

Adult learning and education in the context of CONFINTEA and the SDG agenda

Findings from Armenia, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine
with country case studies by Avetik Mejlumyan,
Tamar Samkharadze, Tudor Lazar and Mykyta Andrieiev
Heribert Hinzen and Ravshan Baratov (Editors)

International Perspectives in Adult Education – IPE 82

The reports, studies and materials published in this series aim to further the development of theory and practice in adult learning and education (ALE). We hope that by providing access to information and a channel for communication and exchange, the series will serve to increase knowledge, deepen insights and improve cooperation in ALE at the international level.

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Editorial

The seventh World Conference on Adult Learning and Education, CONFINTEA VII, took place in Marrakesh, Morocco, from 15 to 17 June 2022. The organisers chose the programmatic title “Adult learning and education for sustainable development – a transformative agenda”, making it clear that, in their view, adult learning and education (ALE) must be an integral part of the challenging transformations of our time. This conviction proved to be the supporting narrative for the entire event and is reflected in many ways in the final document, as its title alone makes clear: “Marrakech Framework for Action: harnessing the transformational power of adult learning and education” (MFA). The document makes it clear that the global Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) cannot be achieved without ALE, and that lifelong learning can only be realised if ALE is considered an integral, indispensable component.

Like no other education sector, ALE is characterised by a strong involvement of non-governmental partners. This relates firstly to implementation: a large percentage, if not the majority, of the programmes are provided by civil society, non-commercial and commercial providers. However, this also relates to the representation of interests for the concerns of ALE, which is primarily covered by civil society networks. Fortunately, this was also reflected in the preparation and realisation of CONFINTEA VII. The civil society networks were closely involved in the preparation process, for which UNESCO, as one of the main organisers of the event, deserves special thanks. On the day before the conference, there was the opportunity to coordinate the positions and demands of civil society at a special CSO forum. The focus here was on emphasising education – in the sense of lifelong learning – as a human right, as well as the concerns about the restriction of opportunities for civil society in many countries (shrinking spaces), and the demand for sustainable and adequate funding of ALE by nation states and the international community.

As the final document of CONFINTEA VII, the MFA contains a whole series of pioneering and progressive demands. The demands for the creation of independent adult education centres (Community Learning Centres), the call for benchmarks for participation in ALE and the call on national governments and the donor community to include ALE more strongly in the financing of education are just a few examples. It is now up to us, but also to UNESCO as the organisation managing the follow-up

process, to give voice and weight to this content. Only in this way can the efforts invested in the CONFINTEA process, in particular by civil society actors, have an impact.

The GRALE (Global Report on Adult Learning and Education), a report format that was created as part of CONFINTEA VI in Belem, Brazil, is a key instrument here. The aim was and is to collect and analyse data and facts on the state of ALE worldwide and to investigate whether and how the resolutions of the CONFINTEA conferences are being implemented by the UNESCO member states. The UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL) is responsible for the conceptualisation and implementation of the GRALE reports, which represent a unique source for many regions of the world to learn more about the needs of the ALE sector and the state it is in. From a civil society perspective, it is particularly important to ensure that both the concept development process and the subsequent creation of the GRALE itself are participatory, involving as many relevant stakeholders as possible, and are not limited to an exclusive focus on state actors or technocratic procedures. It is important to keep up our efforts at persuasion of the reluctant and raise our voices!

DVV International's commitment to the CONFINTEA process goes back decades. We were, and still are of the opinion that CONFINTEA and, specifically, the respective final declarations, are key instruments for advocacy at the global, regional and national level, especially in regions where no truly influential regional structures exist.

With the establishment of GRALE as the only existing reporting format on ALE, this conviction has been strengthened once again. We have had very good experiences with the use of CONFINTEA documents in lobbying work in regions as diverse as the Western Balkans, Central Asia and Latin America. We are firmly convinced that these positive effects can also be expected from the MFA and the new GRALE formats. This is particularly true in the context of the discussion about the successor concepts to the SDGs, i.e. the definition of the global development goals after 2030, which will begin very soon. We undoubtedly have good arguments in favour of demanding greater recognition of ALE in a changing world in which people need an education process which will make them fit for the changes which are coming.

I am very grateful that our continental project "Europe" has taken the initiative and made the processes associated with CONFINTEA available, particularly to the regions of the eastern neighbourhood. Conversely, they have made the debates there accessible beyond the region through the articles in this IPE.

