



DVV International

Education for Everyone. Worldwide.
Lifelong.

Strategic Fields of Action DVV International

Institute for International Cooperation of the
Deutscher Volkshochschul-Verband e. V. (DVV),
the German Adult Education Association



Summary

DVV International is the only professional organisation in the world that focuses on the field of Adult Learning and Education (ALE), collaborating on development and international cooperation. We work from a holistic concept of education that takes equally into account the economic, social and personal development of people. An important focal point of our work is on improving access to ALE for disadvantaged population groups.

DVV International is firmly convinced that ALE plays a key role in overcoming the multiple challenges and changes currently facing the global community and every individual. Inequality and discrimination – especially with regard to access to basic education –, violent conflicts and wars, tackling the climate crisis and the necessary changes to the environment, the digital transformation as well as the consequences of forced displacement and migration will not be overcome without sustainable investment in ALE. The dismantling of (post-)colonial structures and preservation of democratic values requires an increased level of ALE. It is precisely this last point that makes it clear that an intensified global dialogue is necessary in order to do something to counter the disturbing populist and xenophobic tendencies in Germany and Europe as well and to strengthen an awareness for global responsibility.

DVV International achieves its goals through interventions in three spheres of activity:

1. Through the **support of projects** that make the potential of ALE visible. In order to achieve long-term success in this area, an attempt is made, in cooperation with our partner organisations, to improve the legislative and financial framework conditions for ALE by engaging in lobbying and providing advisory services to governments. In parallel, we strengthen our mainly civil society partners with their organisational development and professionalisation.
2. DVV International, as a professional organisation, makes its **expertise** available. On the one hand, it is nourished by the more than one hundred years of experience of the German Volkshochschulen (adult education centres), and on the other hand by the work of our partner networks at the national, regional and global levels. Practice-oriented studies and publications as well as specialised events are carried out jointly. Another central building block is the development of curricula and guidelines for organisational and policy advisory services as well as the training and further education of adult educators.
3. Ultimately, DVV International participates with its network partners in global lobbying to **improve the framework conditions for ALE**. Especially for many partners from the Global South, goals formulated by international organisations and large donors are important factors for shaping national policies. At the European level, DVV International works intensively for greater attention to be paid to a holistic understanding of ALE by the European Union in order to also improve the framework conditions for German adult education centres. ●

1 Introduction

DVV International is the Institute for International Cooperation of the German Adult Education Association (DVV). Since our foundation in 1969, we have fought poverty through education, supported inclusive development and advocated for international cooperation. As the world's only professional and specialised organisation in the field of ALE and development cooperation, we aim to ensure that more needs-oriented and high-quality educational opportunities are available for young people and adults worldwide, especially for disadvantaged groups of the population. Our aim is to make relevant contributions to the development and expansion of sustainable structures and to increase political recognition and public awareness of youth and adult education. Furthermore, we also employ ALE to strengthen understanding with regard to global interrelationships and responsibility. We do this in cooperation with our more than 200 civil society, government and academic partners, with whom we have built up a global network and extensive expertise over the past 50 years.

The international community, with the 2030 Agenda and its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as well as the Incheon Declaration "Education 2030", has defined binding goals for international education policy. For the first time, all areas of education have been addressed in the context of lifelong learning. The subsidiary goals in the field of education implicitly address key areas of work in youth and adult education, thus giving them greater significance and visibility.

Nevertheless, the potential for youth and adult education to solve many social problems remains underestimated and accordingly underfunded. This was recently pointed out by the seventh World Conference on Adult Education, CONFINTEA VII, in Morocco in June 2022.

Meanwhile, the global community is facing both old and new challenges and changes. Political, economic and social instability, war and violent conflict, with the accompanying flight of refugees, as well as technological, climatic and demographic developments, migration and advancing digitalisation – all these factors change learning needs. Thus we must respond with concepts which have been suitably adapted. This is further exacerbated by increasing inequality within countries in the Global North and between them and the Global South, not to mention the continuing serious deficits in the areas of literacy and basic education and gender equality. ALE empowers people to understand and actively participate in shaping change. It therefore plays a central role in moulding and managing the necessary transformations.

