



CONFINTEA VII



CONFINTEA VII/3  
Paris, 2 June 2022  
Original: English

# **Adult learning and education for sustainable development: A transformative agenda**

**Annotated agenda**

## SEVENTH INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON ADULT EDUCATION (CONFINTEA VII)

### ANNOTATED AGENDA

#### **Shaping policy directions for ALE within a lifelong learning perspective**

1. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development builds on three core inter-related domains: economic growth, social inclusion and environmental protection, where progress depends on partnership (to share expertise) and peace (justice and strong institutions). These conditions demand individuals who live cooperatively with others, are flexible, who think critically, respect diversity, protect the environment, are responsible users and competent producers of digital and media information, and are actively involved in finding solutions to current and emerging challenges, both locally and globally. A rapidly developing world does not allow for learning to finish with the end of compulsory or higher education. It requires lifelong learning for all.
2. As a core component of lifelong learning, adult learning and education (ALE) comprises all forms of education and learning, ensuring that adults participate not only in the world of work, but in society as a whole.
3. The COVID-19 pandemic showed the importance of adult learning and education. Only if everybody – young and old – is able to learn can we solve global challenges together. Only if all of us have the chance to adapt to new developments and acquire the knowledge necessary to act jointly, will we be able to create fairer, more just and sustainable societies.
4. As we anticipate further challenges caused by the effects of climate change, demographic shifts and the growing influence of digital technologies in every aspect of our lives, it is critical that ALE as an integral part of lifelong learning moves further up the policy agenda. The seventh International Conference on Adult Education (CONFINTEA VII) will provide the perfect ground for this endeavour.
5. CONFINTEA VII will elaborate a set of recommendations for ALE's further development, which will constitute a new Framework for Action to guide policy and practice for the next 12 years.

#### ***Issues for discussion:***

- (a) Main challenges, achievements, emerging trends, innovations and good practices;
- (b) Directions to shape policy for ALE within a lifelong learning perspective, in the framework of the 2030 Agenda and beyond.

#### ***Anticipated outcome:***

- (a) The Marrakech Framework for Action comprises strategies and recommendations to ensure stronger partnerships for and renewed action in ALE, in order to realize the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and to shape adult learning and education in the future.

#### **Adult learning, the new social contract for education and a right to lifelong learning**

7. The world faces a dual challenge in education and learning. The first is realizing the unfulfilled commitments to ensure the right to quality education for every child, youth and adult. Despite progress in expanding educational opportunity over the past decades, vulnerable and excluded communities continue to be denied the right to quality educational opportunity. The fact that two out

of five youth in low-income countries continue to have low literacy skills, despite decades of national and international development efforts, reflects the stubborn persistence of broader social and economic inequalities, recently exacerbated by the multifaceted impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

8. The second challenge is to fully realize the transformational potential of education as a route for sustainable collective futures. Continued environmental destruction and climate change is putting the planet in peril while the accelerated technological transformation of the various dimensions of life needs to be better steered to ensure inclusive development and democratic participation. The shifts in the employment landscape resulting from structural changes and digitalization are making the creation of decent human-centred work a central challenge.

9. It is by actively forging a new social contract that education can be renewed to ensure sustainable futures based on social, economic and environmental justice. The contours of this new social contract for education are framed by the contribution of ALE as a key component of lifelong learning, and its role in rebalancing our relationships with each other, with the planet and with technology.

***Issues for discussion:***

- (a) Affirming the right to education throughout life;
- (b) Establishing lifelong learning as a common good;
- (c) Promoting a new social contract to advance sustainable futures for all learners.

***Anticipated outcomes:***

- (a) Enhanced awareness of the role of lifelong learning in the context of the new social contract for education advocated by the International Commission on the Futures of Education;
- (b) Identification of practical steps to affirm the right to education throughout life, and towards establishing education and lifelong learning as a common good;
- (c) A better understanding of the vital contributions of ALE to lifelong learning and to the new social contract for education.

**Literacy as the foundation for lifelong learning**

10. Literacy is an integral part of education and the foundation of lifelong learning; it is also part of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development as Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) Target 4.6. Yet, in 2019, more than 773 million youth and adults worldwide, around two-thirds of them women, still lacked basic literacy and numeracy skills. Moreover, there is also a growing concern about low or poor literacy and numeracy among students.

11. The UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS) estimated that, in 2021, 770 millions of adults aged 15 and over lacked basic literacy skills, three out of five being women. The COVID-19 crisis has worsened the situation, resulting in global discussions on learning loss and worsening learning poverty due to disrupted educational provision. Furthermore, despite the existence of an overall agreement on the importance of literacy, as well as the magnitude of the literacy challenge, financial investment for youth and adult literacy has consistently remained low and policy attention insufficient.

12. Building sustainable literacy delivery from a lifelong learning perspective requires a reconceptualization of literacy policies and strategies and a strengthening of effective governance. Research on youth and adult literacy needs to expand and diversify to improve understanding of the field, reinterpret literacy for the future, support meaningful learning and development of adults, enrich

educators' repertoire and capacities, and design relevant learning materials and tools. To achieve this, cross-national, cross-disciplinary and cross-stakeholder partnerships and collaboration should be at the heart of new initiatives to facilitate comparative and diverse perspectives.

***Issues for discussion:***

- (a) Implementing an expanded notion of literacy;
- (b) Improving literacy policy and governance;
- (c) Addressing literacy financing challenges;
- (d) Strengthening research, evidence and data on literacy.