Uwe Gartenschlaeger, Director DVV International, Bonn

Executive Summary

In 2022 the Regional Office “Eastern Neighbours” of the Institute for International Cooperation of the German Adult Education Association (DVV International) initiated the Continental Exchange project covering six countries in Europe: Armenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, Kosovo, Republic of Moldova, and Ukraine. The main objective of the project is to improve policy frameworks for Adult Learning and Education (ALE) based on national and regional best practices and experiences and to strengthen the contribution of ALE-Centres’ to the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The work is financed by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ).

UNESCO has been organising global high-level events on Adult Learning and Education (ALE) since 1949. The most recent – Seventh International Conference on Adult Education (CONFINTEA VII) – was hosted by the Kingdom of Morocco in June 2022.

CONFINTEA VII plays a significant role in helping Member States in their efforts to achieve the SDGs – SDG 4 on quality education in particular – by adopting the MFA (Marrakech Framework for Action), a new framework that replaced the Belém Framework for Action.¹

In order to identify the priorities shared by civil society and governments, it is necessary to translate the visions embedded in the MFA into the national context in a more efficient and sustainable way. In this regard, in 2022, the Continental project in cooperation with the European Association for the Education of Adults (EAEA) held an online follow-up workshop on CONFINTEA VII results, which provided a brief overview of the CONFINTEA process and reviewed and reflected on the recommendations of the Marrakech Framework for Action.

The objective of the work behind this publication was to collect, review and document priority MFA-topics and recommendations for their

¹ Available online at: unesdoc.unesco.org/in/rest/annotationSVC/DownloadWatermarkedAttachment/attach_import_6d51378f-96c2-4813-9c60-c6d7dd47cd48?_=382306eng.pdf&to=20&from=1

implementation on the national level from the civil society in Armenia, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine.

In terms of methodology, it was agreed that a participatory approach should be employed, whereby stakeholders and partners should be involved from the outset. While the responsibility for successful implementation rested with the contracted experts, it was acknowledged that the ownership of the findings and identified recommendations should remain with the partners. The strategy of placing partners at the forefront did not preclude the necessity of involving all levels of responsibility from within DVV International. The input of information, perspectives, and support from the respective colleagues in headquarters, the regional, and country offices was essential.

In all four countries, the central tenet of this participatory approach was to engage with national or local actors in order to generate and collect country-specific information based on interviews, discussions and data analysis. While the similarities were beneficial in developing regional or global perspectives, it was crucial to also consider the differences when synthesising and comparing the information. This required that the differences are presented and discussed within the context of the report. Throughout the process, partners remained engaged through the provision of input and feedback in multiple rounds.

The country reports presented here contain a wealth of information, ideas, data, documents, suggestions and recommendations. They should be read as the perspectives of civil society on important aspects of recent developments in the field of Adult Learning and Education (ALE) and Lifelong Learning (LLL) in their respective countries. Furthermore, they can be seen as a means for the direct or indirect implementation of the recently adopted Marrakech Framework for Action (MFA) and the previously established Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Each of the country reports has developed a set of recommendations and suggestions that will hopefully be taken up by the respective government authorities. Several of the potential activities could be pursued through joint efforts with civil society actors, academia or the private sector.

Looking at these reports through a comparative lens, there is also potential to work beyond the national level. This would require cooperation and networking at the regional level to contribute to the implementation of the MFA and the SDGs in areas such as:

Policy, legislation and financing: Governance frameworks must be developed which will ensure the recognition and support structures for ALE are no less than those for other subsectors of the education system. Despite the varying levels of achievement attained by countries and

governments, there is a clear consensus that all can do more to support the development of ALE.

Institutionalisation, professionalisation and digitalisation: ALE requires similar institutions and facilities as other forms of education and training. Additionally, there is a need for professionals who are trained and retrained to plan and implement ALE. These areas are subject to accelerated digitalisation processes, which offer opportunities and challenges.

General, civic and vocational: ALE has not yet reached the level of understanding and recognition that is needed for a holistic approach which fosters all areas of general, basic, civic, environmental, initial and continuing aspects of vocational education and training.

Inclusion – leave no one behind: ALE is a universal concept applicable to all adults. However, there are specific target groups that deserve particular attention. While the relative priorities of different countries may vary, it is essential to ensure that gender equality, adequate services for people with disabilities, migrants, refugees, minorities and people in rural areas are included in any plan of action.