In what follows, we explain the strategic fields of action with which DVV International wants to contribute to strengthening the central role of youth and adult education in overcoming the challenges that lie ahead. In addition to the guidance function of our work, we mean to demonstrate to the broader public in this way the relevance and possibilities of ALE. ●

2

The role of ALE in overcoming current challenges

Poverty, unemployment and inequality: Despite increasing prosperity, the gap between the rich and the poor is expanding – both within and between countries. Around 200 million people worldwide are unemployed,¹ an even larger number work under precarious conditions. Vast sections of the population in the Global South work in the informal sector. The tools of non-formal vocational education and training are particularly important in this context. Measures aimed at implementing functional literacy, job-related remedial basic education and qualification programmes (Skills for Life and Work) need to be substantially expanded. Income-generating measures, in which ALE plays a key role, make an important contribution to stability and peace and provide people with new perspectives.

Inequality and discrimination: Around the world, the discrimination and oppression of people continues: on the basis of gender, age, religion, sexual orientation, skin colour, ethnicity, disability and many other reasons. Women and girls are the largest disadvantaged group in this context. They are often victims of violence, their rights are restricted in many aspects, they have less access to resources and are still not adequately represented in parliaments. ALE is an important instrument for the effective promotion of equal participation of all people in social, political and economic life. ALE programmes are comprehensive, low-threshold and cost-effective, while they guarantee access to education for disadvantaged population groups in particular, thereby strengthening

their opportunities to participate in social and economic life. These programmes also provide a space for the analysis and dismantling of prejudice and discriminatory social and power structures.

Literacy and basic education: Illiteracy and a lack of basic education remain serious obstacles to participation in society and the economy. At over 750 million, the number of illiterate adults worldwide is still alarmingly high.² Almost two thirds of them are women. Over 250 million children³ either do not attend school at all or end it without a formal qualification; many more suffer from access problems, inadequate quality and a lack of teachers. School closures worldwide during the Covid-19 pandemic, which affected over 80 percent of children and young people,⁴ dramatically worsened the situation in large parts of the world, threatening to create a new generation of educational “losers”. ALE must therefore assume fundamental tasks for the purposes of remedial basic education: Reading, writing and arithmetic, basic digital literacy, the teaching of critical thinking, reflection and problem-solving skills. Basic education verifiably correlates with falling maternal and infant mortality rates, improved employment opportunities, increased environmental awareness, tolerance, political participation and social cohesion, among other things. Without literacy and basic education for all, sustainable poverty reduction will be impossible.

1 ILO Director-general Presentation on Global Employment Trends 2023: <https://bit.ly/3WwXzt9>

2 UNESCO Institute for Statistics: <https://uis.unesco.org/en/topic/literacy>

3 UNESCO 2023: 250 Million Children Out-of-School: What You Need to Know about UNESCO's Latest Education Data, <https://bit.ly/3NZKIDJ>

4 UNICEF 2021: COVID 19 and School Closures: <https://bit.ly/3vlyQGv>

Crises and conflicts: Large swathes of the world are afflicted by violent conflicts. In Afghanistan, the Sahel, the Middle East, Ukraine, and many other regions, the civilian population are increasingly the victims of violence and displacement. In 2022 alone, this resulted in the death of almost 250,000 people, and over 100 million people were displaced from their homeland. ALE plays a key role in providing programmes for these people. There is a particularly great need for remedial education programmes, because violent conflicts interrupt educational trajectories. On top of this, there are (re-)integration programmes for ex-soldiers and people who have been displaced. These encompass language components, vocational qualification measures and counselling services that help people find their way in the new environment, as well as low-threshold discussion formats to help deal with the trauma they have experienced. Adult education centres also play a key role in the validation and recognition of educational and professional qualifications. In addition, they offer opportunities to acquire qualifications that were not able to be obtained in their locality due to war and conflict.

