employment, access to information, and democratic participation, yet millions of adults in Europe still lack the digital competences, tools, or confidence needed to navigate and benefit fully from these technologies. In this context, **digital exclusion becomes a major barrier not only to employment, but also to civic participation and access to rights**.

Lifelong Learning (LLL) and Adult Learning and Education (ALE) provide the educational foundation needed to engage meaningfully with both the green and digital transitions. They equip adults with the capacity to navigate complex change across domains such as work, technology, the environment, and society at large. Crucially, they support not only employability but also ecological literacy, digital citizenship, and democratic resilience.

However, education can also reproduce existing inequalities if it is not deliberately designed with equity and inclusion in mind. When grounded in social justice, LLL and ALE have the potential to help learners and communities understand the historical and structural roots of injustice, and to support their critical engagement as agents of change, rather than passive recipients of top-down reforms. In this way, education strengthens the social fabric necessary for inclusive and sustainable transitions.

Why a roadmap for a socially just transition?

Within this framework, Just4All was launched to bring together Just Transition and Lifelong Learning into a focused, action-oriented project. While Just Transition is increasingly present in policy discourse, it remains inconsistently integrated into national education systems and adult learning strategies. To bridge this gap, the Just4All project set out to document and analyse real-world best practices in inclusive adult education for sustainability, investigate barriers and gaps in national policy frameworks, engage stakeholders in policy dialogues to strengthen cooperation and shared ownership, develop practical tools and knowledge resources to support action at all levels, and produce a Policy Roadmap and

Recommendations list aimed at guiding EU and national policymakers in building adult education systems that can support a just transition in both principle and practice.

This roadmap was developed to support the implementation of a socially just and accessible transition by providing actionable guidance grounded in on-the-ground realities. It synthesises the findings of the project into a comprehensive framework built around five key pillars, each addressing a structural challenge that must be tackled to realise inclusive and sustainable adult education systems. The roadmap presents a set of targeted policy recommendations, addressed respectively to policymakers, civil society organisations, and educators and trainers, to support change at all levels of implementation.

3. The Roadmap to Sustainable and Inclusive Communities

The Pillars

The Just4All project identified five foundational pillars essential for embedding Adult Learning and Education (ALE) into the green and digital transitions. These pillars were developed from a robust evidence base, including national background papers, the mapping of best practices, policy dialogues, and insights from the piloting of the Just4All MOOC. Together, they reflect the necessary conditions for ALE to contribute not only to individual empowerment but also to systemic change grounded in justice, participation, and sustainability.

Each pillar addresses a distinct structural barrier, ranging from fragmented policy environments and insufficient funding to gaps in capacity building, stakeholder exclusion, and unclear governance. Collectively, they demonstrate the need to move beyond fragmented or project-based interventions toward integrated, long-term strategies that position ALE as a core component of the Just Transition.

This section presents the five pillars and outlines the key challenges linked to each. It introduces the **Roadmap to Sustainable and Inclusive Communities**, which contains a targeted set of **policy recommendations**. These recommendations are designed for flexible use by policymakers, civil society organisations, and practitioners. Whether used individually or as a comprehensive strategy, the roadmap supports locally relevant, coordinated, and inclusive approaches to the green and digital transitions.

Policy Alignment

Achieving a socially just, green and digital transition requires more than isolated programmes or temporary projects. It demands coherent policy frameworks that embed adult learning and education (ALE) into the heart of transition strategies at all levels of governance. Currently, ALE is often treated as an auxiliary tool, relevant for job retraining or basic skills development, but rarely recognised as a cross-cutting driver of democratic resilience, social inclusion, and environmental awareness. Without policy alignment across education, labour, environment, and social affairs, ALE cannot effectively contribute to systemic change.

Key challenges for Policy Alignment:

- ALE is frequently absent or underemphasised in Just Transition and green/digital transition strategies (see National Level Policy Context).
- Policy responsibilities remain siloed, particularly across ministries of education, labour, and environment (see EU Political Context).
- Stakeholder participation is often symbolic, with CSOs and learners lacking meaningful routes to influence policymaking (Best Practices Analysis; National Dialogues).
- Policy fragmentation leads to inconsistent implementation and poor scalability of inclusive adult education programmes.

Capacity Building & Inclusive Education

A just transition depends on people's capacity to participate meaningfully and shaping the environmental and digital transitions. To ensure that adult learning plays its full role in this process, investment is needed in the knowledge, skills, and working conditions of educators, as well as in inclusive, learner-centred programs that meet the diverse needs of adult learners. This includes equipping adult educators to address complex social, ecological, and political challenges and providing pathways for disadvantaged groups to access and benefit from transformative learning opportunities.

Key challenges for Capacity Building & Inclusive Education

- Adult educators often lack training in areas such as climate justice, democratic participation, or social equity (see Policy Recommendation: Invest in educator training that includes critical policy knowledge).
- Professional development for educators' professional development remains fragmented, underfunded, and overly focused on narrow technical or digital skills.
- Many adult learning systems prioritise labour-market alignment over broader goals like citizenship, sustainability, or empowerment.
- Programmes remain inaccessible to many groups facing systemic barriers, migrants, women, adults with low formal qualifications, due to lack of outreach, adaptation, or support services.

Stakeholder Engagement

Building sustainable and inclusive communities requires more than top-down planning. The legitimacy and effectiveness of just transition policies depend on meaningful, continuous engagement with those most affected, and the organisations that they are part of learners, educators, civil society organisations (CSOs), and local communities. Stakeholder engagement ensures that policies are grounded in local realities, reflect diverse knowledge systems, and respond to the needs of marginalised groups. It is also essential to democratic resilience, trust-building, and long-term impact.

Key challenges for stakeholder engagement:

- Consultations are often ad hoc, symbolic, or disconnected from decision-making processes (see Policy Recommendation: Establish structured mechanisms for participation).

- ALE stakeholders, including educators, learners, and CSOs, lack structured channels to influence transition-related policy.
- Policy implementation is fragmented, with poor coordination across ministries and between public institutions and community actors.
- There is limited investment in the infrastructure, facilitation, and continuity required for sustained stakeholder engagement (see Stakeholder Engagement analysis; EU Political Context).

Resource allocation: Funding & Sustainability

Inclusive and transformative adult education cannot be delivered without stable, accessible, and long-term investment. Funding is a structural condition for sustainability, and without it, efforts to expand access, train educators, support civil society, and adapt curricula cannot be maintained or scaled. In the context of the green and digital transitions, adult learning and education (ALE) must be seen not only as a cost but as a strategic public investment, one that supports climate adaptation, social cohesion, democratic resilience, and skills development.

Key challenges for Resource allocation:

- Funding for ALE is inconsistent, short-term, and rarely aligned with the goals of the Just Transition (see Policy Recommendation: Provide sustained and inclusive funding).
- CSOs face major barriers to accessing public funding, particularly for long-term, community-based programmes.
- Professional development for educators is rarely prioritised in national budgets.
- Current funding structures rarely support transversal competences or non-labour-market-related learning outcomes.
- ALE curricula are often developed without resources to adapt content to local or global learner contexts (see Policy Recommendation: Ensure ALE curricula reflect diverse experiences).

Roles and responsibilities (data collection and monitoring) at EU, national, regional, and local levels.

A coherent and accountable approach to adult learning in the Just Transition requires clear responsibilities, coordinated governance, and transparent systems for monitoring progress. At present, many ALE systems suffer from fragmented oversight, limited inter-ministerial cooperation, and a lack of robust data on learner participation, outcomes, and needs. This undermines strategic planning, reduces policy impact, and makes it difficult to evaluate whether transitions are inclusive and equitable.

Key challenges for roles and responsibilities:

- Limited coordination between relevant ministries weakens implementation of ALE for the Just Transition (see Policy Recommendation: Establish structured mechanisms for coordination).
- National monitoring systems often exclude non-formal ALE and overlook equity-related indicators.