***Anticipated outcomes:***

- (a) Assessment of progress in youth and adult literacy and of persisting challenges;
- (b) Identification of areas for action in the next decade to promote youth and adult literacy for humanity and the planet.

**Preparing adults for the future of work**

13. In the context of rapid and broad labour market transformations, the workplace is increasingly becoming a learning place. New technologies, expanding informal economies, economic recessions and the resulting pressure on labour markets, the greening of economies and societies, demographic shifts and external shocks (like the one caused by the COVID-19 pandemic) are transforming jobs and labour-market participation patterns.

14. New occupations emerge every day. It is increasingly difficult to imagine working in the same occupation throughout one's life. As such, lifelong learning is a condition that enables individuals to adapt to a changing labour market. Establishing a culture of lifelong learning is imperative in ensuring employability throughout the working life, protecting individuals from labour market exclusion and fragility, and in building more inclusive and just societies that promote personal fulfilment and development.

15. Establishing an entitlement to learning and skills throughout life is key to building such culture.

16. Legislations, policies and programmes for ALE, including through technical and vocational education and training (TVET), are therefore needed to provide opportunities for learning in the workplace, as well as ensuring the private sector's involvement in the recognition, validation and accreditation (RVA) of learning outcomes, including skills achieved through experience.

***Issues for discussion:***

- (a) Establishing an entitlement to learning and skills throughout life;
- (b) Building flexible lifelong learning pathways;
- (c) Transforming and adapting TVET systems.

***Anticipated outcomes:***

- (a) Better understanding of the consequences of labour market transformation for lifelong learning policy development and the factors affecting provision of youth and adult skills and learning;
- (b) Identification of directions for strategies aimed at ensuring continued access to learning throughout the working life, with a particular attention to the most vulnerable groups.

### **Adult learning and education in digital environments**

17. Technological progress is changing the way societies and economies work, with disruption to education and learning at all levels. Technology has become more powerful, more affordable and more widely used in education, work and our daily lives, leading to profound social changes. The widespread use of technology today, accelerated by COVID-19, heightens the importance of access to digital devices and the internet, and of acquiring the digital skills necessary to participate in society.

18. The extensive use of technology in all domains of life has also led to significant risks. These include mis- and dis-information, misuse of personal data, and the possible translation of the digital gap into a learning gap, leading to further inequalities. These developments reinforce the need for a stronger focus on digital skills for youth and adults, including older ones, and the fostering of citizenship skills.

19. The COVID-19 pandemic has proven a catalyst for ALE development, disrupting face-to-face provision of ALE and making online distance learning the default in many areas of ALE, from basic skills and literacy provision to higher education and workplace learning. Given the digital divide and educational inequalities, the right of youth and adults to education needs to be ensured by establishing lifelong learning as a common good.

20. The obligation of Member States to respect, protect and fulfil this right is paramount. While the private sector has innovated and contributed to expand participation in ALE, its leading role raises issues regarding equity but also content, including for the linguistic and cultural diversity.

#### **Issues for discussion:**

- (a) Enabling equitable access to technology for educational opportunities;
- (b) Enhancing quality of learning through technology;
- (c) Redefining the roles of the private sector, grassroots organizations and open education solutions.

#### **Anticipated outcomes:**

- (a) Enhanced understanding of the role of technology in fast-tracking access to ALE;
- (b) Identification of ways to overcome the digital divide and promote digital skills;
- (c) Directions formulated for new learning alliances that build on recent international normative instruments that frame access to knowledge, and the use of artificial intelligence (AI) and connectivity for learning.

### **Adult learning and education for climate action**

21. The planet and its inhabitants are under increasing pressure: human-induced climate change, limited resources, rising temperatures and sea levels, climate-related poverty and environmentally unsustainable economic structures are just a few of the challenges governments and populations around the world face. While the threats are clear, human activity continues to produce greenhouse

gas emissions at a record high, with no signs of slowing down. Fundamental transformations in all aspects of society are required to alter the course of these developments, including in terms of how we grow food, use land, produce and transport goods, and power our economies.

22. There is a growing call for education and learning to enable individuals, as agents of change, to acquire the knowledge, skills, values and attitudes that will lead to the 'green transition' of our societies, as called for in the 'Education for Sustainable Development: Towards achieving the SDGs (ESD for 2030)' framework, enshrined in SDG Target 4.7, and, indeed, across the 2030 Agenda.

23. Education for sustainable development is key to reversing current trends and achieving sustainable consumption and production; ALE must be part of this green transformation, which will also benefit those who are already affected by climate change in their everyday lives. It gives youth, adults and older people an understanding of the issues, raises their awareness, and equips them with the knowledge and agency needed.

24. Hence, ALE can play an important role in empowering youth and adults to address challenges within the framework of broader developments, including social movements at local, national and global levels.

***Issues for discussion:***

- (a) Promoting active citizenship for climate awareness and empowerment;
- (b) Reducing the vulnerability of disadvantaged groups;
- (c) Fostering resilience and adaptability.

***Anticipated outcomes:***

- (a) Recognition of new ways of fostering skills and knowledge for climate action and resilience across societies;
- (b) Directions identified to mainstream ALE interventions in mitigation and adaptation policies to reduce vulnerability to climate change impacts and build resilience at individual and collective levels.