



# 3<sup>rd</sup> GLOBAL REPORT ON ADULT LEARNING AND EDUCATION

Key Messages and  
Executive Summary



United Nations  
Educational, Scientific and  
Cultural Organization





# 3<sup>rd</sup> GLOBAL REPORT ON ADULT LEARNING AND EDUCATION

The Impact of Adult Learning  
and Education on Health and  
Well-Being; Employment and  
the Labour Market; and Social,  
Civic and Community Life

Key Messages and  
Executive Summary



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# FOREWORD

The third *Global Report on Adult Learning and Education (GRALE III)* comes out as the international community works towards the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. By showing the important contribution that adult learning and education can make across many sectors of society, I am confident that this report will provide a valuable tool to advance the new global agenda.

All three *GRALE* reports are reference and advocacy documents, providing information for analysts and policymakers, and reminding Member States of their commitment at the 2009 Sixth International Conference on Adult Education (CONFINTEA VI) to assist in monitoring the implementation of the Belém Framework for Action (BFA).

In *GRALE III*, policymakers will find high-quality evidence to support policies, strategies and budgets. Stakeholders will find compelling arguments for how adult learning and education promotes sustainable development, healthier societies, better jobs and more active citizenship. Researchers will find entry points and ideas for future research.

This report is guided by three goals: first, to analyse the results of a monitoring survey of UNESCO Member States, and to take stock of whether countries are fulfilling the commitments they made at CONFINTEA VI; second, to strengthen the case for adult learning and education with evidence of its benefits on health and well-being, employment and the labour market, and social, civic and community life; and third, to provide a platform for debate and action at national, regional and global levels.

As *GRALE III* illustrates, countries report progress in implementing all areas of the BFA. Yet there are still about 758 million adults, including 115 million people aged between 15 and 24, who cannot read or write a simple sentence. Most countries have missed the Education for All target of achieving a 50% improvement in levels of adult literacy by 2015. Achieving proficiency in literacy and basic skills for adults remains a top priority in the great majority of countries, irrespective of income status.

Gender inequality is another major concern. The majority of those excluded from school are girls, with 9.7% of the world's girls out of school, compared to 8.3% of boys. Likewise, the majority (63%) of adults with low literacy skills are women. Education is vital for human rights and dignity, and is a force for empowerment. Educating women also has powerful impacts on families and on children's education, influencing economic development, health and civic engagement across society.

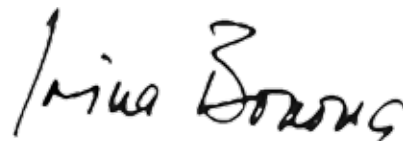
In moving forward, adult learning and education must be built into a holistic, intersectoral approach. This requires working across sectors, guided by the urgent need for deeper partnerships. We must continue to inform all sectors of the essential importance of education for success across the board.

Monitoring and evaluating adult learning and education is vital. Because education and learning often happen in undocumented non-formal or informal spaces, it can be difficult to assess with accuracy. We must continue raising the visibility of learning in all forms and strive for closer monitoring and more accurate data to inform decision-making.

In November 2015, at the 38th UNESCO General Conference, Member States adopted the revision of the Recommendation on the Development of Adult Education (1976). Entitled the 'Recommendation on Adult Learning and Education (2015)', this revision will guide the expansion of equitable learning opportunities for youth and adults on a global scale. I am convinced that both the BFA and the Recommendation on Adult Learning and Education (2015) provide strong tools to promote adult learning and education as part of the 2030 Education Agenda.

Beginning in 2017, high-level decision makers will assemble for the Mid-Term Review of CONFINTEA VI. *GRALE III* will inform the review of the implementation of the BFA since 2009. It will also help participants prepare to promote adult learning and education as part of the 2030 Agenda and the Framework for Action.

In closing, I wish to thank the Director of the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning, Mr Arne Carlsen, for his leadership. He has led this project from the beginning, providing guidance and intellectual direction, and coordinating research teams, staff and partners. I am deeply grateful to all of our partners for their vital contributions to this work, which will, I am confident, stimulate debate, build new partnerships, and strengthen action.



