

**CONFINTEA VI Preparatory Conference
Budapest, 3-6 December 2008**

Pan-European statement on adult learning for equity and inclusion in the context of mobility and competition

We the representatives of the 33 countries in the UNESCO Pan-European Region at this preparatory conference for CONFINTEA VI declare our commitment to strengthening learning and education as a priority for all adults in the region. We meet at a time of financial crisis across the region and the wider world, and in the context of continuing conflicts, accelerating demographic change and environmental changes. We reaffirm the importance of adult learning in enabling people to deal with economic and social change, to participate actively in civil society, to foster cultural action and to enrich their lives. We note the trend in many countries in the region to concentrate increasingly on vocational education for employability and on developing skills at work, and we ask how far present crisis invites a review of this trend. We believe that adult learning is now more important than ever, and has a larger role to play, both to support people in making a living, and for their wider lives.

General Context

With some 1.164 billion inhabitants the region is richly diverse, geographically, economically, politically, socially, ethnically and culturally. Demographic structures are altering and overall population is shrinking and ageing and diversity is increasing in the vast majority of the region, with all the ensuing economic, social, cultural and political implications. In the EU-27 the share of the population aged 65 or over is projected to rise from 84.6 million (17.1%) in 2008 to 151.5 million (30%) in 2060. In 2006 almost 2 million new immigrants settled in the EU, while 20% of the Canadian and 13% of the US population were foreign-born.

The current unemployment rate of 7.1% in the RU and 6.5% in the USA. Virtually one-third of the EE workforce had only the equivalent of lower secondary education there were almost 7 million early school leavers in 2008. In the USA, 21% of the adult population had not attained a high school diploma/equivalent and were not enrolled in school whereas in Canada 60% of adults between the ages of 25 and 64 years had completed some form of postsecondary education. Literacy and key competence levels continue to be a challenge in many parts of the region. In this context, it is worth noting that by 2020, 31.5% of all jobs in the EU will need high qualifications and 50% medium qualifications and this is a consistent trend across the region. From a gender perspective, it is also worth noting that women's educational achievements are generally higher than men's, in many parts of the region women's employment rates are still lower and they continue to earn less than men.

Implications for ALE

ALE has a critical role in responding to these economic, social, cultural, political and educational challenges and since CONFINTEA V there have been sizeable gains for ALE on a number of fronts. Both the EU and the OECD recognise the centrality of lifelong learning. Awareness of the key role of ALE has increased in the majority of countries and 17 of the EU-27 countries have adopted overarching lifelong learning strategy statements in response to the Lisbon Agenda. Policies on ALE exist in virtually every country in the region. In the context of EU benchmark, participation rates for adults have increased from 7.1% in 2000 to 9.7% in 2007. In the USA almost 50% of adults aged 16+ have participated in some form of ALE in 2001. A bold vision for learning in Canada was released in April 2008 by the Council of Ministers of education, Canada, to address the education needs and

aspirations of Canadians. The vision of *Learn Canada 2020* is the provision of quality lifelong learning opportunities for all Canadians.

In addition, ALE has a wider social policy role in health, justice and civic engagement, among others. Learners, practitioners, other social policy actors, and social movements all play roles in achieving this impact, often through creative and innovative forms, including, for example, learning communities and regions, learning festivals or employee development schemes. The challenge is to build systematically on these developments.

The existing frameworks and thus the capacity of ALE to respond to the challenges outlined above varies across the region. In all but a small number of countries, the response has been primarily vocational education and training for growth and competitiveness. However, the overwhelming view of the conference is that there is a need for a more integrated approach that addresses economic development, social cohesion, equity and diversity, democratic citizenship, sustainable development and community and personal development.

Recommendations

The 48th UNESCO International Conference on Education (ICE), November 2008, recalled Article 26 of the UN Declaration of Human Rights which states that everyone has a right to education. We concur with ICE's affirmation that inclusive education is fundamental to achieving human, social and economic development.

There is need for Pan-European region to recognise its responsibility to act as a partner for the development of ALE in the rest of the world. The significance of North-South partnerships is stressed, since they enable mutual learning and aid to be directed to fulfil EFA goals and ensure that the importance of ALE in pursuing the Millennium development Goals is recognised.

1. It is recommended that policy frameworks:

- Cover the formal, non-formal and the informal forms of ALE
- Take into account the personal, social, health, economic, cultural and intergenerational benefits of adult learning
- Encompass programmes that are based on the needs of learners and made more accessible through appropriate learning and other supports
- Strengthen the links and co-ordination with early childhood care and education (ECCE) in lifelong learning frameworks and strategies
- Be developed and implemented through a horizontal, coordinated, and inclusive approach.