- There is a lack of clear roles for civil society and educators in data collection, evaluation, and reporting.
- Policies are often implemented without consistent feedback loops or mechanisms for course correction.
- Cross-country learning is hampered by inconsistent metrics, definitions, and reporting standards (see Harmonise quality frameworks).

Vision: What does a socially just and inclusive transition look like?

While the policy discourse increasingly acknowledges the need for inclusion, adult learning and lifelong learning (LLL) remain largely peripheral in the governance and funding structures driving the transition. Adult learning systems remain structurally under-recognised and underfunded. The European Education Area (EEA), for instance, has expanded its ambition toward inclusiveness and flexibility, yet continues to treat adult learning as secondary to formal education pathways, both in political visibility and in resource allocation (EAEA 2023).

From Skills to Agency: The Unique Role of Adult Learning

As highlighted in the SMALEI project, ALE institutions are often among the few trusted public spaces where adults, particularly those from marginalised backgrounds, can reflect on the implications of systemic changes, acquire transversal competences, and build agency as ecological and civic actors One of the key strengths of adult learning and education (ALE) is its contribution to what the green transition still lacks in many national strategies: a social foundation rooted in participation, capability, and trust. It supports not only individual adaptation but also helps build and strengthen the democratic legitimacy of climate and digital policies.

Structural Challenges: Visibility, Funding, and Fragmentation

One of the persistent weaknesses of the ALE sector is its limited integration into national and EU education systems. As outlined in the EAEA's interim evaluation of the EEA, adult education suffers from:

- **Low and fragmented funding**, over reliant on project-based financing.
- **Limited institutional anchoring**, especially outside vocational training contexts.
- **Policy fragmentation and overlapping**, uncoordinated responsibilities across ministries.
- **Inconsistent quality frameworks**, leading to variation in accessibility and outcomes (EAEA 2023)

These structural barriers actively prevent adult education providers from contributing fully to the twin transitions. In the absence of sustainable investment and recognition, even best in class initiatives often risk remaining localized, short-lived, and dependent on individual actors.

4. Policy Recommendations

The following policy recommendations are grounded in the collective findings of the Just4All project. They build directly on the five core pillars identified as essential to embedding Adult Learning and Education

(ALE) in the green and digital transitions. Each recommendation addresses a structural challenge revealed through the project's national background papers, best practice mapping, stakeholder dialogues, and the MOOC piloting process.

Organised by thematic priority, the recommendations are directed at three key audiences: policymakers, civil society organisations (CSOs), and educators, trainers, and providers. While they can be used individually, they are intended to function as part of a wider roadmap toward sustainable and inclusive communities. Their implementation requires cooperation across sectors and governance levels, and adaptation to local contexts and needs. Together, they offer a concrete, action-oriented framework for ensuring that ALE plays a central role in driving socially just and democratic transitions across Europe.

Provide sustained and inclusive funding for adult learning in the Just Transition

Funding gaps are widely documented across the adult learning sector. National background papers and policy dialogues revealed that adult educators frequently lack access to long-term training resources, especially for content that engages with ecological, civic, and social justice dimensions. Civil society organisations also face significant structural barriers when it comes to securing stable, long-term funding, which restricts their ability to deliver consistent, community-based adult education initiatives. Although EU-level mechanisms like the Social Climate Fund or the Just Transition Fund exist, their eligibility criteria and application procedures often exclude smaller, grassroots ALE actors or non-formal education providers.

Public investment in ALE is essential not only to widen access and participation, but also to ensure that the Just Transition delivers on its promises of equity, empowerment, and sustainability. Without accessible and sustained funding streams, adult learning will remain peripheral to transition strategies, delivered in short-term projects, disconnected from policy frameworks, and structurally limited in reach and impact.

For Policymakers

- Ensure that Just Transition and climate-related funding streams include clear and accessible provisions for ALE, particularly non-formal and community-based providers.
- Review and simplify funding procedures to reduce barriers for small organisations, based on evidence from national background papers and best practice analysis.
- Allocate long-term public funding to support transversal competences, educator training, and inclusive ALE delivery, aligned with the social and environmental goals of the transition.

For Civil Society Organisations (CSOs)

- Advocate for the recognition of CSOs as formal actors in national and regional education funding strategies.

- Collaborate across networks to build collective capacity for accessing, managing, and reporting on public funds, particularly EU-level mechanisms (e.g. Social Climate Fund, ESF+, Erasmus+).
- Demonstrate impact by documenting the long-term benefits of community-led ALE for environmental and social resilience.

For Educators, Trainers and Providers

- Engage in advocacy and public dialogue to highlight funding needs specific to inclusive ALE and transversal competences.
- Strengthen partnerships with CSOs and local authorities to design funding applications that reflect community realities and transition priorities.
- Monitor and report on programme impact to justify long-term investment and advocate for continuity.
- Build internal funding literacy to strengthen resilience and sustainability of ALE delivery models.

Strengthen the role of civil society organisations in adult education and policy co-design.

Across the Just4All national dialogues and background papers, civil society organisations (CSOs) consistently highlighted the lack of meaningful engagement in the development of education and Just Transition strategies. Where participation is offered, it is often symbolic, with limited feedback loops, no formal mechanisms for co-decision-making, and minimal influence over final outcomes. Yet CSOs are key actors in implementing adult learning for the Just Transition. They deliver educational programmes, support community engagement, document grassroots needs, and help design inclusive curricula. When properly supported and included in decision-making, CSOs strengthen the relevance, reach, and democratic legitimacy of adult education systems. Their embedded knowledge, experience with marginalised groups, and ability to bridge institutions and communities make them indispensable partners in designing education that reflects real-world needs and supports system-level change.

For Policymakers

- Establish formal and transparent mechanisms for the participation of CSOs and learners in adult learning and Just Transition curricula and policymaking processes at local, national, and EU levels.
- Recognise CSOs as essential partners in curriculum design, implementation monitoring, and policy evaluation.
- Allocate specific resources to support civil society engagement in consultation processes, ensuring equitable access for small and grassroots organisations.

For Civil Society Organisations (CSOs)

- Advocate for participation of learners, educators and CSO in regional, national and EU education policy planning processes and curricula co-designs.

- Collaborate with ALE providers and local authorities to address gaps in transparency, access to data, and participation in implementation monitoring.

For Educators, Trainers and Providers

- Partner with CSOs to ensure learning content is grounded in community needs and developed through participatory processes.
- Engage in shared advocacy initiatives to promote inclusive policy design and civil society representation.
- Actively contribute to consultations on ALE policy, highlighting the role of education in local sustainability, inclusion, and democratic participation.

Guarantee coherence across education sectors and embed sustainability through whole-system approaches.

Promoting a just transition through adult education requires systemic coherence across education sectors and the integration of sustainability not only into curricula but across the functioning of institutions. Currently, ALE is often siloed from broader education and transition policies. National background papers show that adult learning is typically treated as a secondary or auxiliary sector, particularly when compared to vocational or formal education. Sustainability content, when present, is often limited to thematic modules rather than being embedded across governance, pedagogy, staff training, and institutional culture.

Successful practices documented in the Just4All project demonstrate that when sustainability and social justice principles are embedded throughout education systems, the outcomes are more consistent, inclusive, and durable. Whole-institution approaches, cross-sectoral collaboration, and policy coherence between ministries of education, environment, and social affairs are essential to ensuring that ALE can fully contribute to transformative change. Without such alignment, programmes remain fragmented, short-term, and disconnected from broader national and EU strategies.