Sustainability: Today's trade and commerce cannot be allowed to diminish the opportunities and quality of life of future generations. To ensure this, people need to be better informed about global challenges. This embraces domains such as climate change and the protection of biodiversity, sustainable food production and consumption, universal human rights, the consequences of urbanisation and the economic and social ramifications of globalisation. A cognitive understanding of the challenges is however not sufficient: education for sustainable development as well as the concept of global citizenship education must



be implemented to a greater extent in order to promote a civil society that is able to make the right decisions, critically reflect on its own behaviour and collective behaviour, and then act accordingly. The urgency posed by problems around the world requires swift action, which is why ALE has a prominent role to play in this context – after all, it will be the actions of the emerging adult population that will set the course for the sustainable society of the future.

Digital transformation: The consequences of digitalisation are shaping the world of work (Industry 4.0) and have a profound impact on the way our societies function at all levels. The digital transformation is permeating and changing every aspect of life, from the healthcare sector to communication and the formation of opinions. ALE enables people to participate in the digital transformation primarily by providing programmes that enable them to master the new digital tools. It also has a central role to play when it comes to enabling people to understand and reflect on the functionalities and interrelationships behind the digital transformation. This makes ALE a central building block in securing people's participation in work and society, and an indispensable basis for informed decision-making in social processes.

Migration: More than 280 million people live outside their own country, and many more have migrated or fled within their own country. Migration is a global phenomenon whose causes are manifold: Among the most common motives are the search for better opportunities in life, fleeing from oppression, war, and environmental damage. As a result of internal demographic change, more and more countries are

also recruiting workers from elsewhere. ALE plays a central role in these contexts. It enables language-related, professional and social participation in the new home country. It also plays an indispensable role in preparing people for emigration. And it improves relations between the local population and the new arrivals by creating understanding, breaking down prejudices and facilitating encounters.

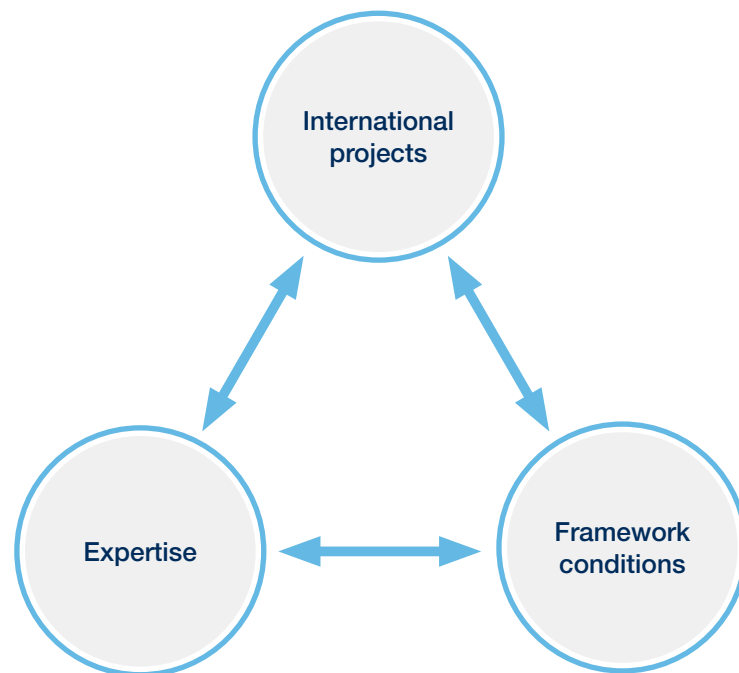
Securing democratic values: The majority of the world's population today lives in systems that have no democratically guaranteed freedom. The number of states ruled by autocrats or dictators, and the influence of actors that are not under democratic control, particularly in the global economy, is increasing. Added to this is the recent significant narrowing of the spaces available to civil society organisations in many countries around the world (shrinking spaces). Populist and nationalist forces are also gaining influence in Germany and Europe, while at the same time it is still difficult for us to accept responsibility for the consequences of colonialism and post-colonialism and to engage in a dialogue with other cultures on an equal footing. These factors must be countered with prudent and flexible concepts. It is especially important to maintain formats for dialogue and to strengthen the resilience of civil society. Civic education (especially citizenship education) for young people and adults is of central importance in this environment in order to enable people to actively participate in political processes at the local, national and global level, to recognise their own interests and to defend them. ●

