Editorial Note

In a period of rapid transformations in work, education, technology and policies, Adult Education is reemerging not as a "subsystem" but as a critical component of a broader ecosystem of lifelong learning. This issue brings together seven studies that, from different starting points, fruitfully "discuss" with each other and map a common orientation: the need to connect learning with social justice, the qualitative transition to work, and the cultivation of critical thinking and action.

Karalis, in his article "Is there any place for Adult Education in the era of Lifelong Learning?", convincingly documents that "lifelong learning" is not just a policy term, but the slow emergence of a new paradigm with the central concept of the continuum—the continuity of both educational institutions (formal, non-formal, informal education) and learning pathways. The historical "massification" of education, the shift from certification to micro-accreditation, the emergence of new types of inequalities in access to resources (especially in the digital sphere) and the Matthew effect in adult participation, constitute a demanding scenario where Adult Education is called upon to play a dual role: (a) compensatory/complementary towards inequalities and (b) democratic, with a focus on the cultivation of critical thinking and critical reflection as a transversal theme. Learning is increasingly described through notions of flexibility, employability, and continuous adaptation. A fundamental question therefore emerges: when learning is framed as a lifelong requirement, where does responsibility truly lie—with the individual or with society? Karalis invites us to understand lifelong learning not simply as a policy orientation but as a deeper paradigmatic transformation. Within this context, Adult Education is called to safeguard its social role, so that it does not dissolve into a narrow logic of constant upskilling and individual accountability. The article offers a framework of understanding that "unlocks" practical synergies between universities, non-formal education institutions and informal learning spaces. Thanassis Karalis argues that in recent years, lifelong learning has expanded and reshaped almost every educational discussion.

These concerns become particularly visible in work-based learning and apprenticeship, note in their article **Goulas, Karatrasoglou and Papageorgiou** highlighting apprenticeship as a structured form of workplace learning with a clear regulatory, pedagogical and social dimension. Such pathways can offer meaningful routes from education to employment, especially for young people navigating unstable labour conditions. Yet these routes remain reliable only when quality is ensured: through clear frameworks, social partnership, pedagogical guidance, and fair working conditions. Without these elements, apprenticeship risks losing its educational character. The analysis of the European approach (EFQEA, EQAVET) and the Greek schemes (EPAS DYPA, Post-Secondary Year–Apprenticeship Class of EPAL, SAEK) highlights achievements but also persistent challenges: quality of programmes, supervision/guidance in the workplace, transparency, relevance to market needs. INE/GSEE proposes a coherent package of measures—a register of companies that meet minimum requirements, training of company mentors, apprenticeship contracts with clear learning outcomes and rights, fair remuneration/insurance protection, systematic monitoring/evaluation—so that apprenticeships function as a real bridge from education to decent work, and not as a job substitution or low-paid employment. As Goulas, Karatrasoglou and Papageorgiou underline, transition is not a single step but a prolonged process shaped by institutions, support mechanisms, and lived labour realities. This understanding is equally relevant for second chance contexts, where learners often move between education, unemployment, short-term work, and return.

Anagnou, Fragkoulis and Arachovitou illustrate how adult learners, within the Greek context and during the EPAL Post-Secondary Apprenticeship Year, frequently approach programmes with concrete expectations—certification, access to employment, economic security—while

at the same time recognising the value of meaningful practice and curriculum relevance. Such findings do not diminish the educational process; rather, they illuminate the social conditions within which learning choices are made. When everyday life is marked by uncertainty, education becomes a means of stabilisation as much as a space for knowledge. This reality challenges educators to reflect on how learning can retain depth and purpose within systems that primarily reward formal outcomes.

For this reason, the critical tradition of Adult Education remains indispensable, as **Gioti and Toka** describe in their article. Critical reflection should not be treated as an abstract academic exercise but as a way of protecting education from being reduced to adaptation alone. Freire, Mezirow, and Brookfield—each from a different perspective—remind us that adult learning can support individuals in questioning assumptions, recognising power relations, and linking personal change with collective responsibility. Critical reflection is not single-dimensional: it connects individual transformations of meaning with collective democratic action and the deconstruction of assumptions. The result is an integrative framework where education as praxis unites meaning-making, ideological critique, and social participation—exactly what is needed in environments challenged by inequalities, authoritarian tendencies, and the commodification of learning. Therefor, when learning is framed exclusively through employability, reflection risks becoming instrumental but when it remains connected to democratic values, it becomes a practice of awareness and ethical engagement.