2. Governance issues should be addressed with a view to creating the local, regional and national frameworks, structures and partnerships –including public authorities, social partners and civil society – essential for the development, coordination, funding, provision, quality management and monitoring of ALE. The involvement of civil society in policy development, policy implementation and governance should be particularly promoted and supported. Learners' organisations, learning communities and learning regions have a positive role to play in establishing, planning, delivering and supporting ALE initiatives in this regard.

- 3. ALE is vital to the public and private interest and robust public investment is key to the development of ALE.** In many countries the financing of vocational and, in particular, non-vocational adult education is not sufficient.

Funding should include public sources with support from national, regional, and local level, as well as multi-stakeholder contributions from the private sector and the individual. Under-represented groups need particular financial support. Timely and effective investment in ALE could prevent the higher social costs of unemployment or marginalization.

New financing mechanisms should be put in place to stimulate individual and collective participation and investment by enterprises.

- 4. Countries should promote access to ALE.** Low participation in ALE, particularly among social-economic groups that could benefit most from further learning, is a concern. We recommend a more equitable access to and participation in, ALE be promoted and supported through concrete measures targeted especially at those adults otherwise least likely to participate, such as Adult Learners' Week. As a result the overall volume of participation will increase. This will involve strengthening the full range and the quality of ALE provision, the development of lifelong guidance systems and the promotion of key competences needed to address individual social and economic change as well as gender and social inequalities and to contribute to a social justice and a dynamic civil society. In addition, higher education institutions should become more responsive to the increasing demand for higher level qualifications.
- 5. Recognising the critical importance of literacy, language, numeracy, social, ICT and VET competences as a part of lifelong learning strategies in pan-European region and in the other regions of the world,** and in view of new and evolving demands these competences, we recommend that special attention be given to:
- a) supporting people needing to maintain and improve literacy, language, numeracy and ICT competences as a key tool for individual empowerment, inclusion and economic wellbeing.
 - b) the continuum from acquisition, the application in health, work, social and personal context and the maintenance of literacy competences
 - c) the intergenerational impact and benefits of family literacy
 - d) adult learning and education programmes reflect the EFA goals and the objectives of the UN Literacy Decade as an international platform for strengthening action in literacy.
- 6. Given diversity of the structure and capacity of ALE in the development of the region we recommend UNESCO develops a template of indicators of participation and progression on a web portal that countries may use to measure changes, to evaluate change over time and to share good practices with other countries.** These could usefully include:
- Improved participation rates in ALE, and targeted increase among under-represented groups
 - An appropriate measure for adults for adults needing improved literacy, language, numeracy and ICT skills and competences
 - The aspiration for every adult of working age to improve their skills, competences and/or qualifications.

7. **Learning outcomes wherever, whenever and however achieved should be recognised and validated.** This should take place within the context of coherent sub-national and/or regional national systems. We call upon UNESCO to support initiatives in this field.
8. **Policies, structures and measures to assure the quality of learning should be developed.** Competence profiles for ALE practitioners and a systematic approach to their initial and continuing professional development should also be developed as far as is practicable. Higher education along with other providers has a key role to play in this regard.
9. **ALE is a legitimate and essential research area.** We recommend more investment in research, evaluation of ALE in order to promote better-informed policy decisions and to improve quality. To demonstrate the wider benefits of participation in ALE and substantially increase the overall comparability and visibility of ALE for a wider range of stakeholders, comprehensive data collection systems should be developed. To promote ALE research production, dissemination and application there is a clear need for the development of a research infrastructure, for robust mechanisms for the production and dissemination of research and critically, for a research interface to promote use of research results in policy development and implementation.
10. **We recommend that UNESCO encourage member states** to include representatives of NGOs, CSOs, employers, unions, providers and adult learners in their delegations to CONFINTEA VI.

Follow-up

The development and implementation of regular tracking mechanisms is necessary in order to achieve the recommendations resulting from the conference. To that end, we strongly urge that:

- Member States establish a regular monitoring mechanisms for implementing the present recommendations at country level
- Member States commit themselves to monitoring progress and to a substantial CONFINTEA VI Mid-Term Review which will coincide with the EFA and MDGs timeline of 2015
- Templates for sharing good practice in a framework of international co-operation through ALE advisory committees, including NGOs and CSOs, networks and collaborative programmes are developed
- Member States commit themselves to encourage and support co-operation and dialogue among different interest groups and stakeholders in adult education
- UNESCO, through the UNESCO Institute of Lifelong Learning coordinates a monitoring process at global level to periodically take stock of the progress and performance in ALE.