For Policymakers

- Apply sustainability principles across all areas of education, including teaching, staff training, organisational practices and community engagement.
- Ensure adult learning is recognised as an equal partner alongside other education sectors in national and EU transition strategies.
- Create joint working groups or coordination spaces that bring together ministries responsible for education, environment and social affairs, with a focus on aligning ALE efforts with sustainability goals.
- Fund programmes that promote cooperation between formal and non-formal education providers, with attention to sharing tools and practices rooted in community-based learning.
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For Civil Society Organisations (CSOs)

- Promote whole system approaches in advocacy work by highlighting good practices that integrate sustainability across institutional operations.
- Collaborate with education providers to co-develop governance models and programmes that embed ecological and social justice goals at every level.
- Participate in national and regional working groups that bring together multiple sectors (education, environment, labour) to promote policy alignment.
- Provide expertise and support to formal education institutions in building inclusive and sustainable internal practices.

For Educators, Trainers and Providers

- Integrate sustainability and inclusion principles not only in course content but in teaching methods, staff development, and institutional strategy.
- Foster partnerships with organisations across sectors to create more coherent pathways between formal, non-formal, and informal learning.
- Engage with policymakers and administrators to advocate for alignment between ALE objectives and national climate, education, and social strategies.
- Share institutional models and tools that demonstrate how sustainability can be embedded in governance, pedagogy, and community engagement.

Expand transnational cooperation to support innovation, inclusion, and global solidarity

While Just Transition is often framed through national strategies, many of the challenges and solutions are inherently transnational. Practices collected through the Just4All project show that cross-border learning exchanges, collaborative capacity-building, and shared curriculum development can accelerate innovation and enhance inclusion, particularly for marginalised groups.

However, civil society organisations and adult educators report limited access to transnational funding opportunities, constrained capacity to engage in partnerships, and insufficient visibility in international transition frameworks. Where partnerships do exist, they are often project-based and short-term. Strengthening transnational cooperation is therefore essential to support peer learning, amplify community voices, and foster a more democratic, participatory, and globally informed approach to the twin transitions that leverages the full potential of Global Citizenship Education (GCE).

For Policymakers

- Facilitate peer learning opportunities between national ALE systems, including through EU-funded platforms, to support mutual exchange of good practices in inclusive and sustainability-related adult learning.
- Support long-term partnerships between ALE providers and CSOs in different member states to co-develop educational materials, professional development pathways, and participatory methods.

- Ensure that EU programmes such as Erasmus+ and the Just Transition Fund are designed with accessible entry points for small and community-based ALE actors, including those without prior international project experience.

For Civil Society Organisations (CSOs)

- Build or join European and international alliances focused on just transition, climate justice, and ALE, to amplify collective advocacy.
- Seek long-term transnational partnerships that go beyond project delivery and support strategic cooperation on inclusion and sustainability.
- Promote Global Citizenship Education and the integration of global perspectives, including from the Global South, into education content and public discourse.

For Educators, Trainers and Providers

- Participate in international peer learning and professional development opportunities to strengthen inclusive and sustainability-focused pedagogy.
- Integrate global case studies and cross-cultural perspectives into curricula, supporting learners' understanding of shared challenges and interdependence.
- Collaborate with international networks to co-develop resources, share tools, and disseminate successful practices.

Explicitly include ALE in Just Transition plans as a cross-cutting tool for citizen empowerment, democratic resilience, and inclusive climate action.

Despite its critical importance in promoting inclusion, civic engagement, and environmental literacy, Adult Learning and Education (ALE) remains largely absent or marginal in most national and EU-level Just Transition plans. Where it is mentioned, ALE is often limited to narrow objectives such as labour market reskilling or digital upskilling, overlooking its broader role in strengthening community resilience and democratic participation. Findings from the Just4All MOOC piloting and national policy analyses highlight ALE's potential to build the capacities needed for individuals and communities to understand, influence, and actively participate in shaping transition policies.

Embedding ALE in Just Transition frameworks is essential to ensure that socially excluded groups are not left behind, and that transition strategies are grounded in lived experiences and real democratic agency. This requires inter-ministerial coordination, recognition of ALE as a strategic field alongside formal education and vocational training, and inclusion in sustainability and resilience funding streams.

For Policymakers

- Include ALE as a core component in national and EU Just Transition strategies, beyond employment-focused training, with clear objectives related to inclusion, participation, and ecological awareness.

- Coordinate across ministries (education, environment, labour, social affairs) to define ALE's role in transition planning and ensure policy coherence.
- Allocate dedicated funding within national and EU sustainability and resilience programmes to support ALE activities focused on civic engagement, social equity, and climate action.

For Civil Society Organisations (CSOs)

- Advocate for the recognition of ALE as a core component of national and EU Just Transition strategies.
- Support community-led education initiatives that connect sustainability, rights, and civic participation, and feed these lessons into national planning processes.
- Monitor national Just Transition Plans and engage in consultation processes to ensure ALE is represented in strategy design and funding allocations.

For Educators, Trainers and Providers

- Demonstrate the broader societal value of ALE through programmes that strengthen civic engagement, climate awareness, and community resilience.
- Design learning environments that support participation and empowerment, especially for learners affected by systemic exclusion.
- Partner with public authorities and CSOs to embed ALE in transition-related planning and funding mechanisms.
- Collect and share evidence on how ALE contributes to just transition goals, to build the case for its formal integration into policymaking.

> **Invest in educator training that includes critical policy knowledge, not only pedagogical or technical skills.**

The Just4All MOOC piloting and national background papers reveal that adult educators are often expected to navigate highly complex educational, social, and environmental challenges, yet lack the training and support needed to do so effectively. Professional development for adult educators tends to focus narrowly on digital tools or generic pedagogy, while overlooking the need for critical understanding of policy frameworks, climate justice, and systemic inequality. This limits the ability of educators to engage learners in meaningful reflection on the green and digital transitions and to support civic participation and empowerment.

Equipping educators with the tools to provide effective Global Citizenship Education and address the political, ecological, and social dimensions of transition is essential to ensuring adult learning contributes to inclusive and democratic transformation. This requires sustained investment in interdisciplinary, cross-sectoral professional development that foregrounds the role of educators not only as instructors, but as facilitators of critical dialogue, democratic engagement, and community resilience.

For Policymakers

- Include critical policy content, such as social justice, climate frameworks, and democratic participation, in national ALE training standards and professional development pathways.
- Allocate dedicated funding for educator training programmes that build capacity beyond technical instruction, especially in regions facing heightened transition impacts.
- Encourage partnerships between ALE providers, civil society organisations, and training institutions to co-create intersectional and practice-based learning modules.

For Civil Society Organisations (CSOs)

- Partner with training institutions and ALE providers to co-design professional development programmes that integrate social justice, climate literacy, and policy awareness.
- Advocate for public funding to support long-term, inclusive training for adult educators, particularly those working with disadvantaged groups.
- Create open-access resources and platforms for peer learning and exchange across organisations, sectors, and national contexts.
- Document and disseminate examples of educator-led initiatives that link pedagogy with political and ecological engagement.

For Educators, Trainers and Providers

- Seek out and advocate for professional development that goes beyond technical skills, e.g. ensuring that educators have adequate training to effectively teach Global Citizenship Education related matters.
- Integrate content on climate justice, social equity, and democratic participation into course design and teaching practices.
- Participate in communities of practice and peer learning networks to exchange strategies for inclusive, transition-oriented education.
- Collaborate with CSOs and researchers to co-develop and pilot new training approaches that reflect learners lived realities and current policy contexts.

Prioritize transversal competences as essential to inclusive and democratic transitions.

The Just4All project identified a consistent gap between the transformative aims of Just Transition policies and the narrow scope of many adult learning programmes. These programmes often focus on labour market integration or digital skills development, while overlooking broader educational goals such as critical thinking, ecological literacy, civic engagement, and social responsibility. Evidence from the national background papers, stakeholder dialogues, and MOOC piloting demonstrated that transversal competences are essential to building inclusive and resilient communities.

Despite this, transversal competences remain structurally under-supported in both funding and policy frameworks. The best practices gathered through the project show that these competences are most effectively developed through participatory and community-based learning approaches. However, such

methods are often undervalued in formal systems, excluded from curricula, or not recognised in national quality frameworks.