Irina Bokova  
Director-General of UNESCO

# KEY MESSAGES

## 1. COUNTRIES REPORT PROGRESS IN ALL AREAS OF THE 2009 BELEM FRAMEWORK FOR ACTION

- **Policy:** 75% of countries reported that they have significantly improved their adult learning and education (ALE) policies since 2009. 70% have enacted new policies. A large majority of countries (85%) stated that their top policy priority was literacy and basic skills. 71% of countries reported that they have a policy framework in place to recognize, validate and accredit non-formal and informal learning.
- **Governance:** 68% of countries reported that consultation between stakeholders and civil society takes place to ensure that ALE programmes are tailored to learners' needs.
- **Financing:** ALE still receives only a small proportion of public funding: 42% of countries spend less than 1% of their public education budgets on ALE, and only 23% spend more than 4%. However, 57% of countries and 90% of low-income countries plan to increase public spending on ALE.
- **Participation:** Participation rates have increased in three out of five countries, but too many adults are still excluded from ALE. Almost one in five countries stated that they had no information on how participation rates have developed.
- **Quality:** 66% of countries gather data about completion rates, and 72% gather information about certification. 81% of countries provide pre-service and in-service training for adult educators and facilitators.

The full results of the survey can be found at <http://uil.unesco.org/grale>. This website will help analysts develop a fuller picture of the global state of ALE.

## 2. ALE IS A KEY COMPONENT OF LIFELONG LEARNING AND WILL MAKE A MAJOR CONTRIBUTION TO THE 2030 AGENDA FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

- *GRALE III* shows that ALE yields significant benefits across a range of fields. Many countries reported increasing evidence that ALE has a positive impact on health and well-being, employment and the labour market, and social, civic and community life.
- Literacy is essential for developing further skills, and so 65% of countries identified illiteracy as the major factor preventing ALE from having a greater impact on health and well-being. Literacy is also essential for enabling workers to function effectively and safely in their workplace. Furthermore, two-thirds of the countries that responded to the *GRALE III* monitoring survey stated that literacy programmes help to develop democratic values, peaceful co-existence and community solidarity.
- 35% of countries responded that poor interdepartmental collaboration prevents ALE from having greater benefits on health and well-being. Only one-third of countries said that they have an interdepartmental or cross-sectoral coordinating body promoting ALE for personal health and well-being.

- 64 countries responding to the *GRALE III* survey stated that inadequate or misdirected funding is an important factor preventing ALE from having a greater impact on health and well-being.
- More than half of the countries agreed that ALE can have a ‘moderate’ to ‘strong’ effect on employability.
- Some 53% of countries reported that their knowledge base on the labour market outcomes of ALE had improved.
- More than nine out of ten countries said that they now know more about ALE’s impact on society and community than in 2009.
- ALE has a strong impact on active citizenship, political voice, social cohesion, diversity and tolerance, and therefore benefits social and community life.
- 85% of respondents stated that literacy and basic skills were a top priority for their ALE programmes. In most countries, ALE policymakers and providers devote special attention to adults with low literacy and basic skills. Ensuring that adults achieve proficiency in literacy and basic skills remains a top priority in the great majority of countries, irrespective of their income status.

### 3. LEVELS OF LITERACY AMONG ADULTS REMAIN ALARMINGLY LOW

- Around 758 million adults, 115 million of whom are aged between 15 and 24, still cannot read or write a simple sentence. Most countries have missed the Education for All target of achieving a 50% improvement in levels of adult literacy by 2015; only 39 countries met the target.

### 4. GENDER INEQUALITY CONTINUES TO BE A CONCERN

- Inequity in the way women’s education and qualifications are supported and valued remains a dominant issue. The majority of those excluded from school are girls, with 9.7% of the world’s girls out of school, compared to 8.3% of boys. Likewise, the majority (63%) of adults with low literacy skills are women.
- Nevertheless, there are some hopeful signs: in 44% of participating countries, women participated more in ALE than men. However, some 24% of countries had no data to report on this issue. Improving data on gender equity in ALE is crucial, because as well as improving individual lives, the education of women has powerful secondary effects on their families and their children’s education. Women’s education also has a strong impact on economic development, health and civic engagement.



5.  
**DESPITE NOTABLE PROGRESS IN MONITORING AND EVALUATION SINCE 2009, BASIC DATA ON ALE CONTINUES TO BE INADEQUATE, AND THUS THE TRUE EFFECTS OF ALE ARE POORLY UNDERSTOOD**

- Data problems exist in all regions of the world, even where well-developed information systems are in place. *GRALE III* therefore calls for a discussion on how best to design systems that: a) recognize the problems impeding data-gathering; and b) match countries' current and future financial and human resource capacities.