Glossary and terminology: It is evident that there are still a considerable number of terms in use which reflect various historical contexts yet simultaneously impede the formulation of policy decisions and the implementation of joint efforts. Consequently, the recommendation is that ALE – the standard term – be used. A glossary related to ALE terminology, with translations where necessary, should also be provided.

Government, civil society and academia: A number of examples from countries around the world demonstrate how strengthening the golden triangle can be improved. It is evident that governments cannot act alone in this regard. Universities can engage in research that benefits the ALE sector, thereby achieving their third mission. Civil society actors are also important because they can be relevant providers.

Networking and cooperation: The establishment and growth of ALE associations, networks and platforms is a notable accomplishment and a pleasure to see. While they are playing a pivotal role in joint advocacy efforts and capacity building, it is also essential to enhance their capacity to perform their work more effectively.

Heribert Hinzen

Introduction: CONFINTEA process and the SDG Agenda

This reflection is part of a project that was started in 2022 by the Regional Office “Eastern Neighbours” of the Institute for International Cooperation of the German Adult Education Association (DVV International), covering six countries in Europe: Armenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, Kosovo, Republic of Moldova, and Ukraine. Its main objective is to improve policy frameworks for Adult Learning and Education (ALE) and to strengthen ALE-centres’ contribution to the implementation of the SDGs – based on best national and regional practices and experiences as well as good international expertise. The work is financed by Germany’s Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ).

Participatory process

In terms of methodology, it was agreed that a participatory approach should be employed, whereby stakeholders and partners should be involved from the outset. While the responsibility for successful implementation rested with the contracted experts, it was acknowledged that the ownership of the findings and identified recommendations should remain with the partners. Constant and open communication and feedback was therefore essential. The strategy of placing partners at the forefront did not preclude the necessity of involving all levels of responsibility from within DVV International.

An important first step was the invitation to share, in their respective countries, documents and materials produced in the run-up to, during, or as a follow-up to the Marrakech Conference. Based on their review, a number of questions emerged on how partners have perceived the MFA follow-up in their countries so far, whether they have possible suggestions for the successful implementation of the planned project, and how they would like to be involved. In this way, it was possible to create and provide an overview of all the activities and discussions that had been initiated so far by the partners in their countries, whether from civil society, academia or government.

In order to facilitate the generation of information and ideas for future MFA implementation, guidelines and guiding questions were developed in collaboration with national experts. These were designed to support focus group discussions at the national level, which could be either online or in-person, but facilitated by national experts. The objective was to share information and recommendations from the country level, particularly from a civil society perspective.

In all four countries, the fundamental aspect of the participatory approach was to engage with national or local stakeholders to generate and collate country-specific information based on interviews, discussions and data analysis. While the similarities were beneficial in facilitating the synthesis and comparison of regional or global perspectives, it was equally important to acknowledge the differences between the cases. These are presented and discussed within the framework of the report.

The incoming documents permitted an initial comprehension of the way partners and offices had been engaged in the preparation for CONFINTEA VII. This included an understanding of the extent of participation in the conference, whether in person or online, and the subsequent debriefing following the adoption of the MFA. The examination of the materials in question revealed a diversity of categories. A deeper analysis of the situation of ALE policy and practice has been conducted in Armenia and

Georgia, with the results presented in a series of studies published in recent years (Avramovska et al. 2021a, 2021b, 2021c, 2021d).

A more systematic approach was chosen in Armenia where the International ALE Agenda and the Republic of Armenia was discussed in a chapter of *Adult Education in Armenia – Study of Policies and Practices. Review of the State of Affairs and Developing Recommendations for Integration in Policy Framework and Practice* (DfW International 2020). Representation of Armenia in Marrakech was well prepared, and therefore the CONFINTEA VII follow-up seemed to have been possible in a special way: The Education Minister provided a speech which is now available as a video on YouTube. Further on, the Yerevan State University (YSU) was able to involve staff and students in topical research projects which are now in a final stage and being translated. A closing conference had to be deferred to 2024 because of the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh.

In Georgia there seems to be a serious follow-up to earlier attempts of the Skills Agency, DfW International and other partners, to bring ALE closer to skills development, which includes initial as well as continuing vocational education and training (IVET and TVET), both of which are cornerstones of the *2022-2030 Unified National Strategy of Education and Science of Georgia* (Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia 2022) which takes up important areas agreed upon by UN member states for the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) and their implementation at country level (UN 2015).