For adult learning to support an inclusive and democratic transition, transversal competences must be fully integrated into curricula, quality assurance processes, and funding criteria. This requires shifting away from a purely economic focus and recognising the role of adult learning in advancing social and ecological objectives.

For Policymakers

- Recognise transversal competences as a core element of adult learning strategies and include them in national funding frameworks and ALE quality standards.
- Ensure that transversal learning outcomes, such as civic engagement, critical reflection, and sustainability awareness, are supported through dedicated indicators and long-term investment.
- Promote the development of cross-sectoral and community-based educational models that centre transversal competences and connect learning to social and ecological objectives.

For Civil Society Organisations (CSOs):

- Advocate for the inclusion of transversal competences in national and EU adult learning strategies and funding schemes.
- Work with education providers to develop programmes that foster critical thinking, democratic participation, and sustainability awareness.
- Produce and share evidence of how transversal competences contribute to social inclusion and community resilience.

For Educators, Trainers and Providers:

- Integrate transversal competences into course content, teaching methods, and assessment practices.
- Apply participatory, experiential, and problem-based learning approaches that link education to real-life social and environmental challenges.
- Collaborate with CSOs to design learning experiences that reflect the needs and realities of marginalised groups.
- Promote recognition of transversal competences within institutional frameworks and public policy debates on the Just Transition.

Ensure publicly funded ALE curricula reflect diverse experiences and are adapted to local realities and global perspectives.

The Just4All project revealed a clear demand for adult learning materials that reflect the diverse realities of learners and connect local challenges with global dynamics. Throughout the MOOC piloting and best

practice analysis, the need for examples that speak to local communities and local contexts, including experiences from the Global South, Indigenous knowledge systems, and marginalised communities within Europe was highlighted multiple times.

Currently, publicly funded ALE curricula often fail to integrate these perspectives. Many programmes rely on abstract policy concepts or generic sustainability messaging, which can feel disconnected from the daily lives and cultural backgrounds of learners. This limits both learner engagement and the transformative potential of ALE to support inclusive transition processes.

To ensure adult education supports social equity and democratic legitimacy, curricula must be co-developed with learners and reflect multiple knowledge systems and lived experiences. Doing so not only increases accessibility and relevance but also strengthens the capacity of adult learning to foster global solidarity and local empowerment.

For Policymakers

- Require that publicly funded ALE programmes include mechanisms for the co-design of curricula with learners and community stakeholders.
- Promote flexible curriculum frameworks that enable regional and cultural adaptation of sustainability content, including the integration of local knowledge and community priorities.
- Support the inclusion of diverse global perspectives, including voices from the Global South and historically marginalised communities, within national learning materials and educator resources.
- Fund the development and dissemination of multilingual, locally grounded, and globally aware teaching materials that reflect the diversity of the learner population.

For Civil Society Organisations (CSOs):

- Collaborate with ALE providers and public authorities to co-create curricula that reflect the social, cultural, and political diversity of learners.
- Support content development that ensures representation of underrepresented voices and global perspectives, such the topics tackled in Global Citizenship Education, in adult learning materials.
- Promote inclusive design methodologies that involve learners, community members, and educators in the content creation process.

For Educators, Trainers and Providers:

- Incorporate case studies, stories, and examples from diverse communities into lesson plans to connect abstract themes with learners lived experiences.
- Engage learners in shaping content through participatory and co-creative methods.
- Partner with CSOs and international networks to source, exchange, or co-develop culturally responsive learning resources.

Establish structured mechanisms for including adult learners and educators in transition policymaking, and ensure coordination across ministries.

Throughout the Just4All project, a recurring concern among educators, learners, and civil society actors was the absence of clear, accessible, and sustained mechanisms to influence transition policymaking. Consultations, when they occurred, were often symbolic or one-off events. Many adult learning stakeholders expressed uncertainty about how their contributions related to broader strategies or where to channel feedback. As highlighted in the national background papers and MOOC piloting reflections, this lack of structured participation and inter-ministerial coordination undermines both the inclusiveness and effectiveness of Just Transition policies.

Moreover, responsibilities for adult learning, social inclusion, climate policy, and labour market development are often dispersed across different ministries and agencies with limited collaboration. This fragmentation leads to inconsistent implementation, limited accountability, and missed opportunities to align education with real-world transition needs. Without integrated governance and ongoing dialogue, adult learning remains siloed, reactive, and peripheral to systemic change.

To ensure that ALE can contribute meaningfully to the green and digital transitions, governments must establish permanent, cross-sectoral participation structures that enable educators, CSOs, and learners to co-shape policy. These structures should be linked to monitoring systems, funding priorities, and curriculum development processes, with a mandate to influence decision-making and promote coordinated implementation across sectors.

For Policymakers

- Develop structured and transparent consultation processes linked to curriculum design, funding allocation, and transition monitoring, drawing on inclusive participation methods.
- Establish formal coordination mechanisms between ministries of education, environment, labour, and social affairs to align ALE strategies with broader transition frameworks.
- Ensure that participation mechanisms are accessible and resourced, enabling structurally excluded groups and community-based actors to contribute meaningfully.

For Civil Society Organisations (CSOs):

- Advocate for the creation of formal participation mechanisms at national and local levels that include civil society, educators, and learners.
- Develop internal processes for coordinated and evidence-based policy input during consultations and implementation monitoring.
- Collaborate with public authorities to ensure that participation structures are transparent, inclusive, and have a mandate to influence decisions.
- Share good practices from other sectors or countries to inspire the development of effective and democratic governance mechanisms.

For Educators, Trainers and Providers:

- Participate in structured consultation and co-design platforms to contribute pedagogical and community-based insights to policy processes.
- Facilitate learner involvement in public dialogues, curriculum shaping, and evaluation mechanisms.
- Advocate within institutions for better coordination between education, labour, social, and environmental policy areas.
- Share feedback from programme implementation to help align policy frameworks with on-the-ground educational realities.

> **Harmonize quality frameworks to ensure equitable access and consistent outcomes in adult learning for the Just Transition.**

Evidence from across the Just4All project, including national background papers, stakeholder dialogues, and the MOOC piloting, demonstrates that the quality of adult learning provision remains highly uneven across Europe. ALE systems are governed by fragmented standards, often disconnected from each other or from the broader goals of the green and digital transitions. As a result, many programmes suffer from inconsistent recognition, limited adaptability, and gaps in equity and inclusion. This variability undermines both learner confidence and the potential for ALE to serve as a driver of just and sustainable transitions.

Learners from marginalised backgrounds are disproportionately affected. Without quality assurance mechanisms that explicitly prioritise civic participation, social justice, and ecological awareness, education risks replicating existing inequalities rather than challenging them. Moreover, non-formal and community-based ALE providers, who often work most closely with excluded groups, are frequently left out of national quality frameworks or denied institutional recognition.

To build inclusive, high-impact ALE systems, quality must be defined not only by economic outcomes or standardised assessments but by relevance to community needs, responsiveness to learners' contexts, and alignment with Just Transition goals.

For Policymakers

- Develop national ALE quality frameworks that explicitly include goals related to social inclusion, environmental literacy, and civic empowerment.
- Ensure that both formal and non-formal ALE providers are eligible for recognition and funding based on diverse and community-responsive indicators.
- Promote consistency across regions by aligning national quality frameworks with EU-wide principles on equity, inclusion, and participation in lifelong learning (e.g. Council Recommendation on Upskilling Pathways, 2016).
- Co-develop quality standards in collaboration with CSOs, educators, and learners to ensure they reflect lived realities and local contexts.

For Civil Society Organisations (CSOs):

- Advocate for inclusive quality frameworks that reflect the role of ALE in advancing social equity, environmental literacy, and democratic engagement.
- Engage in policy development processes to co-define quality standards that are appropriate for non-formal, community-based, and participatory learning environments.
- Share evidence of effective, high-quality ALE practices that fall outside traditional accreditation systems.
- Build alliances with educators and public authorities to promote values-based approaches to quality.

