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Institute for  
Lifelong Learning

**CONFINTEA VII**

**Revised Concept Note**

**Adult learning and education for sustainable development:  
a transformative agenda**

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# Adult learning and education for sustainable development: a transformative agenda

The International Conference on Adult Education (CONFINTEA) is a UNESCO intergovernmental conference (Category II) for policy dialogue on adult learning and education (ALE) and related research and advocacy.

CONFINTEA VII will take place in Marrakech, Morocco, from 15 to 17 June 2022.

## Background

The International Conference on Adult Education, organized by UNESCO, is an important platform for debating the latest developments in adult learning and education (ALE). It has taken place every 12 to 13 years since the late 1940s. The first conference was held in 1949 in Elsinore (Denmark), followed by Montreal (Canada) in 1960; Tokyo (Japan) in 1972; Paris (France) in 1985; Hamburg (Germany) in 1997; and Belém (Brazil) in December 2009.

In 2009, CONFINTEA VI led to the adoption of the [Belém Framework for Action \(BFA\)](#) which recognizes the critical role of lifelong learning in addressing global educational issues and challenges. Member States committed to making progress in five key areas of ALE: policy; governance; financing; participation, inclusion and equity; and quality. The BFA has been instrumental in guiding action to develop adult literacy and adult education within a lifelong learning perspective, and to harness the power of adult learning for a viable future for all.

Adult education is recognized as an essential element of the right to education, and we need to chart a new and urgent course of action to enable all young people and adults to exercise this right. We reiterate the fundamental role of adult learning and education as laid down during the five International Conferences on Adult Education (CONFINTEA I–V) since 1949 and unanimously undertake to take forward, with a sense of urgency and at an accelerated pace, the agenda of adult learning and education.

*Belém Framework for Action (Preamble, p.5), adopted at CONFINTEA VI, December 2009*

Also, in 2009, UNESCO issued the first [Global Report on Adult Learning and Education \(GRALE\)](#) to establish a basis for future CONFINTEA debates and monitor countries' progress in implementing the BFA. Published every three years since 2009, GRALE provides a continuous update of the status of development of ALE in the UNESCO Member States. It monitors the progress of Member States against the BFA on the basis of the GRALE survey and provides an overview of emerging trends and challenges in the field of ALE.

In its fourth issue, for the first time the GRALE survey was used also to monitor the implementation of the [Recommendation on Adult Learning and Education \(RALE\)](#) adopted by Member States in 2015. Complementing the BFA and with a longer timeline, RALE sets out principles and goals for ALE with regard to the BFA's areas of action, and for the key learning fields of ALE, i.e., literacy and basic skills; continuing education and professional development (vocational skills); and liberal, popular and community education (active citizenship skills). The Recommendation calls on Member States to seek ways to better address learning needs of marginalized groups, and thus 'promote equitable learning opportunities for youth and adults', specifically with regard to reaching the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in general, and SDG 4 on education, in particular.

### Defining adult learning and education

Adult learning and education are a core component of lifelong learning. It comprises all forms of education and learning that aim to ensure that all adults participate in their societies and the world of work. It denotes the entire body of learning processes, formal, non-formal and informal, whereby those regarded as adults by the society in which they live, develop, and enrich their capabilities for living and working, both in their own interests and those of their communities, organizations, and societies. Adult learning and education involve sustained activities and processes of acquiring, recognizing, exchanging, and adapting capabilities. Given that the boundaries of youth and adulthood are shifting in most cultures, in this text the term ‘adult’ denotes all those who engage in adult learning and education, even if they have not reached the legal age of maturity.

*Recommendation on Adult Learning and Education (2015), p. 6*

Since 2015, recognizing the role of adult learning and education for the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda, the GRALE reports are drafted in the framework of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Furthermore, in 2017, on the occasion of the CONFINTEA VI Mid-Term Review, held in the Republic of Korea, representatives from UNESCO Member States underlined in [the Suwon/Osan Statement](#) – the need to better articulate ALE with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in a lifelong learning perspective. Underlining the importance of ALE for realizing the 2030 Agenda, they recommended renewing efforts to raise awareness of the potential of ALE among all relevant stakeholders, within and beyond education, in a range of areas, including peace, inclusion, social cohesion, health and environmental sustainability.