Moldova reported on a variety of activities of civil society and policy developments within the government. A report by Pro Didactica for the European Association for the Education of Adults (EAEA) mentioned the CONFINTEA process. However, participation from the Moldovan Government in Marrakech did not materialise. Civil society is closely monitoring the *Strategy Education 2030* process in respect to ALE and non-formal education towards lifelong learning.

The full-scale invasion of Ukraine by Russia has created a critical situation for ALE in the country. Activities are limited, and the imposition of martial law has resulted in a drastic reduction in the Ukrainian government's support for education at all levels.

A key concern in all the consultations between and within countries has been the importance of institutionalising and professionalising ALE. This has involved supporting local ALE institutions such as CLCs, as well as related governance mechanisms in policy, legislation, and financing – within the framework of lifelong learning. In analysing the results from the country reports, a comparative lens will be applied to identify commonalities and similarities between countries, as well as differences.

CONFINTEA as a process and the SDG agenda

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) was founded in 1945 just after the end of World War 2. UNESCO is the most important international organisation for ALE and its parent body, the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL). All our governments are UNESCO member states. In its constitution you will find: “Since wars begin in the minds of men and women, it is in the minds of men and women that the defences of peace must be constructed.” (UNESCO 1966).

It will be seen in this chapter that from its early beginnings UNESCO received continuous support from civil society as a sort of “critical friend” in developing ALE as a subsector of the education system, as part of lifelong learning, as a provision at the local level, as a profession and an academic discipline. UNESCO welcomed this support at the global level through organisations like ICAE, at the regional level like EAEA, or at the national level through organisations based in member states, like DVV for Germany.

DVV International has extended this support into many areas and countries over the past 50 years (Hirsch et al. 2019). Reflections on policies, legislation and finances have been high in demand as strong framework conditions seem to be requirements for achievements to be made. In order to advance the MFA, DVV International supported two studies which increased the information and understanding of financing ALE. The ICAE study on *Financing adult learning and education: The way forward: what works, how and why?* (Popović 2021) which looked at global financing mechanisms, while the study *Public Financing of Popular Adult Learning and Education (ALE). Experiences, lessons and recommendations from 14 country and case studies* (Duke et al. 2021) was focused on experiences of publicly financing popular, community, civic or liberal forms of ALE, and what could be learned for respective discussions and decisions in Marrakech. One of the case studies was *Public financing of popular adult learning and education in Ukraine* (Smirnow, Andrieiev 2021), which was written before the Russian invasion changed so much.

In advancing CONFINTEA VII, the *International Review of Education, Journal of Lifelong Learning* came up with a special issue on *Strengthening the Future of Adult Education and Lifelong Learning for All: Building Bridges between CONFINTEA and the SDGs* (Benavot et al. 2022). The introductory essay on *Reimagining adult education and lifelong learning for all: Historical and critical perspectives* recommended: “ALE financing should be fully embedded and concretised in policy and legislation and move beyond well-intentioned political commitments. Without an urgent increase in financing, the potential role of ALE to respond to the major crises of our time will go under/unrealised” (Benavot et al. 2022).

UNESCO World Conferences

The first international conference dealing with adult education under the auspices of UNESCO took place in 1949 in Elsinore, Denmark, sinore by making proper use of the premises of the local folk high school (UNESCO 1949). Peace building and the reconstruction of societies was the priority, but also the early start of rebuilding education for adults as a practice, and building the body of adult education as a profession, with support from governments and universities. This formed a nucleus for all the global gatherings to follow. Since the establishment of the conference in the 1970s, the acronym CONFINTEA (*Conférence internationale sur l'éducation des adultes*), coming from the French language, has been used.

A quick overview (Knoll 2014) of the different CONFINTEAs, which were organised about every twelve years since then, may read as follows: As for 1960 in Montreal, the deliberations were strongly influenced by the then decolonisation process, especially in African and Asian countries, when the new nation states were claiming their rights in a changed global architecture and demanding respect for their needs in the education of adults, with literacy as a major basic skill. CONFINTEA III took place in 1972 when the adult education community met in Tokyo to construct adult education as a subsector of education systems, with the necessary components of policy and practice, institutionalisation and professionalisation, as well as including adult education as an academic discipline, viewed from the local via the national to the global level.