6.  
**LOOKING AHEAD TO 2030: HOW ALE CAN EQUIP PEOPLE TO MEET THE DEMANDS OF THE FUTURE**

- Over the next 15 years and beyond, countries will face a complex set of challenges relating to issues such as mass migration, employment, inequality, environmental sustainability and accelerating technological changes. ALE is a central component of public policies that can help address these challenges. ALE contributes to the prevention of conflict and poverty, helping people learn to live together, be healthy and thrive, irrespective of their economic, social or cultural background. ALE makes a difference by helping people to continuously update their knowledge and skills throughout their lives so that they maintain their ability to contribute as healthy and productive members of society.

- As part of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, world leaders have promised to provide 'lifelong learning opportunities for all', improve adult literacy and foster other essential skills and knowledge. ALE will contribute to all the Sustainable Development Goals, from fighting poverty to tackling environmental degradation.
- The Belém Framework for Action and the Recommendation on Adult Learning and Education (2015) will be important tools for promoting ALE in the coming years. In the future, *GRALE* will monitor the implementation of both the Belém Framework for Action and the Recommendation on Adult Learning and Education (2015). These complementary frameworks will help the international ALE community steer the development of ALE policy and practice in UNESCO Member States. The Mid-Term Review of CONFINTEA VI, which is scheduled for 2017, will provide countries with a valuable opportunity to promote ALE as part of the Education 2030 Framework for Action.

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## INTRODUCTION: THE WORLD OF ADULT LEARNING AND EDUCATION

The third *Global Report on Adult Learning and Education (GRALE III)* contains powerful data and practical examples showing that adult learning and education (ALE) helps individuals become and stay healthier, improve their economic prospects, and be more informed and active citizens, no matter where in the world they live.

Policymakers around the world recognize the importance of ALE. A majority of the 139 countries that responded to the *GRALE III* monitoring survey hold positive views about the potential of ALE, and many shared positive examples (see Box 1).

In 2015, global leaders promised to foster ALE in a number of transformative international statements, including the Recommendation on Adult Learning and Education (2015); the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development; and the Education 2030 Framework for Action.

The ALE promises made in these agreements build on the 2009 Belém Framework for Action, which was adopted by 144 countries at the Sixth International Conference on Adult Learning and Education (CONFINTEA VI) in Brazil. In the Belém Framework for Action, countries agreed to improve ALE in five areas: policy, governance, finance, participation and quality.

### Box 1

#### The benefits of ALE: Some examples

- In the **Philippines**, ALE programmes to promote breastfeeding and infant nutrition have helped reduce infant mortality.
- In the **United States of America**, ALE has led to better environmental behaviour and improved literacy.
- In **China**, physical exercise and musical activities have helped older adults improve their mental health and resilience.
- Dozens of studies in **Europe** have shown that ALE brings economic benefits for employers.

## 1. **GRALE III: AN OVERVIEW**

The first aim of this report is to monitor whether countries are putting their Belém commitments into practice. **Chapter 1** examines each of the five Belém action areas, drawing mainly on the responses of 139 countries to the *GRALE III* monitoring survey.

The second aim of the report is to examine the links between ALE and outcomes in three important domains: health and well-being (**Chapter 2**); employment and the labour market (**Chapter 3**); and social,

civic and community life (**Chapter 4**). As well as analysing data from the monitoring survey, each chapter reviews the relevant literature, presents informative case studies and provides compelling reasons for countries to invest further in ALE. The third aim of the report is to guide policymakers and practitioners on the road ahead. **Chapter 5** shares lessons from the three *GRALE* reports that have been produced since 2009. It also considers the implications for ALE of six major global trends. **Chapter 6** examines how ALE is reflected in the Sustainable Development Goals. It highlights principles and policy recommendations for countries to consider ahead of the Mid-Term Review of CONFINTEA VI, which is scheduled to take place in 2017.