For Educators, Trainers and Providers:

- Integrate learner feedback, community relevance, and social impact into internal quality assurance practices.
- Contribute to the development of local and national frameworks that recognise diverse learning outcomes and pedagogical approaches.
- Highlight and document how ALE programmes contribute to the goals of the Just Transition beyond labour-market outcomes.
- Collaborate with CSOs and policymakers to ensure that quality standards support innovation, flexibility, and inclusion in adult learning.

5. Lessons Learnt and Just4All methods

The purpose of this section is to present the groundwork, what has been done, why it has been done, the key findings and how they are built up, the way to the roadmap and the 10 policy recommendations.

Just4All -Best practices

While policy planning for a just transition is relatively recent, many adult education initiatives have long embodied its core principles in practice. Learning from these efforts provides insight into how just transition initiatives take shape on the ground and what factors enable or limit their success, which can ultimately inform broader education system governance, policy development, and practitioners' strategies. By integrating these findings into formal just transition strategies, policymakers and practitioners can **ground high-level plans in learner-centered, real-world experience**, connecting big-picture goals with local realities, and aligning strategic planning with on-the-ground implementation.

With this in mind, the project set out to gather best practices from the countries of partner organizations, as well as from regional and global levels, through partners operating across these different contexts. The final collection includes 49 best practices - primarily from Cyprus, Sweden, Ireland, and France - along with contributions from other EU and non-EU countries (Bangladesh, Denmark, India, Morocco, Serbia, Uganda, and the USA), and regional initiatives at the level of the European and Arab regions. This contextual diversity provides insight into how adult education for just transition aligns with broader regional and global goals, while locally addressing diverse and specific learner needs, barriers, and realities of different communities.

The practices reflect recurring patterns—ranging from structural barriers to access, to innovative pedagogical approaches, institutional-level transformation, and educator capacity-building—which offer important lessons for policy development and system-level planning.

Learner Barriers and Environmental Education Access

As is often the case in adult education targeting systematically disadvantaged groups, one of the central challenges across practices was ensuring both **access to and sustained participation** in learning programs. The barriers included participants feeling overwhelmed or detached from environmental topics, as well as having more immediate unmet needs, such as housing, employment, or healthcare, that limited interest in and participation in environmental education programs. For women, these barriers were also often linked to traditional gender roles.

A key mitigation strategy was **grounding sustainability in learners' everyday lives**. Programs did this through demonstrations, project-based approaches, field trips and hands-on education approaches, like clothing swaps, sharing skills for repairing garments, recycling, and community-based reuse initiatives. By connecting environmental goals with concrete financial and social benefits, these approaches helped participants engage with the green transition in ways that felt relevant and tangible.

In response to pressing needs, such as housing or healthcare, some initiatives extended their support well beyond education. They adopted a **holistic approach that addressed structural barriers** by offering assistance with housing, transportation, and access to physical or mental health services. These efforts enabled learners to participate more fully in education by stabilizing other aspects of their lives.

Creative, locally grounded methods also played a role in making sustainability more accessible. Community activities like treasure hunts, mural painting, and community challenges helped frame environmental issues as something immediate and shared, rather than distant or abstract. These formats increased participation and allowed learners to connect with environmental concerns in ways that were more engaging, tangible, and embedded in their surroundings.

Civic-oriented community-based programs added yet another dimension of relevance and agency. Through **education for advocacy, organizing, and political engagement**, they enabled participants to identify environmental issues relevant to them, design changes in their surroundings, voice their needs, and contribute to shaping green transition policies in their communities.

These findings point to the need for policy frameworks that fund and incentivize adult education programs that integrate sustainability into daily-life contexts, support services that address social and economic barriers to participation, and empower learners to participate in decision-making. Such frameworks have the potential to address the reproduction of inequalities rooted in systemic disadvantages and the democratic dimension of justice related to participation. This requires fostering strong partnerships between adult education providers, social services, community organizations, and local authorities to ensure coordinated, sustained support for systematically disadvantaged groups.

Participatory and nature-based didactic approaches

Participatory, project-based approaches played a key role in civic environmental education, enabling learners to identify issues in their own communities and **develop practical solutions**. Many initiatives used community-building activities and hands-on workshops focused on recycling and reusing, connecting economic and environmental benefits. To spark interest and deepen engagement with the idea of a just transition, some programmes employed innovative methods, such as **art-based practices,** that invited learners and residents to explore environmental themes creatively. Besides these, the practices observed were not always explicitly focused on the green transition, such as preparing learners for green jobs or encouraging participation in environmental decision-making, but many contributed to it indirectly. **Nature-based approaches** used public green spaces not to teach sustainability, but to support broader goals like mental health improvement, active aging, or fostering a sense of belonging to a new environment among migrants. In doing so, they cultivated a connection with nature that, indirectly, reinforced environmental awareness and values. Even when sustainability was not the primary objective, these approaches promoted ecological thinking as a meaningful secondary outcome.

Policymakers should recognize and fund participatory and nature-based approaches as legitimate pathways for advancing environmental awareness, even when sustainability is not the explicit learning objective, by including them in adult education funding schemes and national strategies.

Embedding sustainability across institutional functioning

The practices underscore the importance of embedding sustainability principles across all levels and functions of adult education institutions, not only within education programs. They point to the need for systemic integration that fosters both cultural and structural transformation, involving **staff across all areas** (teachers, administration, and leaders) of the organization. Sustainability efforts limited to programmes risk fragmentation and short-termism. In contrast, whole-institution approaches foster alignment between what is taught and how institutions operate, enabling consistent values across teaching, governance, and community engagement.

Institutional sustainability should be embedded in national adult education quality standards, accreditation frameworks, and leadership development programmes, ensuring that sustainability becomes a core organisational principle rather than a programmatic add-on. This shift positions sustainability as a fundamental dimension of institutional functioning and public responsibility, not a temporary or isolated initiative.

Shortage of Educators and Capacity Building

A common challenge across the observed practices was a shortage of educators equipped to address both environmental topics and the needs of systematically disadvantaged groups. This gap reflects the complex and **intersecting responsibilities that adult educators are expected to take on,** supporting inclusive education while also advancing sustainability goals. Some initiatives responded to this challenge through cross-sectoral collaboration, forming partnerships between adult education providers, environmental organizations, and other relevant actors. Capacity-building efforts also played a key role, focusing either on supporting educators in their work with systematically disadvantaged groups or on empowerment to integrate sustainable development into teaching practices.

To address the educator gap, policies should invest in long-term, cross-sectoral capacity-building initiatives that equip adult educators to address both environmental topics and the needs of disadvantaged learners, and embed this support into national and regional adult education systems.

What tied many of these practices together was **strong stakeholder collaboration.** It was sometimes identified as a missing element, a barrier that limited access, scope, and scalability, while in other instances, it was identified as a success factor for overcoming barriers and ensuring the initiatives' success and sustainability. These initiatives brought together diverse actors, including learners, teachers, researchers, artists, educational institutions, environmental organizations, social service providers, and local governments. This participatory, cross-sector approach ensured that program content remained relevant to local needs and that systematically disadvantaged participants received the broad support necessary to stay engaged. Policy frameworks should actively support stakeholder collaboration at all stages, from co-design to implementation, by creating conditions and funding structures that enable long-term, cross-sector partnerships.

Taken together, these practices demonstrate that a just transition in adult education requires more than curriculum reform. Effective implementation depends on participatory and nature-based didactic approaches, stable structural support, institutional integration of sustainability, and the professional empowerment of educators. Policies that address these interconnected needs, by funding holistic approaches, strengthening educator training, and embedding environmental and social goals at every level, are necessary to achieve a just and inclusive transition.

