

ENHANCE FINAL CONFERENCE Amplifying Learner Voice in Adult Learning

Opening Remarks

Elisa Gambardella (Director and Education and Lifelong Learning Coordinator, SOLIDAR+) opened the conference and presented the agenda for the day.

ENHANCE in Practice

The ENHANCE Project in a Nutshell & Introduction to the “ENHANCE in Practice” Session

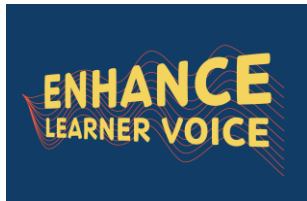
Angeliki Giannakopoulou (Senior Policy and Projects Coordinator, EAEA) introduced the **ENHANCE project**, noting that the conference marked the final event of the Erasmus+ initiative. The project is coordinated by the [European Association for the Education of Adults](#) (EAEA), and the project partners include:

- [Farnebo Folkhögskola](#) (Sweden).
- [ABC](#) (Netherlands).
- [Nevelők Háza Egyesület](#) (Hungary).
- [AONTAS](#) (Ireland).
- [Das Kollektiv](#) (Austria).
- [SVEB](#) (Switzerland).
- [CINOP](#) (Netherlands).
- [SOLIDAR+](#) (Belgium).

Although the official project duration runs from December 2023 to May 2026, Giannakopoulou emphasized how both the preparatory work began before the official launch and how the project’s impact and activities are expected to continue beyond its formal conclusion.

She highlighted the distinctive nature of adult education and stressed the importance of placing adult learners at the centre of learning processes. The starting point for meaningful participation is the creation of learning spaces in which adult learners actively shape the educational process itself, making learning more democratic and more closely connected to society.

The ENHANCE project was structured around **three main objectives**:



1. **Mapping existing practices and initiatives** aimed at strengthening learners' voices, while adopting a critical perspective that assessed both strengths and limitations. This work resulted in the development of an **interactive matrix**.
2. **Developing a comprehensive and holistic tool** to support processes that enhance learners' voices. This included:
 - a. a **roadmap** intended for organisations, policymakers, and learners;
 - b. **booklets** created "by learners for learners" focusing on themes such as breaking silence and reclaiming one's voice.
3. **Providing concrete spaces for learners' voices and stakeholder participation** through the creation of a **podcast series**.

The project's **target group** was **multi-level**:

- **Macro level:** policymakers and civil society actors;
- **Meso level:** adult education organisations and networks;
- **Micro level:** learners, educators, educational content, and methods within the broader adult education community.

An **interactive Matrix** was developed to analyse both the effectiveness and the limitations of existing practices in strengthening learners' voices. The aim was to better understand the impact, accessibility, and inclusiveness of these processes. The practices examined were collected both from the project countries and from the European level more broadly.

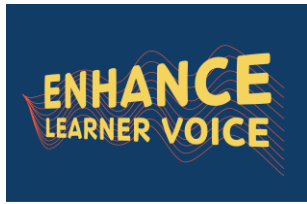
Key aspects of the matrix included:

- mapping processes that promote adult learners' involvement in communities and learning structures;
- conducting desk research and producing a background paper to identify indicators of effectiveness and defectiveness;
- compiling materials such as a **toolkit**, **data collection sheets**, and the matrix **background paper**.

To present the outcomes, effective and ineffective elements were framed in terms of **persisting challenges** and **potential lessons**.

The **podcast** component of the project aimed to provide a direct platform for learners' voices. The podcast was also structured around **three interconnected levels**:

- **Micro level – Voices of learners:** discussions on learners' experiences, focusing on active participation, direct democratic processes, and the effects of both the presence and absence of such participation.



- **Meso level – Discussing practice:** discussions at the level of organisations and structures of adult learning, focusing on how these can facilitate and enhance learners’ voices.
- **Macro level – Creating policy:** discussions on participatory processes and the power of the learner voice in policymaking, involving exchanges between policymakers, practitioners, and learners.

Giannakopoulou concluded by presenting the [project website](#), where the matrix, the podcast series, and all related materials produced throughout the project are available.

BREAKOUT ROOMS

Group 1: A Deep Dive into the ENHANCE Matrix

Alexandra Matthys (Education and Lifelong Learning Policy Officer, SOLIDAR+), facilitator of the session, presented the [Matrix](#).

The aim of the matrix is to **map existing practices**, specifically those that promote active participation and enhance learners’ voices. The approach is explicitly critical, focusing on both the effectiveness and limitations of such practices.