## 2. MONITORING PROGRESS IN ALE: THE BELÉM FRAMEWORK FOR ACTION

In order to monitor progress in ALE since 2009, UNESCO's 195 Member States were invited to complete a 75-question survey in 2015. This survey was designed in collaboration with experts from the UNESCO Institute for Statistics, the UNESCO Global Education Monitoring Report, the World Health Organization, the International Labour Organization and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. Questions covered each of the five areas of action identified in the Belém Framework for Action. In total, 139 countries (71% of UNESCO Member States) responded to either the entire survey or significant parts of it. Their responses provide rich insights into developments and trends in ALE.<sup>1</sup>

To begin, the survey asked countries whether they had official definitions of ALE, and if so, how these definitions had evolved since 2009.

- 75% of countries reported that they have an official definition of ALE. In Latin America and the Caribbean, 84% of countries have definitions; in North America and Western Europe only 52% do.
- 13% of countries have changed their definition of ALE substantially since 2009. 62% reported that the definition of ALE has not changed since 2009, and 25% that the definition changed a little.

## 3. STRENGTHENING POLITICAL COMMITMENT TO ALE

The Belém Framework for Action calls on countries to make a political commitment to ALE in the form of policies and laws. The *GRALE III* monitoring survey asked whether policies had improved since 2009. It also asked about important policy goals such as promoting literacy and basic skills; including marginalized groups; and recognizing, validating and accrediting non-formal and informal learning.

- 75% report that they have significantly improved their ALE policies and laws since 2009. 70% say that they have enacted new ALE policies since 2009.
- For 85% of countries, literacy and basic skills are a top priority of ALE programmes. In Central and Eastern Europe, only 57% of countries give them highest priority.
- 81% of countries say that their policies address adults with low-level literacy or basic skills. However, several groups remain marginalized: the ALE policies of only 18% of countries address ethnic, linguistic and religious minorities. Only 17% of countries address migrants and refugees. Only 17% address adults living with disabilities.
- 41% say they had a policy framework to recognize, validate and accredit non-formal and informal learning before 2009. 30% have established frameworks since 2009. 29% have yet to do so.

75% of countries report a significant improvement in their ALE policies and laws since 2009.

<sup>1</sup> *GRALE III* highlights key findings of the survey. Where results are presented as percentages, these are proportions of countries responding to a specific question. The full range of survey responses is available at <http://www.uil.unesco.org/grale>.

60% of countries report that the overall ALE participation rate has increased since 2009, yet ALE still receives only a small share of public education spending.

#### 4. MAKING THE GOVERNANCE OF ALE MORE EFFECTIVE

In the Belém Framework for Action, countries pledged to establish governance structures that make ALE more effective, transparent, accountable and equitable. The *GRALE III* survey asked whether ALE was being decentralized from national to regional and local levels; whether relevant stakeholders were included in developing, implementing and evaluating ALE policies and programmes; and whether inter-ministerial cooperation on ALE had improved.

- 42% of countries agreed that ALE has become more decentralized since 2009, with a further 26% agreeing somewhat. 32% disagreed or disagreed somewhat. Country experiences suggest that decentralization works better when national institutions provide overall coordination, funding and guidance, and when local institutions implement programmes and identify learning needs.
- 68% of countries say that they have consulted with stakeholders and civil society about ALE policies since 2009.
- Almost 90% of countries say that inter-ministerial coordination on ALE has become stronger since 2009.

#### 5. ENSURING ADEQUATE FINANCING FOR ALE

The Belém Framework for Action includes several commitments on financing ALE. Alongside overall increases in public spending, it calls for more integrated financial strategies across government departments, better incentives to encourage businesses, NGOs and individuals to invest in ALE, and more attention to vulnerable and marginalized populations.

- ALE receives a relatively small share of public education spending. 42% of countries spend less than 1% of their public education budgets on ALE, and only 23% spend more than 4%.

- 46% of countries say that the proportion of spending on ALE increased between 2009 and 2014, and 13% report that ALE spending decreased.
- There are some positive signs for the future: 57% of countries and 90% of low-income countries say that they plan to increase their ALE spending.
- Countries from all regions have developed innovative ALE financing mechanisms.

#### 6. BROADENING ACCESS AND PARTICIPATION IN ALE

In the Belém Framework for Action, countries agreed to take measures to increase overall participation in ALE programmes, and to provide more learning opportunities for women and disadvantaged groups, including ethnic minorities, refugees, migrants and people living in poverty and remote rural areas.