### Objectives

Against this background, the aim of CONFINTEA VII is to shape policy directions for ALE within a lifelong learning perspective, in the framework of the 2030 Agenda and beyond.

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development builds on progress within three core domains: environmental protection, social inclusion, and economic growth. These are inter-related and depend on two main requirements: partnership (to share expertise) and peace (justice and strong institutions).

Furthermore, as the United Nations’ Secretary-General, António Guterres, suggests, the urgency and ambition required to deliver the SDGs depends very largely on people’s capacity to push for the required transformations and recognize their shared responsibility for the world in which we live<sup>1</sup>. These challenges, against the background of growing funding gaps<sup>2</sup> and likely delays in achieving the SDGs<sup>3</sup> due to COVID 19, demand individuals who live cooperatively with others, are flexible, who think critically, respect diversity, respect the environment, are responsible users and competent producers of digital and media information, and are actively involved in finding solutions and actions to current and emerging challenges, both locally and globally. Adult learning and education are certainly a means to achieve this, as a lifelong process, consisting of flexible paths of learning.

Consequently, CONFINTEA VII will encourage Member States to develop flexible learning opportunities for work and for fostering a culture of human rights, justice, inclusion and equity, respecting the environment. In recognition of the centrality of peace and tolerance for sustainable development, citizenship education in ALE is the thematic focus of GRALE V that will be launched at CONFINTEA VII.

At the Conference, participants will review current practices, achievements and challenges for ALE and elaborate a set of recommendations for ALE’s further development, which will feed the CONFINTEA VII outcome document – a new framework for action to guide policy and practice for the next 12 years.

1. [Five Urgent Needs for Global Governance: UN Secretary-General Sets Priorities for 2022 | News | SDG Knowledge Hub | IISD](#)

2. <https://en.unesco.org/news/unesco-warns-funding-gap-reach-sdg4-poorer-countries-risks-increasing-us-200-billion-annually>

3. <https://esgclarity.com/achieving-sdgs-62-years-behind-schedule/>

Consistent with the 2030 Agenda, this new framework for action will provide an opportunity to guide the implementation of some of the recommendations of the Report from the International Commission on the Futures of Education (UNESCO, 2021), [\*Re-imagining our futures together. A new social contract for Education with its focus on transformative learning and education.\*](#)

The process towards CONFINTEA VII included preparatory regional conferences that took place in 2021. Their outcomes allowed to identify the main issues in ALE and propose recommendations for CONFINTEA VII.

### **Outcome**

CONFINTEA VII will adopt a ‘framework for action’, comprising recommendations to strengthen policies and international cooperation, in order to realize the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and to shape adult learning and education for the future.

### **Date**

15 to 17 June 2022

### **Venue**

Marrakech, Morocco

### **Modality**

Hybrid (in presence and online)

### **Languages**

The working languages in the plenary sessions shall be Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian and Spanish. The parallel workshops will work in English and in at least one other language (Arabic, French or Spanish).

### **Content**

The Conference agenda will combine plenary sessions, including ministerial events, as well as thematic workshops conducted in parallel.

### **Participants**

As this conference will be organized as a hybrid conference, on-site participants as well as a large number of online participants will attend including Ministers responsible for adult learning and education in UNESCO Member States, Associate Members and Non-Member States, representatives of international organizations, non-governmental organizations, private sector, youth, education researchers, practitioners etc.

### **UNESCO – a global leader in education**

Education is UNESCO's top priority because it is a basic human right and the foundation for peace and sustainable development. UNESCO is the United Nations' specialized agency for education, providing global and regional leadership to drive progress, strengthening the resilience and capacity of national systems to serve all learners and responding to contemporary global challenges through transformative learning, with special focus on gender equality and Africa across all actions.



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### **The Global Education 2030 Agenda**

UNESCO, as the United Nations' specialized agency for education, is entrusted to lead and coordinate the Education 2030 Agenda, which is part of a global movement to eradicate poverty through 17 Sustainable Development Goals by 2030. Education, essential to achieve all of these goals, has its own dedicated Goal 4, which aims to **“ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.”** The Education 2030 Framework for Action provides guidance for the implementation of this ambitious goal and commitments.