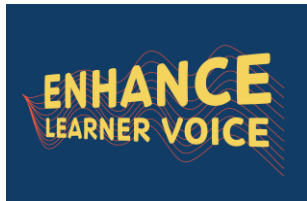
Several key elements guided the development of the matrix:

- **Research-based approach:** before compiling the matrix, preliminary research was conducted to identify key indicators of effectiveness and defectiveness.
- **Data collection:** each partner organisation gathered around five good practice examples. These come from Austria, Hungary, Ireland, the Netherlands, and Switzerland, while partners working at European level compiled international examples.
- The good practices were collected through **data sheets** and **interviews**.

The theoretical background of the matrix is outlined in the [background paper](#). This document also explains why enhancing learners’ voices matters and how “learner voice” is conceptualised within the project.

In this framework, learner voice refers to the process of creating spaces in education where learners can express their opinions, claims, and needs; reflect on their own preconceptions and biases; and ensure that the system listens and responds to their input. It is also understood as an emotional process that requires safe spaces.

Learner voice is further described as a metaphor for identity and agency, where gaining self-confidence is central to finding one’s voice. Empowerment lies at the foundation of this



process. A learner-centred approach is understood to increase motivation and have a positive impact on society more broadly.

The matrix is structured around **two axes**:

- **Horizontal axis (access):** who can participate in learning processes and under what conditions (e.g. payment, barriers, time flexibility, geographical reach).
- **Vertical axis (impact):** how communities, society, and policy are affected by these processes.

Matthys presented the matrix and the related materials, which were developed using [Genially](#). She also introduced a data sheet from one of the project's programme to illustrate how the research process was conducted and what aspects were analysed.

Participants were invited to **reflect on possible good practices** from their own organisations or networks and share them with the group, focusing on:

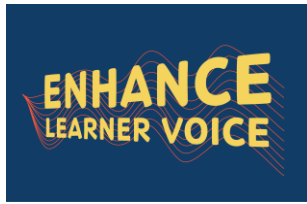
- How accessible is the practice? Who can participate and under what conditions (cost, bottlenecks, time flexibility, geographic reach)?
- How are learners involved in the design, structure, and implementation of the learning process (feedback before, during, and after the activity)?

Charlotte Ede (Learn for Life) asked whether the scoring element of the matrix was self-assigned by initiatives or externally attributed. Matthys explained that there were two steps: first data collection, then scoring based on defined indicators. The results were then shared back with the organisation that provided the data, allowing for reflection and possible adaptation.

Ede also noted that there appear to be relatively few initiatives with major challenges, asking whether this is due to the selection process. Matthys explained that many participating organisations were already engaged in participatory practices, which could explain their positioning in the more effective quadrant of the matrix.

Julie van Elslander (KMOP) appreciated the use of Genially for presenting the material.

Susanne Klingseis (Lernraum) mentioned a relevant initiative that could potentially be included in a future matrix. The project, called [Voices](#), is an Erasmus+ project focusing on oral histories of migrants, developed “by migrants for migrants.” It aims to create video-based oral histories and already has a website with preparatory research.



Moufida Guirmani (EP Oueslati) shared an example from Tunisia, the *CheckMySchool* project, developed in the South Mediterranean region. The initiative creates scorecards and uses social accountability tools to improve school environments and sustainable living conditions. Concrete effects include:

- Improvement of school infrastructure, thanks to community reporting and monitoring (e.g. toilets, roofs, classrooms, which were repaired more quickly);
- Strengthening of dialogue between citizens and the Ministry of Education;
- Empowerment of local communities, including training parents, students, and teachers to monitor, document, and evaluate educational services;
- Reduction of corruption and irregularities.

Melanie Julie (IFWEA) presented study circles as a participatory learning tool where groups decide collectively on topics, timing, and materials. She suggested adding linguistic accessibility (access to learning in learners' native languages) as a potential dimension in the matrix.

Alexandra Matthys responded that language accessibility was not included as a separate indicator but was considered as a potential bottleneck.

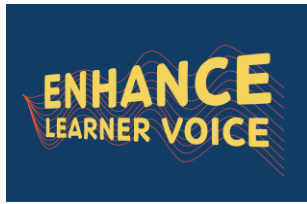
Paula O'Shea presented her experience as a learner in the *Your Voice Counts* programme, which includes a tutor handbook designed to encourage participation in democratic elections.