- There are positive trends in the overall ALE participation rate. 60% of countries report increases since 2009, while only 7% say that participation has decreased.
- The overall gender gap in ALE is declining. However, men are more likely to participate in formal technical and vocational education, while women are more likely to participate in non-formal ALE.
- 50% of countries report higher participation rates since 2009 for young people who are not in education, employment or training. 28% of countries say that the participation rate for older adults has increased.
- Data on participation remains inadequate. 62% of countries provided no estimates on participation among minority ethnic, religious or linguistic groups. 56% did not report on migrants and refugees, while 46% did not report on adults with disabilities.

## 7. IMPROVING THE QUALITY OF ALE

The *GRALE III* monitoring survey considers several ways to improve the quality of ALE. These include collecting systematic information on ALE outcomes; providing pre-service education and training programmes for educators; requiring educators to have initial qualifications; providing in-service education and training programmes for educators; and conducting research and analysis on ALE.

- Most countries systematically track the administrative outcomes of ALE: 72% collect information on certificates and qualifications issued, while 66% monitor completion rates.
- Far fewer countries gather information on economic and social outcomes of ALE, such as employment outcomes (40% of countries) or social outcomes like health (29%).
- 81% of countries have initial, pre-service education and training programmes for ALE. This includes 92% of Arab States, but only 67% of countries in Latin America and the Caribbean. Only 46% of countries say that pre-service qualifications are required to teach ALE.
- 85% of countries report that they have in-service professional development, but 54% say that their development programmes do not have sufficient capacity.

## 8. THE IMPACT OF ALE ON HEALTH AND WELL-BEING

Policymakers need to understand and strengthen the links between ALE, health and well-being for three key reasons:

- With healthcare budgets under pressure, ALE can be a cost-effective way to show people how to prevent health problems and adopt healthy behaviours.

- Our understanding of health has expanded to include well-being. Learning and education can help people take more control over the quality and meaning of their lives, and to develop competencies to cope with the stresses of life.

- The Sustainable Development Goals call for whole-of-government policies, and countless studies show how health outcomes depend on much more than the healthcare system itself.

The path from better education to better health is rarely linear. As people move through the life course, their learning and health needs evolve constantly, as do their ways of acquiring new knowledge, skills and behaviours. Furthermore, learning and health needs vary in different socio-economic and cultural contexts; thus what is considered healthy behaviour in one community may be regarded as unhealthy in another.

Nevertheless, the *GRALE III* monitoring survey found that 89% of countries agree that ALE contributes 'a great deal' to personal health and well-being. Moreover, the evidence for positive links between health and education is overwhelming. For individuals, good general health translates into better learning outcomes and more positive engagement in families, communities and workplaces. For societies, it means higher levels of human capital and full participation in economies and community life. Leading studies highlight a wide range of specific benefits and returns to ALE:

- **Healthier behaviours and attitudes:** More educated people are more likely to adopt healthy lifestyles and understand how to manage their health. ALE can also help people acquire the confidence and knowledge they need to access health facilities.
- **Longer life expectancy and disability-free life expectancy:** More educated people live longer, and their lives are less likely to be marred by disability or pain.

89% of countries agree that ALE contributes 'a great deal' to health and well-being.

Research shows that ALE yields positive labour-market outcomes, but more men than women participate in vocational training.

- **A reduction in lifestyle diseases:** More educated people are less likely to suffer from heart disease, stroke and diabetes. ALE can also empower adults to resist advertising for unhealthy foods and address environmental pollution.

The *GRALE III* survey reveals major challenges in relation to health. 65% of countries identify illiteracy as a major barrier preventing ALE from having a greater impact on health. Cumulative inequality is an important consideration here: marginalized groups often have both less access to healthcare and less access to learning activities with positive effects on health. Countries also need to address gender equality, particularly in the light of low rates of literacy among women. In addition, countries must overcome 'budget silos'. 46% of countries say that inadequate or misdirected funding prevents ALE from having a greater impact. The lion's share of public health spending is directed to acute care and hospitals rather than preventive education. With each ministry responsible for its own budget, there are limited incentives for ministries to consider the positive or negative impact that their work has in other sectors.

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development provides an entry point for more holistic policymaking and budgeting. As things stand, 35% of countries say that poor interdepartmental collaboration prevents ALE from having greater impact. Only one-third of countries say that they have an interdepartmental or cross-sectoral coordinating body promoting ALE for personal health and well-being. Sustainable Development Goal 3 aims to 'ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages'. This will be impossible without concerted efforts from the health and education sectors.