Learning also unfolds beyond formal programmes, as **Giannakopoulou** argues. In her article, adult learning is approached as a social-relational process that unfolds in the practices of collective action. Through activist narratives, horizontal flows of knowledge, experiential problem solving, identity transformations and the development of lived ecological consciousness are highlighted. The study also documents systemic obstacles (burnout, institutional indifference, limited recognition of informal knowledge) and proposes to recognize social movements as living learning ecosystems. In local environmental initiatives, adults learn through participation, shared effort, disagreement, and care for common spaces. Such learning is embodied and relational; it shapes civic identities and produces knowledge that often remains invisible to formal systems. The message is clear: Adult Education is not limited to the classroom; it happens where citizens act, collaborate and reflect on their shared reality. This perspective invites a broader understanding of second chance education—not as a mere return to school, but as an opening toward agency, belonging, and meaningful participation grounded in lived experience.

At the institutional level, second chance structures require careful design and sustained support. **Kletsas** shows how the French Écoles de la Deuxième Chance demonstrate entry procedures, personalised learning plans, quality assurance, and systematic monitoring to support processes of reintegration, which at the same time, reveal the demands placed on both learners and institutions. A second chance is not a simple opportunity granted once; it is a guided educational journey that requires continuity, patience, and care.

Particularly valuable in the current period is the effort to systematically map the field itself. The bibliometric mapping of Second Chance Education (2015–2025) by **Karakitsou and Tsiakiri** documents very strongly the growing research interest and highlights two central directions: one focusing on learners' experiences, motivation, and psychosocial development, and another addressing social, institutional, and policy dimensions, with emphasis on skills, employability, and inclusion. This mapping does more than record growth; it reveals how the field conceptualises its priorities and where its attention is drawn. More importantly, it reminds us that these two perspectives must remain connected. In second chance education, personal biographies and structural conditions meet on a daily basis.

In conclusion

The seven articles hosted in this issue of AECI engage in a dialogue around the same question: how adult learning becomes a lever for personal and collective change. The converging answer is that learning is most powerful when it is connected to real practices, is institutionally recognized without losing its social character, and is holistically supported. As we can see, Second Chance Education occupies a delicate place within adult learning. It addresses people whose educational paths have been interrupted, often accompanied by experiences of exclusion and a lasting sense of failure. In this space, education is not merely a formal provision. It becomes a social commitment: the possibility that learning can return, that dignity can be restored, and that participation can be reimagined. An editorial reflection can therefore only conclude with a careful reminder. Second Chance Education cannot be evaluated solely through certificates, indicators, or labour-market outcomes. These elements are important, but they are not sufficient. The deeper question concerns whether education enables people to regain confidence, voice, and a sense of belonging—and whether society is prepared to recognise learning as a right rather than a corrective measure for earlier exclusion. If second chance education is to remain faithful to its name, it must avoid reproducing old inequalities in new forms. It must create conditions in which adults are not merely trained to adapt, but supported to stand—equipped with knowledge, with skills, and with dignity. We hope that this contribution will serve as a bridge between policy, practice, and research—and as an invitation for collaborative interventions that will make second chances first choices for a learning society.

Beyond all the articles we have presented and the book review, with this issue we are launching a new column titled *Revisiting the Past*. This column will feature short articles written by the editorial team as well as by other colleagues, highlighting significant events in the history of our field, often inspired by relevant anniversaries. The first of these articles focuses on civil rights activist Rosa Parks, who attended workshops at the Highlander Folk School and who, seventy years ago, on December 1st, 1955, refused to give up her seat to a white passenger, as was then required by law—an act that became a catalyst for the abolition of racial segregation.

For this new column, but more importantly for research and theoretical approaches in the field of Adult Education, we welcome your contributions as we enter the sixth year of our journal.