Nuala Glanton (Cork College of FET) appreciated the division between micro, meso, and macro levels, noting that it provides a useful framework for accountability. She also referred to the Lundy Model as a useful tool that emphasises creating safe spaces, ensuring voice is heard, providing an audience, and ensuring that action is taken.

Alexandra Matthys noted that the ENHANCE project included not only data sheets but also interviews with both learners and education practitioners, as a way to directly include the voices of those the project aims to reach.

Alexandra Matthys asked participants whether they have encountered challenges in accessing organisations and collecting data.

Conor Thompson (AONTAS) also talked about the Lundy Model as particularly useful as a starting point for practitioners new to learner participation.



Ruby Cooney (AONTAS) added that they use the Lundy Model in their National FET Learner Forum, which produces regional reports on learner experiences across Ireland.

Paula O'Shea emphasised the importance of creating safe spaces and establishing feedback loops, while **Conor Thompson** highlighted the importance of early reflection on power dynamics and stakeholder roles within groups. **Paula O'Shea** also stressed the need for consistent “drivers” within initiatives, both among learners and staff, to sustain engagement over time.

Rebecca Jackson (AONTAS) reflected on the value of distinguishing between learner categories at the meso level and highlighted the importance of bringing learner voices into the macro level, particularly in relation to policymaking. She underlined the complexity of factors influencing learners' experiences and the importance of keeping this framing in mind.

Paula O'Shea added that it is empowering for learners to see their voices translated into change across different contexts. She also emphasised the importance of accessibility, including for people with disabilities, to ensure the inclusion of as many voices as possible.

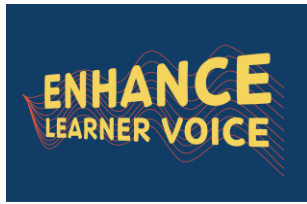
Alexandra Matthys gave participants some time to explore the matrix independently and then asked whether the matrix could be a useful tool in participants' own work.

Charalambos Vrasidas (CARDET) noted the main challenge lies in localising the tool and adapting it to different contexts but considered it highly useful for reflection.

Susanne Klingseis concluded that both the matrix and the podcast could be valuable tools for her organisation's work.

Group 2: The Podcast Series

Larisa Sioneriu (European Projects Coordinator, AONTAS) started by presenting the [podcast series](#), which consists of 29 episodes, with most project partners involved in its production process. The episodes were recorded in different languages and accompanied by translations, ensuring accessibility for wider audiences. Across the series, **interviews** were conducted **with learners, policymakers, and educators**. In some episodes, these groups participated together in a shared discussion, while in others the format was based on one-to-one interviews. For example, Sioneriu interviewed two learners and two educators for one of the episodes.



Sioneriu then invited participants to listen to an excerpt from one of the podcast episodes. Following the listening exercise, she asked participants to share one word or idea that remained with them.

Marina Sakac Hadzic (EAEA) highlighted the concept of empowerment, noting how adult learning can support people in re-entering employment and foster a strong sense of accomplishment and confidence.

Rebecca Stråfors-Enderborn (Färnebo folkhögskola) reflected on the themes of confidence and community, particularly how studying together with other women contributed to a learner's sense of self-confidence and belonging.

Dilek Taşdemir (Lernraum & VHS) emphasised the importance of self-belief, self-encouragement, and empowerment, noting that confidence was also strengthened through the support of others.

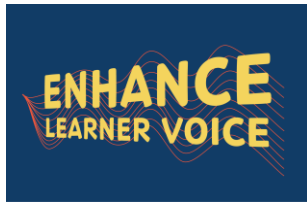
Building on these reflections, **Larisa Sioneriu** observed that connection is often one of the main outcomes participants take away from adult education experiences. She raised broader questions about the lack of connection within society and what this reveals about the conditions needed for meaningful learning and participation. Across the discussion, connection, confidence, and empowerment emerged as central themes.

Angeliki Giannakopoulou (EAEA) reflected on the importance of women occupying spaces where they are often not expected to be, particularly in fields such as technology. Drawing on her own experience studying computer engineering, she recalled how male and female students were addressed differently by a professor, illustrating the persistence of gendered expectations. She stressed the importance of non-formal learning pathways in enabling women to access such spaces and challenge existing social norms.

Larisa Sioneriu later provided additional context about the episode, explaining that it featured an adult woman and mother returning to education through a programme designed for women interested in learning technology-related skills. The discussion highlighted how participation in spaces traditionally perceived as inaccessible can be deeply empowering.

Anna-Karin Raphasha Björnberg (Färnebo folkhögskola) described the podcast as capturing the essence of adult learning through themes of empowerment, recognition, and connection.