Piloting the Just4allMOOC

The piloting of the JUST4ALL MOOC comes at a critical political moment. As Europe and the wider world face the intersecting crises of environmental collapse, social inequality, and democratic erosion, the concept of a Just Transition has emerged as more than a policy buzzword, it is a moral and political imperative. The move toward greener economies cannot come at the expense of workers, marginalised communities, or those traditionally excluded from decision-making processes. It demands inclusive education systems that empower citizens not just to adapt, but to participate, shape, and lead transformative change.

Adult Learning and Education (ALE) plays a crucial role in this effort. Yet, despite its potential, ALE often remains underfunded, undervalued, and disconnected from broader social and ecological agendas. The JUST4ALL MOOC attempts to bridge this gap by providing adult educators and civil society actors with the tools, knowledge, and critical frameworks needed to align educational practice with the principles of justice, participation, and sustainability. In doing so, it responds to a growing call across Europe for education that does not simply prepare individuals for the labour market, but equips them to engage as informed, active, and collective agents in shaping a fairer future.

The MOOC, consisting of 8 modules and expert webinars, was piloted between October 2024 and March 2025 across four languages (English, Greek, French, and Swedish), and reached learners from diverse professional backgrounds, age groups, and national contexts. While the initial aim of the piloting was to test the course structure and gather feedback for improvement, it also yielded broader insights into how

ALE can be positioned to support the goals of a Just Transition, and what structural changes are necessary for this potential to be realized. These lessons have implications for policy development, system-level planning, and the broader governance of ALE in Europe.

ALE as a Policy Lever in Transition Planning

One of the most consistent findings across piloting feedback was the strong alignment between the MOOC's content and participants' lived experiences and professional needs. Adult educators, NGO workers, and community organizers frequently expressed that the course helped them articulate the value of their existing work within a Just Transition framework, whether they were running sustainability workshops, working with migrants, or engaging in democratic participation efforts. This suggests that, although adult learning initiatives have long supported the aims of transition, equity, participation, and resilience, these contributions are often invisible in formal policy discussions.

Participants viewed the MOOC as validating their role in responding to systemic challenges, while also offering a shared vocabulary and conceptual clarity that enabled them to communicate more effectively with public institutions or funding bodies. This underscores a key policy lesson: adult learning is not merely an implementation tool for reskilling or upskilling, but a **strategic enabler of inclusive and participatory transition processes**. Recognizing this role requires not only funding ALE, but **explicitly integrating it into national Just Transition strategies**, ensuring it is part of the conversation at the levels of policy design, implementation, and evaluation.

The Importance of Linking Policy Knowledge to Practice

Another critical insight emerging from the pilot was that participants were often engaging in work directly related to the transition, yet lacked opportunities to reflect on or deepen their understanding of the policies that shape it. The MOOC offered accessible explanations of frameworks such as the European Green Deal, the Pillar of Social Rights, and national sustainability strategies. Participants reported that this content helped them link abstract policy goals to their everyday practice and see themselves as actors within larger systems of change.

This reflects a broader gap in the field: many adult educators are not systematically supported to understand or engage with policy. As a result, their capacity to contribute to and influence transition planning is constrained. Addressing this requires **investing in educator professional development that includes not only pedagogical skills, but also policy literacy**, critical systems thinking, and an understanding of the democratic dimensions of the transition. Strengthening this interface between policy and practice is crucial if adult education is to serve as a democratic infrastructure in times of transformation.

Digital Participation and the Limits of Platform-Based Learning

The digital structure of the MOOC enabled accessibility and flexibility, especially for working professionals or those in rural areas. However, it also revealed structural weaknesses in online adult education environments. While the platform itself was generally navigable, several participants noted difficulties in using discussion forums, inconsistencies in digital navigation (e.g., the "mark as done" feature), and a

general lack of peer-to-peer engagement. This limited the depth of learning and the formation of a learning community, both of which are essential when addressing complex and politically charged topics like the Just Transition.

This suggests that **digital delivery, while necessary, is insufficient on its own** to support transformative learning. Adult learning for transition needs to include interactive spaces for dialogue, reflection, and exchange. Without these elements, online education risks replicating the individualism of platform-based learning and undermining

the collective and participatory dimensions of ALE. From a policy perspective, this points to the need for **blended models that combine asynchronous learning with structured, facilitated dialogue, whether online or in person, and for public investment in participatory learning infrastructures.**

Motivation, Gamification, and the Question of Recognition

The gamification aspects of the MOOC, including mini-games, quizzes, badges, and certification, were positively received, particularly among learners who identified as visual or experiential learners. These tools helped maintain motivation and made the content more engaging, especially for those unfamiliar with theoretical approaches. However, feedback also revealed a recurring concern: **the absence of formal recognition mechanisms for this kind of learning**. Learners questioned whether their efforts would be recognized by employers, educational institutions, or funding bodies, and whether their newly acquired skills and competences would have any weight in career development or civic recognition.

This concern reflects a persistent challenge in the adult education landscape: the lack of consistent and meaningful **validation systems for non-formal and informal learning**, particularly in areas such as sustainability, civic engagement, and social innovation. While EU-level work on micro-credentials offers some opportunities, it often remains disconnected from the realities of ALE and the communities it serves. Policies must therefore prioritize the **integration of ALE into national micro-credential frameworks**, ensuring that learning outcomes in the areas of participation, advocacy, and ecological transition are formally recognized and transferable.

Inclusion, Diversity, and Global Relevance

Although the MOOC was designed primarily for European learners, it attracted interest from participants outside the EU, including from Africa, Asia, and Latin America. These learners, as well as some from marginalised communities within Europe, expressed that while the core principles of the course were relevant, the examples and case studies were often Eurocentric. There was a lack of representation of diverse social realities, indigenous knowledge, or Global South perspectives on transition and sustainability.

This feedback highlights the **importance of content diversity and contextual adaptation** in educational programmes aimed at addressing global challenges. For ALE to meaningfully contribute to the Just Transition, educational materials must reflect the lived experiences of all learners, especially those most affected by environmental and social injustices. Policymakers and funding bodies should support co-

design processes that involve learners and educators from diverse backgrounds and **ensure that diversity and inclusion are embedded in curriculum development, not added as afterthoughts.**

Learners and Educators as Policy Contributors

Perhaps the most important finding from the piloting was that participants did not view themselves as passive recipients of knowledge. Instead, they saw the MOOC as a space to develop critical questions about transition planning, such as: Who defines what is "just"? Who is involved in transition design? What types of knowledge are prioritized or excluded? These reflections were especially common in modules that explored public pedagogy and civic engagement, which encouraged learners to connect personal experiences to structural analysis and policy critique.

Yet outside of the MOOC, most learners reported having little or no opportunity to contribute to policy processes. Their insights, experiences, and local knowledge often remain disconnected from decision-making structures. This gap undermines both the inclusiveness and the effectiveness of transition strategies. For ALE to serve as a bridge between policy and practice, policymakers must **create formal mechanisms for adult learners and educators to be consulted and involved in the design, monitoring, and evaluation of Just Transition policies**. This includes participatory consultations, advisory boards, and long-term platforms for civic engagement in education governance.

As the piloting of the MOOC has shown, there is both a deep need and a strong appetite for learning spaces that situate adult education within the realities of climate injustice, systemic exclusion, and power asymmetries. What emerges most clearly from participants' reflections is the value of connecting personal, local experiences with global challenges, of recognizing oneself not just as a learner, but as an actor in a wider socio-political ecosystem. To be effective, Just Transition education must remain grounded in the lived realities of learners while constantly opening critical questions: Who benefits from transition policies? Whose knowledge counts in shaping them? And what kinds of collective futures are possible when we democratize access not only to resources, but to meaning making itself? The MOOC, at its best, is not a closed training programme but an invitation to co-create, to question, and to act, together.

National level Background Papers

To take meaningful steps toward a just transition, it is essential to understand both on-the-ground realities and the current policy landscape. To support this, the project collected national reports from civil society organizations in four countries, Cyprus, Ireland, France, and Sweden—examining what is the state of the practices and the policies on just transition and adult education in each context. Drawing on the four national background, the project identified the following key lessons learnt.