3 Goals and strategic fields of action

Education for all is a human right. In terms of lifelong learning, this applies to all age groups. Lifelong learning is also a central building block for the reduction of poverty and infusing of equitable development. In order to achieve this, significantly more needs-orientated and high-quality educational opportunities must be made available for young people and adults in the future – especially for disadvantaged groups in the population. Our goal is to strengthen and develop youth and adult education structures worldwide. Political recognition and public awareness of ALE must increase. Funding must be significantly increased.

With the conviction that ALE plays an indispensable role in overcoming key challenges and that this requires solid and sustainable structures, three fields of action for the strategic orientation of DVV International's work can be identified. First: **International adult education projects**, that we develop and implement with our partners at the local level. Second: As a specialist professional organisation, **we provide expertise** at the interface of adult education, development and international cooperation, whereby access to the knowledge we have acquired at home and abroad plays a central role. Third: We work in collaboration with our network partners to **improve the framework conditions for adult education**. These fields of action are closely interlinked – they are mutually dependent and mutually supportive. ●

Fields of action of DVV International



Field of action A

Foster development and cooperation through projects

Young people and adults are at the centre of our project work, which targets various objectives:

In the realm of development cooperation, the situation of disadvantaged target groups in particular should be improved. Deprivation has many faces: poor quality of basic education, or lack of access to it, resulting in unemployment and lack of entry to the labour market, as well as limited opportunities to participate in political and social life. Our projects will therefore continue to pursue a holistic and inclusive approach to education, with the participation of civil society, in order to make an effective contribution to socio-economic, political and social development. We will continue to systematically pursue this approach.

Through this project work, we commit ourselves to longterm and sustainable structural support. Our focus is on the development and construction of sustainable youth and adult education structures. Our commitment is underpinned by our involvement in improving the political framework. We do this by providing advisory services and support to state and international partners in the development of strategies, laws and regulations for adult education and lifelong learning. Equally indispensable is the strengthening of civil society organisations and networks in their lobbying work for ALE.

We additionally facilitate the further training of teaching, administrative and management staff of our partners and their supporting structures. We do this by introducing and testing innovative teaching and learning methods as well as providing support and advice on organisational structure and quality management. Consultancy, exchange and training are

provided by our own employees and our global network of partners and experts. They have access to a unique pool of curricula and guidelines which have been developed in collaboration with our partners.

Educational programmes at grassroots level are mainly dedicated to the priority areas of literacy and remedial basic education, vocational qualification and further training as well as general youth and adult education (political education,





environmental and health education and global and intercultural learning). Our projects illustrate the effectiveness of investments in ALE and thus make an important contribution worldwide to the abatement of poverty and hunger, to the prevention of health problems, to the equitable management of transformational global change and to gender equality.

Our projects build bridges for encounter, exchange and understanding between people from different social or

demographic contexts. Especially in times of growing tensions, adult education helps to bring people together and break down prejudices. In this we support the German adult education centres (Volkshochschulen) and our international partners by initiating networking projects and promoting intercultural understanding.

Ultimately, our projects contribute to the creation of a global sense of responsibility for the fate of our planet, its people and our future generations. To this end, we utilise the educational concepts of Education for Sustainable Development and Global Citizenship Education. Through the combined networks of some 850 German adult education centres and our more than 200 partners worldwide, we reach a broad and diverse range of target groups in Germany, Europe and around the world. ●

Field of action B

Develop and expand expertise

We are the only specialist organisation in the world for adult education, international cooperation and development. Our expertise is made up of several building blocks: the experience and knowledge from our international project work, which we have been carrying out for 50 years with today more than 200 partners in over 30 countries; our active participation in international adult education networks and associations and, last but not least, the work of around 850 adult education centres (vhs) and their associations in Germany. These global partner networks give the work of DVV International a unique profile.