Panthea Taymoory (Färnebo folkhögskola) underlined that access to education involves more than the existence of schools alone. She stressed the importance of broader societal



support structures that enable women to return to learning, noting the multiple layers involved in making participation possible.

In response, **Larisa Sioneriu** referred to the concept of **wrap-around support**, commonly used in Ireland to describe the additional measures community education providers offer to help learners remain in education, such as childcare, meals, and counselling services. She emphasised that barriers to participation should not be understood as individual failures, but rather as structural issues. Recognising this, she argued, can significantly strengthen learners' confidence and sense of agency.

Participants were also asked to reflect on what podcasts can convey that is often absent from written reports or policy documents.

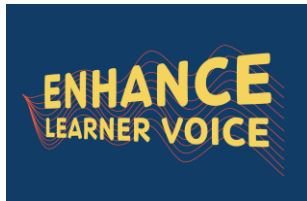
Angeliki Giannakopoulou noted that discussions around the COVID-19 period conveyed emotions and stress in ways that written texts cannot fully capture. She argued that podcasts make it possible to communicate collective feelings and lived experiences that are often lost in written documents, especially policy documents and reports.

Panthea Taymoory emphasised that podcasts offer a more holistic perspective, whereas written documents frequently leave out important dimensions of people's experiences.

Matthieu Mes (Stichting ABC) pointed to the emotional dimension of hearing people describe the significance of gaining access to education after previously being excluded from such opportunities.

Larisa Sioneriu also reflected on the production process, explaining that AONTAS collaborated with a community radio studio and that participants appreciated recording in a professional setting. She then invited **Jonathan Korsar (Färnebo folkhögskola)** to share reflections on the process of editing and producing the podcasts. Korsar noted that much of the recent work had focused on sound editing and processing, and expressed interest in hearing about the experiences of others involved in conducting interviews and designing episodes.

Réka Szalóki (Nevelők Háza Egyesület) explained that acting as a reporter was a new experience for her. One episode focused on the restrictions faced by civil society organisations in accessing schools in Hungary over the past years, and explored how alternative spaces could be created to connect with young people and students.



Angeliki Giannakopoulou further reflected on the diversity of approaches across the podcast series. Some episodes focused on resistance, others on planning and future-oriented thinking, while others centred on personal experiences. She stressed the importance of allowing participants to speak in the languages they felt most comfortable using, arguing that linguistic flexibility is essential for authenticity and broader inclusion, both among participants and listeners.

Larisa Sioneriu also raised the question of whether podcasts can function as an equalising space between learners and policymakers. In response, **Angeliki Giannakopoulou** discussed two podcast episodes that brought these groups together. In one case, the learner and policymaker had never met before, yet the learner entered the discussion with a strong sense of expertise grounded in lived experience. In another case, an existing relationship between the learner and policymaker enabled a different kind of conversation, built on trust and prior engagement. Angeliki highlighted two key lessons from these experiences: first, that learners are willing and eager to contribute when given the opportunity and space to speak; and second, that meaningful engagement requires ongoing relationships rather than one-off consultations.

Larisa Sioneriu concluded by observing that podcasts create space for genuine conversation and dialogue, allowing participants to enter discussions that are already ongoing and collectively shaped.

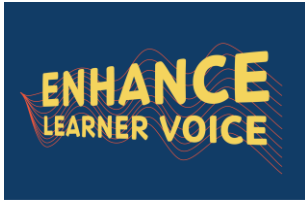
In the closing reflections, participants considered the future role of podcasts within adult education and policy work.

Anna-Karin Raphasha expressed hope that the podcasts would continue to reach audiences, especially policymakers, and contribute to greater recognition and support for adult education.

Elisa Gambardella (SOLIDAR+) emphasised how podcasts make it possible to connect more directly with people's experiences through tone of voice and emotion. She argued that this form of storytelling can strengthen connections within communities and encourage greater engagement with social and educational issues. In her view, podcasts are valuable tools for connecting learners, policymakers, and everyday experiences, while also encouraging more active participation within communities.

Elisa Gambardella then welcomed participants back to the plenary session.

Pauline Vidal and Maria Foulquié shared the visual work they have been developing throughout the conference through Visuality.



In the spotlight: Showcasing of Practical Example Learner Voice Project(s)

Nuala Glanton, Adult Education Officer at **Cork College of FET** presented the [Cork ETB Active Citizenship Project](#).