## 9. ALE AND SKILLS FOR EMPLOYMENT AND THE LABOUR MARKET

The world of work is becoming more complex and uncertain:

- New technologies are changing the types of skill people need in the workplace. Adults need support in acquiring new skills and managing the physical, mental and emotional demands of the labour market.
- With people living longer lives, older generations need particular support if they are to remain in the labour market for longer periods.
- Cross-border and rural-urban migration brings opportunities and challenges for labour markets, both in the host countries and cities and in the countries and cities that migrants have left behind.

ALE can help people and societies adapt to these changes. A vast body of research shows that ALE brings positive labour market outcomes for individuals, their employers, their societies and their economies. Education boosts skills, and more skilled people are more employable, successful and flexible in the labour market. They also earn higher wages. For organizations and economies, these individual benefits translate into higher levels of productivity, entrepreneurship, tax revenues and overall economic growth.

ALE also brings more general and indirect outcomes for the labour market. ALE boosts health and well-being, increases self-esteem and improves people's ability to organize their lives. These benefits can translate into greater job satisfaction and commitment at work and a healthier workforce. They can also lead to better-functioning labour markets and promote social cohesion.

To maximize the benefits of ALE, policymakers need to tackle gender inequality. Increasing labour force participation by women has the potential to boost economic growth considerably. Yet vocational programmes – the form of ALE that is most directly linked to financial

gain – are often aimed at and populated by men. 54% of countries participating in the *GRALE III* monitoring survey stated that more men than women participate in vocational training. Despite new laws and programmes to prohibit discrimination, societal norms continue to prevent women from working and benefiting from their education.

The prevalence of inequality can affect the labour market outcomes of ALE significantly. Where inequality is high, national averages may show improvements in education, productivity and innovation, but hide the plight of disadvantaged groups that are often subjected to exploitative and unregulated working conditions. Employers are more likely to invest in ALE for workers who already have recognized qualifications. Literacy programmes are needed to help disadvantaged groups gain knowledge of the labour market, stay in jobs and support their job search.

The impact of ALE also depends on the market strategies that employers and policymakers use to boost productivity. Where their strategy is to enhance the value of goods (quality-based competition), there is a clear incentive to invest in ALE, as this nurtures innovation and development. Where their strategy is simply to reduce costs (price-based competition), neither employers nor workers will be willing to invest in ALE.

Most countries believe in the importance of ALE for the labour market. More than half of the countries participating in the *GRALE III* survey said that ALE has a 'strong' or 'moderate' impact on employability. When asked which types of ALE have the most positive effects, 53% of countries singled out initial vocational education and training. 53% of countries reported improvements in their knowledge base on the labour market outcomes of ALE since 2009. Individuals also believe that ALE increases their employment prospects. In countries participating in the OECD Survey on Adult Skills (PIAAC), 80% to 90% of adults who participate in ALE report doing so for job-related reasons.

Yet despite strong evidence and positive perceptions, public investment in ALE remains inadequate. Public investment can provide incentives for individuals and firms to invest, for example through cost-sharing or risk-mitigation instruments. To provide further incentives, policymakers need to promote the recognition and validation of all forms of ALE, thereby connecting non-formal education and informal learning to recognized qualifications. This also involves addressing the stigma that is often attached to non-formal ALE or 'lower-tier' educational tracks.

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development provides crucial political impetus for countries to invest in ALE. Within the education goal (Sustainable Development Goal 4), four targets relate directly to labour-market outcomes. ALE can also make a fundamental contribution to Sustainable Development Goal 8, which focuses on employment and decent work for all.

## 10. THE ROLE OF ALE IN SOCIAL, CIVIC AND COMMUNITY LIFE

The Hamburg Declaration on Adult Learning, which was adopted at CONFINTEA V in 1997, states that 'adult education is both a consequence of active citizenship and a condition for full participation in society'. This implies that ALE can lead to social change, but that civic and social structures also affect the availability and quality of ALE.

There is strong evidence that ALE can help citizens become more active and resourceful members of their communities. ALE not only helps individuals improve their literacy, numeracy and practical skills, but it also fosters life skills such as resilience, confidence and problem-solving. It can encourage people to become more tolerant of diversity, more attentive to issues of sustainability, and more aware of the arts, ethics and cultural heritage.