National reports show that countries often rely on a combination of national and EU-level funding mechanisms focused on labour market development, environmental protection, and social inclusion. While these streams can be leveraged to support elements of just transition, they are rarely specifically designed for it. As a result, funding usually does not target the **intersection of ecological issues and social justice**, leading to systematically disadvantaged groups frequently being overlooked in environmental planning and spending. These indirect funds remain important, but in the absence of

dedicated and coherent funding frameworks for just transition, adult education efforts risk remaining fragmented, short-term, and difficult to scale, limiting their ability to address existing inequalities.

National reports show that policies tend to prioritise education for green jobs, particularly in sectors such as renewable energy, sustainable agriculture, and energy efficiency. While safeguarding workers, especially adults with low levels of formal education, remains a core principle of the just transition, the reports point to this **employment-centric focus** carrying two major risks. First, it reduces the purpose of education to labour market participation, overlooking the broader competencies needed for civic engagement, critical thinking, and collective agency. Skills for community building and democratic participation remain undervalued in mainstream environmental policies, despite being essential for enabling individuals to navigate social change and contribute meaningfully to society. Second, reports point that this narrow focus risks reinforcing gender and social inequalities. By prioritising specific economic sectors, policies often ignore essential but unpaid or underpaid forms of labour, such as care work, predominantly carried out by women.

Reports show that **civil society organizations play a key role in advancing just transition**. They provide non-formal education that complements formal education systems, by reaching communities left behind, addressing their needs and focusing on work related education, but also beyond. They provide capacity building for teachers, offering support in just transition didactic approaches, resources on working with systematically disadvantaged groups, and providing access to up-to-date research. On the policy advocacy level, they mobilize the public and organize events such as climate marches and participate in dialogue with policymakers to ensure that social dimensions of environmental policies are addressed. Despite their bottom-up approaches rooted in local needs, **civil society organisations remain underrepresented in policymaking processes.** While national reports highlight examples of collaboration with authorities, schools, universities, and youth associations, they also point to persistent systemic challenges. Many CSOs, particularly smaller ones, lack stable funding, which limits their ability to develop long-term, large-scale initiatives. They also report limited competences to engage with policymakers or form strategic partnerships.

Across the four countries, formal education systems officially incorporate a cross-curricular approach to sustainability, guided by national policies that mandate its integration across educational levels. While these policies establish a foundation for systemic curricular change, national reports highlight **issues with implementation and the fact that social justice themes are not explicitly targeted.** In terms of implementation, although there are national bodies supporting educators to deliver cross-curricular sustainability education, these are mostly targeted at primary and secondary education teachers, without focus on adult educators and non-formal education. There is a significant need for stronger funding of these initiatives, structural and systemic support and capacity building. Civil society organizations, address this gap by collaborating with formal education institutions by organizing workshops for teachers, co-developing interdisciplinary lesson plans, and equipping educators with didactic approaches grounded in just transition principles.

Across the four countries, international networks and coalitions, formed by civil society organisations, governments, educational institutions, and supranational bodies, are identified as vital platforms for

capacity-building on just transition, knowledge exchange, sharing of best practices, and the development of innovative approaches in adult education. National reports highlight their value in fostering intercultural understanding and exposing both educators and learners to global perspectives on sustainability, equity, and justice. Many of these initiatives link citizens in the Global North with communities in the Global South facing the direct impacts of climate change, building climate solidarity and showcasing the global interconnectedness of the crisis.

An examination of the above reveals two cross-cutting themes. First, current environmental policies remain largely shaped by a green growth logic that prioritises economic development and labour market outcomes. This framing often sidelines social justice concerns, treating them as secondary rather than foundational. As a result, funding is fragmented, partnerships with CSOs are sidelined, policy coherence is weak, and systematically disadvantaged learners, such as women, migrants, and adults with low levels of formal education, are frequently overlooked. Second, a persistent challenge lies in the lack of adequate, systemic and sustained support for educators. Where professional development of teachers does exist, it tends to focus on primary and secondary education, with narrow focus on environmental content, while neglecting justice-oriented themes and didactical approaches that cultivate learner agency. Bridging these gaps requires more than additional investments – it calls for systemic support that empowers educators to include just transition education into everyday practice. Without justice at its core, there can be no just transition. Achieving it requires reimagining environmental, employment, and education policies together – and recognizing educators and civil society actors not as peripheral participants, but as essential partners in building a more democratic, inclusive, and sustainable future.

6. State of Play

Current barriers/challenges achieving just and inclusive lifelong learning and adult education

Lifelong learning and adult education (ALE) have moved higher on the European and international policy agenda in recent years, recognised as essential for navigating the social, ecological, and technological transformations of our time. The inclusion of adult learning within the European Pillar of Social Rights and the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (specifically SDG 4.3 and 4.5) reflects a growing consensus that ALE is not a peripheral activity, but a core component of democratic societies, sustainable development, and just transition strategies (UNESCO; 2022, European Commission; 2020). Yet, despite this recognition, the actual landscape of lifelong learning across Europe and beyond remains uneven, fragmented, and deeply marked by inequalities.

While participation rates in adult education are increasing in some areas, large gaps persist, particularly among those who stand to benefit most: low-skilled adults, older learners, migrants, people with disabilities, and those living in rural or economically marginalised communities. Only 11% of adults in the EU participate in learning activities, and participation drops sharply among the most vulnerable groups (Cedefop; 2020). In many cases, those furthest from learning remain furthest from power. Structural barriers, such as financial costs, inflexible course formats, limited outreach, and insufficient public

investment, continue to restrict access (UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning, 2022). The result is a system that, despite progressive rhetoric, often reinforces rather than reduces existing inequalities.

A major challenge lies in the fragmented nature of adult learning systems themselves. Across Europe, ALE policies and programmes are spread across multiple ministries and often disconnected from other sectors like employment, health, environment and, migration where adult learning could play a transformative role (Delors Institute, 2025). Without cross-sectoral coordination and shared strategic vision, adult learning risks being confined to narrow skills development agendas, rather than enabling critical engagement with the broader social and ecological changes underway. Moreover, validation of non-formal and informal learning remains underdeveloped in many countries, limiting recognition of the knowledge and capacities adults already possess (European Commission, 2023).

Cultural and political factors also shape the limits of adult education today. In many contexts, ALE is still treated as an afterthought, undervalued by policymakers, underfunded by governments, and misunderstood by the public (Milana & Nesbit, 2015). The dominant economic framing of learning as a tool for employability and productivity marginalises its equally vital role in fostering citizenship, community participation, and agency, especially in the face of climate breakdown and democratic erosion (UNESCO; 2021). Efforts to promote just and inclusive ALE must confront not only institutional gaps but also narratives that define whose knowledge counts, who has the right to learn, and what learning is ultimately for.

Finally, at a time when the green and digital transitions are being accelerated by European and national strategies, such as the EU Green Deal and Digital Compass 2030, the risk of an unjust transition is very real (European Commission; 2021, ETF; 2024). Without educational approaches that include and empower those most affected by these changes, the gap between intention and impact will widen. Adult education has the potential to serve as a bridge, to connect local lived realities with global policy agendas, to foster critical understanding alongside practical skills, and to enable communities to imagine and enact alternative futures. But realising this potential requires sustained political will, meaningful investment, and a firm commitment to justice not just in outcomes, but in process.

The twin transitions: Green and Digital: risks and opportunities

The green and digital transitions are reshaping how people live, work, learn, and participate in society. While these shifts are necessary responses to the environmental crisis and technological advancement, they raise pressing questions about power, access, and fairness.