In 2024, Ireland held four different elections (European elections, referendum, local elections, and general elections). Within this context, the project aimed to encourage greater participation in voting, particularly among adults experiencing difficulties with reading and writing, with the broader objective of promoting democracy and active citizenship.

Some tutors initially did not feel confident teaching learners about elections and democratic processes. In response, the project developed a handbook that tutors could use as guidance and support.

The main aims of the project were:

- to develop a collaborative and holistic approach;
- to raise critical awareness around decision-making processes;
- to increase voter participation.

The teaching approach was learner-centred and participatory.

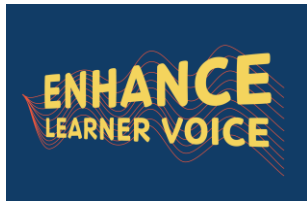
The team also developed a self-directed online course. Upon starting the course, learners can choose between three languages: Irish, Ukrainian, and Polish, reflecting the significant Ukrainian and Polish communities living in Ireland. The content of the online course mirrors that of the handbook.

Julie Van Elslander, Project Officer at **KMOP Policy Center** presented two different projects.

The first is the [LEGENDS project](#) (*Local Excursions Generating Elderly Narratives for Digital Storytelling*). The project aimed to enhance adults' digital competences by starting from their own interests, histories, and personal stories, thereby linking digital literacy to topics that participants already found meaningful and engaging. The broader objective was to reduce digital isolation.

The project developed through three main stages:

- conducting surveys and focus groups with seniors to map their experiences with digital literacy;
- developing curriculum modules anchored in local stories and experiences;
- organising workshops based on these materials.



Van Elslander then presented the **GARDEM project** (*Community Gardens: Forward-Looking Learning Centres for Democratic Values*), which aims to transform community gardens across Europe into local learning centres.

Reflecting on both projects, Van Elslander emphasised that adults were involved as co-creators of the programmes, allowing engagement to emerge naturally throughout the process. She also highlighted that learners' voices are not limited to specific themes or formats, but rather constitute a transferable approach that can be applied across different contexts.

From Voice to Policy

In the spotlight: Showcasing of Policy Example Learner Voice Project(s)

Charalambos Vrasidas, Executive Director at **CADET** presented the project ***Supporting Mental Health Resilience among Youth in Cyprus***.

The initiative was developed in partnership with UNICEF and the Ministry of Health, with the objective of supporting mental health and the well-being of vulnerable children and young people.

Charalambos highlighted the urgency of the issue in Cyprus, where one in three children experiences mental health challenges and 85% of young people report anxiety-related issues.

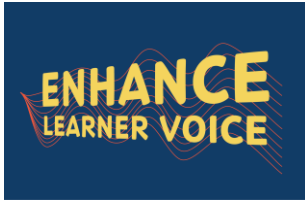
The project produced two main outcomes:

- a youth engagement framework exploring how young people and learners can have a stronger voice in policymaking processes affecting their lives;
- a second outcome focused on policy recommendations and support structures for mental health services.

The first six months of the project were dedicated to in-depth research, including interviews and focus groups with young people and practitioners. The findings highlighted several recurring issues, including the stigma surrounding mental health, the lack of youth-friendly services, and limited awareness of existing support services.

Based on these findings, recommendations were developed and compiled into a report submitted to the Ministry, and feeding into the National Mental Health Strategy. The core principles for youth engagement that emerged from the process were:

- youth-friendliness;
- inclusiveness;
- participation;
- transparency.



The ENHANCE Project in a Nutshell & An Introduction to the ENHANCE Roadmap & Mini Booklets

Angeliki Giannakopoulou presented the latest outcomes of the ENHANCE project. The project began by identifying key challenges affecting adult learners, including persistent barriers, rigid hierarchies, limited time, and broader structural inequalities that often silence learners' voices. Adult learners are frequently treated as passive recipients rather than active participants in shaping learning spaces.

The project therefore sought to explore how learning environments can actively support and strengthen learners' voices.

Once again, the project's target groups were presented across three interconnected levels – macro, meso, and micro.

The **ENHANCE Roadmap** was presented as the **latest outcome of the project**. Its objective is to guide processes that create space for and strengthen learners' voices.

The work began through conversations with adult education practitioners, providers, policymakers, and learners, centred around key questions:

- Who speaks?
- Who listens?
- Who acts?

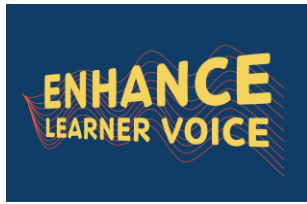
These discussions also connected to broader efforts to promote participation in the 2024 European elections.