All of the learning gains described above are benefits in their own right. However, they also generate wider-reaching societal benefits. In a world shaped

ALE can encourage people to become more tolerant of diversity, more attentive to issues of sustainability, and more aware of the arts, ethics and cultural heritage.

by social change, migration and ethnic heterogeneity, ALE can help promote social cohesion and encourage tolerant and trusting societies. It can also equip people with the capacities and knowledge they need to participate in political life.

Two-thirds of countries responding to the *GRALE III* survey say that literacy programmes help develop democratic values, peaceful coexistence and community solidarity. ALE can help empower disadvantaged populations and improve their social connections, networks and communication skills. This, in turn, helps them connect with the broader community and labour market, thereby promoting social integration. As recognized in the 2013 Beijing Declaration on Building Learning Cities, ALE can foster 'learning communities' and 'learning cities' that are better equipped to find solutions to major challenges like environmental sustainability.

Social and community development is heavily dependent on women's capacities. UNESCO estimates that 481 million women aged 15 years and over still lack basic literacy skills, and that only two-thirds of female youth in sub-Saharan Africa are literate. Women still do not have sufficient opportunities to participate in ALE programmes. In the workplace, they are given fewer opportunities to participate in further skills training, and their capabilities are not fairly valued. ALE can sensitize boys and men to issues of gender equality and the actions they can take to help achieve it.

The most marginalized, disadvantaged and poorest people are persistently excluded from ALE activities. People with disabilities, chronic illnesses or learning difficulties, for example, are among those considered hardest to reach with ALE programmes.

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development provides new political impetus for governments to pursue ALE for societal outcomes. Sustainable Development Goal 4, Target 4.7 is of particular relevance here (see Box 2).

66% of countries say that literacy programmes help to develop democratic values, peaceful coexistence and community solidarity.

## Box 2 Sustainable Development Goal 4, Target 4.7

'By 2030, ensure that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including, among others, through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture's contribution to sustainable development.'

In many countries, policy guidelines recognize the relevance of ALE in promoting active citizenship and social inclusion. However, policies often prioritize economic objectives, placing more emphasis on formal ALE and labour market outcomes than on non-formal ALE, which tends to have less tangible community outcomes.

## 11. LESSONS AND TRENDS FOR THE FUTURE OF ALE

The *GRALE III* survey suggests that countries are making progress on ALE. However, this progress remains uneven and uncertain.

Literacy, which is part of the right to education and constitutes a foundation for lifelong learning, remains a major global challenge. Around 758 million adults are still unable to read and write. Only 17 out of 73 countries with a literacy rate below 95% in 2000 were able to achieve the international goal of improving adult literacy by 50% by 2015.

A large majority of countries responding to the *GRALE III* survey identify adults with low basic skills as the main target group of their ALE programmes. Efforts are also continuing at the global level.



UNESCO is launching a Global Alliance for Literacy in the Framework of Lifelong Learning, which will unite diverse public and private actors behind the new literacy target set out in Sustainable Development Goal 4. Meanwhile, emerging concepts of literacy recognize that people are literate at different levels. The Recommendation on Adult Learning and Education (2015) therefore argues that ALE should support adults in progressing along a continuum of learning and proficiency levels.

Gender inequality in education remains a major impediment to sustainable development. Violence against girls and women is prevalent. Discrimination in the workplace is a barrier for the women who are directly affected, but it also means that their families, communities and societies cannot benefit from their education.

The collection of data on ALE is improving in many countries. In the *GRALE III* survey, four out of five countries report that they have developed more effective systems to monitor and evaluate ALE since 2009. However, beyond self-reported data, robust evidence on ALE remains hard to come by. The challenge is that responsibility for providing ALE and managing knowledge is shared by a range of public institutions and private actors. Moreover, ALE that takes place in non-formal and informal settings is hard to quantify and measure.