We strengthen adult education as a central component of lifelong learning by providing expertise. It enables us to highlight the role of ALE for the 2030 Agenda, in particular the education goal, even more clearly. In addition, we want to emphasise ALE's contribution to tackling key issues such as the equitable ecological restructuring of the economy and society or the digital transformation. This also means highlighting interdependencies with key areas of development cooperation such as health, displacement and migration, gender equality and democracy education. Our goal is to make clear that the solution to global challenges cannot succeed without sustainable adult education structures and the active involvement of civil society.

An important role in the provision of specialist professional expertise and findings is played by digital and print publications, particularly in the form of position papers and technical specialist papers, as is the organisation and support of



professional and specialist conferences. Through research, we facilitate dialogue on important adult education topics. The creation and dissemination of curricula, handbooks and other teaching and learning materials on topics relating to the training and further education of adult educators, organisational development, gender-sensitive project work and policy advice also play an important role.

In the future we will continue to support the critical examination of approaches to work, methods and products within the global network and contribute our expertise to the technical dialogue with politicians and civil society. Virtual formats (internet, social media, platforms, online events) will play an even greater role in this process. Therefore, we will forge alliances with new partners, intensify cooperation with existing partners such as UNESCO or the International Council for Adult Education (ICAE), and strengthen knowledge cycles between continuing education in Germany and abroad. The knowledge gained will be utilised for national and international project work and for the expansion of lobbying and advocacy. ●

Field of action C

Improve framework conditions worldwide

The global improvement of the framework conditions for ALE is one of our core missions. Lobby work and advocacy for the human right to education and lifelong learning is carried out together with national, regional and global associations and networks. We show the manifold success and potential of adult education in a targeted manner and demonstrate its importance for development policy processes, the achievement of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals and the strengthening of peaceful and democratic coexistence. Dialogue between civil society and government partners, which has recently become increasingly difficult, is what we facilitate. In doing so, we emphasise our humanistic understanding of education and our belief in the power of education to lay the foundations for the broad-based participation of large sections of the population in the ongoing processes of change. We reaffirm our understanding of ALE as a public good and advocate for greater attention from the international donor community, central global structures and the governments of our partner countries.

Here we also draw on our worldwide project experience and our professional and specialist expertise (fields of action A and B). As part of the international adult education community, we shape global processes in favour of development, peace and security.

We lobby and advocate for ALE through various channels: Within the framework of our social structure support projects we engage with government partners at the

national level to advise and support them in the creation of improved legal frameworks and ALE strategies, and support civil society networks in their lobbying work. As part of the German Adult Education Association, we have been actively involved in the European Adult Education Association (EAEA) for many years and are committed to raising the profile of ALE in the European Union. Our work ultimately centres on efforts to strengthen ALE at the global level. Along with our partners, we want to firmly emphasise that the global Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) cannot succeed without ALE. As part of the CONFINTEA world conferences on adult education organised by UNESCO, we actively advocate for a holistic understanding of ALE and work toward improving its institutional and financial framework conditions.

We want to further expand our lobbying and advocacy work. In collaboration with our partners, we will continue to engage critically and constructively in discussions on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda in order to better position youth and adult education in the political education process, to increase budgets and to enable effective structures and programmes. Therefore, we will continue in the future to contribute our expertise to the public discourse at all levels – at the interface of adult education, international cooperation, development, and through position papers, professional specialist conferences and other media – in the conviction that the complex processes of change that lie before us can only succeed if we put a greater emphasis on youth and adult education. ●

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DVV International is the Institute for International Cooperation of the German Adult Education Association (DVV). DVV International provides worldwide support for the development and expansion of sustainable youth and adult education structures and cooperates with more than 200 civil society, government and academic partners in over 30 countries in Africa, Asia, Latin America and Europe.

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