The next step involved designing the roadmap itself. A methodology was first developed and then continuously adapted throughout the process. The intention was to create a participatory and open-ended tool, supported by a methodological toolkit offering different approaches and options. Particular importance was given to including the authentic voices of learners, educators, and policymakers involved in the process. Participants could choose to have their names included as co-creators.

The roadmap was presented as an interactive tool aimed at learners, practitioners, and policymakers, providing guidance on representation, visibility, and active participation in decision-making processes.

Giannakopoulou also presented the **ENHANCE Booklets**, which address three key themes:

- breaking the silence of marginalisation;
- migrant women reclaiming their voices;
- creating outspoken learning spaces for collective action within communities.



Giannakopoulou explained that a wide range of participatory tools were used throughout the process.

She then walked the audience through the roadmap itself, noting that the original version is currently available in English, with additional language versions planned for the future. The roadmap workshop methodology is also available online.

From Voice to Policy: A Roundtable on Learner Participation

Moderator: Alexandra Matthys, Education & Lifelong Learning Officer, SOLIDAR+

With the Participation of:

- **MEP Marcos Ros Sempere**, S&D Group
- **Klara Engels-Perenyi**, Policy Officer DG EMPL
- **Art O'Leary**, Chief Executive Officer, Electoral Commission Ireland
- **Conor Thompson**, Head of Advocacy and Policy, AONTAS

Alexandra Matthys opened the discussion by explaining that the conversation is inspired by themes emerging from the roadmap. The session is organised around two rounds of questions followed by a Q&A.

Question to **Klara Engels-Perenyi**, Policy Officer DG EMPL:

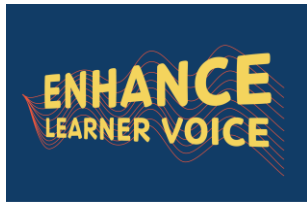
The ENHANCE Roadmap highlights the importance of supportive environments such as community spaces, accessible communication, and trust-building. How can EU programmes further strengthen these enabling conditions to help more adults engage confidently in learning throughout their lives?

Klara Engels-Perenyi reflected on the fact that participation in learning depends not only on available resources, but also on **supportive environments** that motivate people to engage.

She connected this to ongoing discussions around the European *Union of Skills* initiative and the *Skills in Action Plan*, which increasingly recognise the importance of supportive learning environments.

Engels-Perenyi particularly appreciated the roadmap's emphasis on **community-building** as a **starting point for participation** rather than an additional element. Learners need trusted environments and peer support structures in order to engage effectively.

She also referred to current work on **Individual Learning Accounts** within EU member states, noting that while stable structures are important, guidance and support remain



essential, especially for adults who may have had difficult educational experiences in the past.

She noted that there are already inspiring examples across Europe, including the Irish initiatives presented earlier and examples from the Baltic countries, where adult learner coordinators work closely with citizens. A key challenge, however, is **scaling up successful local initiatives**, many of which remain temporary or project-based. Mainstreaming such practices requires long-term resources and stronger discussion within future EU funding frameworks.

Question to **Art O’Leary**, Chief Executive Officer, Electoral Commission Ireland:

Drawing on your experience with citizens’ assemblies and participatory initiatives, how can electoral bodies like the Electoral Commission create more structured and meaningful spaces for citizens—including adult learners—to move from being informed about elections to actively shaping democratic processes and debates?

Art O’Leary started by explaining that there is no easy answer to this question. He explained that one of the key challenges is helping people understand how voting connects to their everyday lives and experiences. He argued that there are no “hard-to-reach people,” but rather “hard-to-reach services,” stressing that vulnerable and marginalised groups are often not reached because sufficient efforts have not been made to reach them effectively.

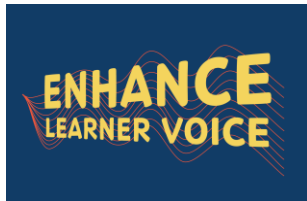
O’Leary also identified young people as one of the most difficult groups to reach. Since young people increasingly **access information** through **social media**, engagement strategies must move into **digital spaces** and **adapt communication methods** accordingly. He stressed the need to “**meet people where they are**”, including through short-form and accessible communication formats capable of explaining complex issues clearly.

Question to **Conor Thompson**, Head of Advocacy and Policy, AONTAS:

The roadmap emphasizes the importance of community-based advocacy and learner-led action. From your experience, what are the most effective ways to support learners in moving from sharing experiences to influencing policy and public debate?