## 12. ALE IN THE 2030 AGENDA FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Education 2030 Framework for Action have firmly anchored ALE in the global effort to eradicate poverty, promote more equitable societies and pursue sustainable development. They specifically identify adults as learners requiring attention. Several Sustainable Development Goals explicitly call for improvements in ALE. The targets also capture all three fields of learning mentioned in the Recommendation on Adult Learning and Education (2015): literacy; continuing training and professional development; and active citizenship. The 2030 Agenda

for Sustainable Development has a much stronger focus on ALE than the Millennium Development Goals, and its impact reaches far beyond specific goals and targets. It has the following overarching policy implications for countries seeking to transform ALE between now and 2030:

1. Education, including ALE, is a fundamental and enabling human right. The challenge in realizing this right for ALE is that, unlike initial schooling, it is difficult to envisage ALE being both free and compulsory. Nonetheless, countries will need to ensure that people have effective access to high-quality learning opportunities. Ensuring effective access here means informing adults adequately about opportunities, and providing them with financial and other forms of support so that they can take advantage of such opportunities.
2. ALE is part of a balanced educational life course. The concept of lifelong learning challenges recent tendencies to focus on (and invest in) the very early years of life. Current spending patterns will not be enough to address the needs of millions of school leavers without basic skills, of the 120 million children and adolescents who are still out of school, and of the many adults needing to keep their skills up-to-date in their workplaces and communities.
3. ALE is part of a holistic, inter-sectoral agenda. Different policies and practices can no longer be discussed in silos. Obstacles like labour-market discrimination can only be overcome if ALE and other policy areas are considered jointly. Countries recognize the need for cross-sectoral approaches, but different sectors continue to protect their vested interests, while administrative rules prevent co-financing across sectors.
4. More collaboration will be needed among diverse stakeholders. This is particularly true for ALE, where the provision and funding of programmes involves the broadest possible range of actors, including governments, private providers, employers, civil society organizations and learners themselves.

80% of countries report that they have developed more effective systems to monitor and evaluate ALE since 2009.

ALE needs to be part of the data revolution.

5. ALE needs to be part of the data revolution. The Education 2030 Framework for Action calls for better monitoring and reporting in education, and for a 'research and evaluation culture' to help improve policies. This will be a particular challenge in the field of ALE, where the knowledge base remains weak, even in high-income countries. Any efforts to improve data will need to consider available resources and set careful priorities.

Many of the Sustainable Development Goals have implications for ALE, including Goal 3 (on health), Goal 5 (on gender equality), Goal 8 (on the world of work) and Goal 11 (on resilient cities). Sustainable Development Goal 4 focuses explicitly on education and lifelong learning, aiming to 'ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.' Of the seven targets under Sustainable Development Goal 4, the following five relate directly to ALE:

- Target 4.3 calls on countries to ensure access to technical, vocational and tertiary education.
- Target 4.4 calls on countries to provide more people with the skills they need to find decent jobs.
- Target 4.5 calls on countries to eliminate gender disparities in education.
- Target 4.6 calls on countries to ensure that 'all youth and a substantial proportion of adults achieve literacy and numeracy'.
- Target 4.7 covers education for sustainable development, human rights, gender equality, peace and global citizenship.

## JOIN THE GRALE COMMUNITY

*GRALE* does not attempt to provide a single model of best practice in ALE. However, it does call on all countries to take urgent action to put the principle of lifelong learning into practice. Readers are encouraged to dive deep into the evidence and analysis presented in this report, and to explore the ideas and innovative cases that are presented. Readers are also invited to visit the *GRALE* website (<http://uil.unesco.org/grale>). This site draws on the *GRALE III* survey to present a large set of data on ALE. Countries can track their progress and compare their experiences with peers. Analysts can examine the data to build a fuller picture of the global state of ALE. At the Mid-Term Review of CONFINTEA VI, countries will consider how *GRALE* can best monitor progress over the years to come. The challenge will be to develop an integrated approach that captures the ALE commitments made in the Recommendation on Adult Learning and Education (2015), the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the Education 2030 Framework for Action and the Belém Framework for Action. *GRALE IV*, which is scheduled for publication in 2019, will focus on indicators that allow for better monitoring and evaluation of ALE and lifelong learning. The UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning looks forward to engaging with readers and partners throughout the process of preparing *GRALE IV*.



The third *Global Report on Adult Learning and Education (GRALE III)* draws on monitoring surveys completed by 139 UNESCO Member States to develop a differentiated picture of the global state of adult learning and education (ALE). It evaluates countries' progress in fulfilling the commitments they made in the Belém Framework for Action, which was adopted at the Sixth International Conference on Adult Education (CONFINTEA VI) in 2009. In addition, the report examines the impact of ALE on three major areas: health and well-being; employment and the labour market; and social, civic and community life. *GRALE III* provides policymakers, researchers and practitioners with compelling evidence for the wider benefits of ALE across all of these areas. In so doing, it highlights some of the major contributions that ALE can make to realizing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.