The promise is considerable: Climate neutrality, sustainable production, and the expansion of green jobs all speak to the urgency of addressing and reversing the degrading liveability of ecosystems and communities, while at the same time Digitalisation offers tools to improve efficiency, increase participation in the political and social discourse, and increase access to services. Yet beneath this promise lies a more complex reality: without intentional safeguards, both transitions risk reinforcing the very inequalities they are meant to help resolve.

Unbalanced Impacts, Unequal Access

Guided by the European Green Deal, the green transition in the European Union promises ecological regeneration and economic decarbonisation, yet the rewards and burdens remain unequally shared. Communities dependent on high-emissions industries face uncertain futures, often without accessible retraining pathways. This reality plays out in the continued systematic exclusion of vulnerable groups, including migrants, women, and lower-skilled adults or adults with lower formal education attainments, from policy-making and green job markets (Alliance for a Just Transition; 2023).

The Digital Transition mirrors these patterns. Digital literacy and access to infrastructure are still far from universal. For many adults, especially those with low formal education attainments, digital environments remain unfamiliar or inaccessible. The shift to online services and learning, while beneficial for some, can isolate those lacking the skills and/or support to navigate them. Structural gaps are especially visible in adult learning systems, where non-formal education providers often lack the resources to adapt to digital demands (EAEA; 2023). As noted in the work of the ECHO Network project, a just digital transition must account not only for technical progress, but also for its social, ethical, and democratic implications. The focus cannot be limited to markets and skills alone, it must also engage with questions of participation, rights, and inclusion (ECHO Network; 2024).

Taken together, these insights highlight how the green and digital transitions, though often treated separately, are increasingly interconnected. Green technologies rely on digital infrastructure; circular economies depend on data systems; new forms of climate governance use digital tools to manage environmental information.

As these transitions converge, so do their risks. Marginalised communities face a compounded set of challenges, which call for a coordinated and inclusive policy strategy from the institutions.

Seizing the Opportunity for Systemic Change

These transitions also open space for new forms of learning, cooperation, and empowerment, especially when adult education is geared not only toward market needs, but toward building collective capacity for change. This dual transformation offers a critical window to coordinate efforts and reimagine public policy. As the Council Recommendation on learning for the green transition and sustainable development argues, lifelong learning must be embedded into transition strategies not as an accessory, but as a condition for success (LLLP 2022).

For this to be achieved, we call for policies that:

- Value transversal competences alongside job-specific skills.
- Provide stable and long-term support to adult learning institutions.
- Recognise the role of civil society in shaping learning agendas.
- Address social and ecological priorities as interconnected and not separate.

Yet many strategies emphasise outcomes over the pathways that lead to them: emissions reduced, networks expanded, technologies adopted, while overlooking who is involved, and how decisions are made. A just approach to the twin transitions must bring education, especially adult learning, to the forefront of these questions, not as an afterthought, but as a foundational part and agent of the policy.

Adult learning can act as a connective thread between climate goals and democratic participation, between technical skills and civic agency.

As stated before, the idea of a just transition has evolved from its roots in 1970s American labour struggles into a core, often unevenly applied, principle in European environmental and social policy. Originally advanced by the Oil, Chemical and Atomic Workers Union of the United States to support workers affected by environmental regulations, the concept has broadened to encompass multiple visions, from worker-centred approaches and holistic rights-based frameworks to market-oriented narratives focused on business continuity and competitiveness (High Committee for a Just Transition; 2024).

This diversity of interpretations is reflected in the European Union policy architecture on the matter. The 2019–2024 institutional cycle marked a significant shift with the launch of the European Green Deal. While the European Green Deal presents an ambitious framework for ecological transformation, its social dimension has often been treated as secondary, addressed through add-on measures rather than embedded in the core of policy design. As a result, just transition remains largely a corrective layer rather than a structural principle.

As noted by SOLIDAR, the EU's approach has focused on treating some of the outcomes of the transition, such as job losses, energy poverty, and regional economic shifts, as a side effects rather than proactively addressing systemic inequalities that risk being deepened by green and digital reforms (SOLIDAR 2025a). In this sense, instruments such as the Just Transition Mechanism and the forthcoming Social Climate Fund provide important but limited support. For example, while the extension of the EU Emissions Trading System (ETS 2) to buildings and transport could cost low-income households an estimated €600–1,112 billion, the Social Climate Fund's €86.7 billion allocation (including national contributions) is a fraction of the required compensation (ERCST; 2021).

Furthermore, the Council Recommendation on ensuring a fair transition (Council of the EU; 2022) and recent Commission communications on energy poverty provide only soft law guidance, leaving implementation largely at the discretion of Member States. This governance gap results in uneven protection and fragmented progress across the Union.

Rising public concern around energy and transport poverty, insecure employment, and eroding living standards has elevated the visibility of these issues. Despite this, the EU's current direction reflected in the 2024–2029 mandate offers limited reassurance. The new Clean Industrial Deal, positioned as the Union's flagship economic and decarbonisation strategy, uses the language of social fairness but lacks binding obligations, concrete delivery tools, or sufficient financial backing (SOLIDAR; 2025c).

These shortcomings reveal a broader structural tension: the EU promotes **skills development** as the main tool to achieve social fairness, without addressing the systemic factors that shape access to learning and labour markets. As both EAEA and SOLIDAR have stressed, strategies like the Union of Skills risk narrowing the role of adult learning to labour market activation, while overlooking its function in citizenship, empowerment, and systemic inclusion (EAEA 2025; SOLIDAR 2025b). A Union of Skills that does not also

become a **Union of Learning** risks increasing polarisation of the political, while at the same time furthering and replicating the very inequalities it aims to overcome.

A genuinely just transition must instead understand the value of inclusive education systems as both a right and a resource. This means:

- Embedding social justice into climate and industrial policy design from the start.
- **Investing in universal access to lifelong learning**, especially for those more exposed to climate change and digitalisation vulnerability.
- Recognise and provide resources for a wider array of formal, non-formal and community-based adult education initiatives that bridge the gap between transition relevant education and those who most need it.
- Support education pathways that not only focus on employment, but to full social, democratic and ecological participation.

Position papers such as Intersecting Pathways: Inclusive Education for Active Citizenship (SOLIDAR, 2024) emphasise the potential of education as a tool for democratic renewal and social cohesion, not just economic adjustment. Council Recommendations on learning for the green transition and sustainable development represent a step in this direction, but they require much stronger follow-through in terms of funding, accountability, and implementation (LLLP; 2022).

7. Concluding thoughts

A just transition is not only a policy objective; it is a collective project that requires inclusion, long-term planning, and a redefinition of whose knowledge and participation count in shaping Europe's future. The evidence gathered through the Just4All project, including national background papers, best practices, policy dialogues, and the piloting of the MOOC, shows clearly that adult learning and education (ALE) holds untapped potential to support this transformation.

Yet across countries, ALE continues to be structurally underfunded, politically marginalised, and insufficiently connected to the governance of the green and digital transitions. Civil society organisations and educators are delivering meaningful work on the ground, often without adequate recognition or sustainable support. Learners from structurally disadvantaged groups remain too often excluded, not just from learning opportunities, but also from the conversations shaping the systems they live in.

This roadmap offers a way forward. It identifies the key structural conditions that must be addressed to enable ALE to contribute fully to the green and digital transitions. This contribution extends beyond individual skills development and includes strengthening communities, building democratic resilience, and ensuring that transitions are shaped by participation and justice.

The policy recommendations presented here are not a rigid blueprint. They are designed to help policymakers, civil society organisations, and educators identify entry points, build partnerships, and embed inclusive adult learning at the heart of transition strategies. Whether used in full or in part, the

roadmap provides a shared point of reference for action, grounded in practice and informed by the voices of those closest to the challenges.

If Europe is to succeed in building sustainable and inclusive communities, adult learning must be recognised as a public good. Its value lies not only in supporting employment, but also in sustaining democratic life, social cohesion, and ecological renewal. The Just4All project shows that this is not only necessary, but possible, if we invest in the systems, people, and partnerships that can make it real.

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