Conor Thompson explained that AONTAS grounds its work in **adult education principles** centred on **equality** between **learners** and **educators**. He emphasised the need for more **horizontal forms of education**, where different forms of knowledge are equally valued rather than organised through rigid hierarchies. Advocacy begins by creating environments where these educational principles become reality.

He highlighted the idea that: “People understand to the extent that they participate and participate to the extent that they understand.”



Learners and educators should therefore be viewed as equal participants in the learning process, which in turn creates enabling conditions for active citizenship.

Second question to **Klara Engels-Perenyi**, Policy Officer DG EMPL:

What opportunities do you see for the European Commission to further encourage innovation in how adult learning systems listen to and work with learners, so that participation becomes more continuous, inclusive, and meaningful across different contexts in the EU?

Klara Engels-Perenyi explained that the European Commission mainly supports participation through two channels: **policy** and **funding**.

On the policy side, she notes that EU institutions can continue reinforcing important messages, many of which are clearly articulated in the ENHANCE roadmap and booklets. One key point is the need to move from occasional consultation towards **continuous learner participation**. She stressed that listening only works when learners can see visible follow-up and real influence resulting from their participation; otherwise, participation risks becoming merely symbolic and people may disengage.

Engels-Perenyi also highlighted that learners are often consulted only at the end of educational processes, once the most important decisions have already been made. Instead, participation should begin earlier and shape processes from the outset.

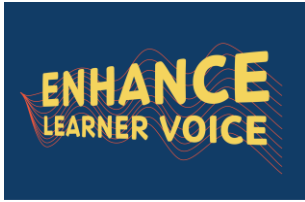
She noted that this is already more developed in higher education, where stronger structures for student participation exist, whereas such structures are often weaker in adult education contexts.

Another important element is the cooperation between local and regional structures to create more **systemic forms of learner involvement**. According to Engels-Perenyi, stronger national frameworks and institutionalised participation channels are key enablers for learners' voices.

She also explained that participation can be encouraged through **project requirements** and **funding mechanisms**. If participation requirements are embedded directly into funding calls, applicants are obliged to address them from the beginning.

Finally, she underlined that successful education and skills policies depend on coordination across multiple policy domains, including:

- education;
- skills;
- employment;
- social policy;
- childcare;
- digital access.



Learner participation ultimately depends on how these systems function together in practice to enable meaningful access and engagement.

Second question to **Conor Thompson**, Head of Advocacy and Policy, AONTAS:

Intersectionality and structural barriers (like childcare, language, or socio-economic constraints) are central in the roadmap. How can civil society organisations like AONTAS ensure that learners with fewer opportunities are not only included, but actively shaping advocacy agendas?

Conor Thompson highlighted the importance of connecting different policy domains, echoing Engels-Perenyi's earlier remarks. Drawing on AONTAS' experience, he referred to regional and national Learner Voice Reports, which identified financial support systems as a major challenge, not only because of limited funding but also because of confusion around funding schemes.

He also shared an example relating to transport, where learners identified transportation as a key issue affecting participation. Learners subsequently became involved in local government and transport committee discussions, demonstrating how learner voices can directly influence policy spaces.

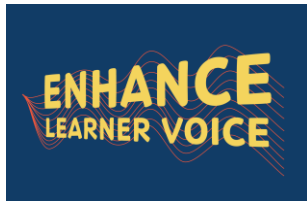
Second question to **Art O'Leary**, Chief Executive Officer, Electoral Commission Ireland:

In the context of rising disinformation and manipulative online behaviour, how can electoral bodies and adult education systems work together to build long-term democratic resilience, ensuring that citizens are not just protected, but empowered to actively safeguard democratic integrity?

Art O'Leary addressed the growing challenge of misinformation and disinformation, which he described as a growing concern for electoral integrity. While regulation and platform responsibility remain important, he argued that education and public engagement are ultimately the most effective responses. Media and digital literacy should therefore be understood as lifelong learning challenges affecting all age groups.

He stressed the importance of targeted messaging and education, particularly during election campaigns, where information needs to be approached critically. A key challenge is identifying trusted sources and supporting people in navigating media use, while also strengthening their capacity to critically assess information from multiple sources.

Conor Thompson adds that AONTAS developed workshops and a [workbook on disinformation](#). He argues that adult learning spaces should encourage curiosity rather than certainty, particularly in a context where education is increasingly politicised by harmful



actors. For him, adult education spaces can function as “counterspaces” where people meet, engage critically, and learn collectively.

MEP Marcos Ros Sempere, from the S&D Group, joined the conversation.

Question to **MEP Marcos Ros Sempere**, S&D Group:

The ENHANCE roadmap stresses that learner participation often remains symbolic and without real influence. From a legislative and/or governance perspective, how can the European Parliament ensure that adult learners move from consultation to actual decision-making power in EU education policies?

MEP Marcos Ros Sempere reflected on the fact that participation is too often treated as a bureaucratic exercise rather than a democratic process.

If learners are only consulted once decisions are already made, participation becomes symbolic. He therefore argued that **participation** must become **institutionalised** and embedded structurally rather than depending on isolated initiatives.

He referred to examples such as the EU Youth Dialogue and participatory processes developed during the Conference on the Future of Europe.

Accountability was also highlighted as central: institutions must not only listen but demonstrate what has changed as a result of participation.

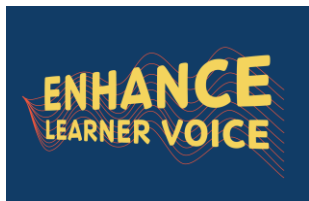
MEP Ros Sempere further argued that participation requires material support and should be connected to governance structures and funding mechanisms. Democratic participation extends beyond elections and includes participation in the policies shaping everyday life.

Second question to **MEP Marcos Ros Sempere**, S&D Group:

Visibility is highlighted as a key condition for participation. What role can the Parliament play in making adult learners and lifelong learning more visible in EU public discourse and political priorities, especially compared to other education sectors?

MEP Marcos Ros Sempere agreed that invisibility often contributes to **political marginalisation**. He stressed that this is particularly relevant given the increasing importance of **lifelong learning** for **social inclusion** and **democratic resilience**. He highlighted the role of the European Parliament, noting that visibility is itself a political issue, and that lifelong learning and education should be recognised as key policy priorities.

He observed that these issues are often primarily framed in terms of competitiveness and labour market needs, while the **democratic dimension** and **active citizenship** are equally fundamental.



The European Parliament can also play an important role in directly amplifying learners' voices. In this regard, he referred to the ENHANCE project as an example, particularly the inclusion of learners speaking in their own voice through the podcast, which contributes to a more direct and humanised policy dialogue. Building on this, he called for the creation of additional spaces within the European Parliament where learners can meaningfully participate in and contribute to policy processes.

MEP Ros Sempere also underlined **communication** as a key factor for participation: overly technical or bureaucratic language can constitute a barrier to participation, and EU institutions should strive to make communication more accessible and inclusive.

Finally, he stressed that visibility must also entail **recognition** of adult learners as active agents.

He concluded that **lifelong learning** should be understood as part of the **European social model**, not only in relation to employability, but also as a **foundation for democratic participation**.

Q&A

Angeliki Giannakopoulou noted that lively discussions were already taking place in the conference chat. She also highlighted that discussions around learner voice must go beyond citizenship status, since many learners involved in adult education do not have access to full political rights or electoral participation.

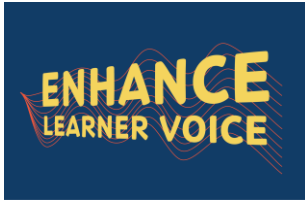
Marina Sakac Hadzic (EAEA) shared a reflection on the conference, noting how powerful it would be if decision-makers had more opportunities to engage directly with the lived experiences of people, for example through podcast storytelling rather than only through summarised reports.

Concluding Remarks

Angeliki Giannakopoulou thanked all participants for their contributions.

Before the final closing remarks, **Maria Foulquié** presented the visual materials created through Visuality throughout the day. The visuals aimed to capture:

- the different levels of participation involved in creating the podcast;
- key elements emerging from the matrix and the good practices presented;
- the relationship between adult learning, democratic participation, trust, and holistic support structures.



The panel discussion particularly highlighted the importance of:

- trust;
- participation;
- coordinated policies;
- meeting people where they are.

In her concluding remarks, Angeliki Giannakopoulou stressed that learning is not limited to formal classrooms or competitiveness-oriented objectives, but also concerns opportunities to learn, connect, and participate beyond formal systems.

She concluded by noting that, in a context where communities are increasingly exposed to oppressive ideologies, remaining vocal and present is essential. Although listening and participation can sometimes feel uncomfortable, meaningful change requires the willingness to listen openly and collectively.

The conference closed with participants thanking one another for their involvement in the project and expressing the intention to remain connected beyond the end of the initiative.