1985 was dominated by the Cold War, with a frosty atmosphere, but still creative enough to bring forward *The Right to Learn* (UNESCO 1985) as the concluding document, which if compared to other declarations almost reads like a poem. 1997 was CONFINTEA V, which may have been the largest adult education gathering up to that point, with a strong civil society participation who made their voices heard through the *Hamburg Declaration and the Agenda for the Future* (UNESCO 1997). 2009 was CONFINTEA VI in Belém, again with high civil society participation and in coordination with the almost back-to-back World Social Forum. The Belém Framework for Action (BFA) was strong on areas like policy, governance, financing, participation, inclusion, equity and quality, which later influenced other global education processes (UIL 2010). The BFA called for regular monitoring. UIL followed-up by installing the Global Report on Adult Learning and Education (GRALE) that comes every three years, with the 5th GRALE on *Citizenship education: empowering adults for change* (UIL 2022b) tabled in Marrakech. We will come back to CONFINTEA VII (2022) a little later and with more details, especially with an orientation on the role civil society played in advocacy before (Duke, Hinzen 2022) and after (Denholm et al. 2022).

World Education Fora

In between, we should throw some light on a few interconnected agendas, like the World Education Fora. The first one was held in 1990 in Jomtien and produced the *World declaration on education for all and Framework for action to meet basic learning needs* (WCEFA 1990). In 2000, in Dakar, the World Education Forum (WEF) came up with the widely quoted declaration on *Education for All (EFA)*. It already had a fresh perspective and was looking at education throughout life with early childhood, schooling and vocational training, as well as higher education (WEF 2000). It was, however, weak in respect to adults and the older generations which led civil society to talk of EFA as *Except for Adults* (Khan 2000). This could later be seen in the Millennium Development Goals (UN 2000), when universal primary education was the only education priority which was included.

An important outcome of Dakar was the request for an annual *Global Monitoring Report on Education for All* (GMR on EFA) which subsequently offered the deeper analysis on important thematic areas like gender or quality, youth and skills or inclusive education. The last version was *Education for people and planet: Creating sustainable futures for all* (UNESCO 2016), before it was transformed into the Global Education Monitoring (GEM), whereby the last two issues on *Non-state actors in education: Who chooses? Who loses?* (UNESCO 2021b) as well as *Technology in education: a tool on whose terms?* (UNESCO 2023) are of high relevance to the education, training and learning of adults.

2015 saw the WEF in Incheon, which concluded with its most important overarching goal to “Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all” (WEF 2016: 20). On the negative side, there were no clear targets for ALE, only indirect requests for all learners, which of course includes adults. On the positive side it should be mentioned that there was a strong sustainability agenda for all education: “By 2030, ensure that all learners acquire 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” (WEF 2016: 48).

Sustainable Development Goals

A few months later the outcome from the WEF, the *Incheon Declaration and Framework for Action for the implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 4* (WEF 2016), became part of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDG). The SDGs were adopted by the UN in their summit late in 2015 for the years 2015-2030 (UN 2015).

Goal 4 is Quality Education as to “Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all”. All in all, there are 10 targets listed, and out of those, the four quoted here are of high relevance for us in ALE:

- 4.3 By 2030, ensure equal access for all women and men to affordable and quality technical, vocational and tertiary education, including university
- 4.4 By 2030, substantially increase the number of youth and adults who have relevant skills, including technical and vocational skills, for employment, decent jobs and entrepreneurship
- 4.5 By 2030, eliminate gender disparities in education and ensure equal access to all levels of education and vocational training for the vulnerable, including persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples and children in vulnerable situations
- 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” (WEF 2016: 20, 21).

Very important for peace is Goal 16 on Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions, which “is about promoting peaceful and inclusive societies, providing access to justice for all and building effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels. People everywhere should be free of fear from all forms of violence and feel safe as they go about their lives whatever their ethnicity, faith or sexual orientation... However, ongoing and new violent conflicts around the world are derailing the global path to peace and achievement of Goal 16.”

Other important goals in respect to sustainable development are Goal 7 Affordable and Clean Energy; Goal 11 Sustainable Cities and Communities; Goal 12 Responsible Consumption and Production; Goal 13 Climate Action. Growing common ground is that to achieve any of these goals, quality education for all in a lifelong perspective is needed, and ALE can be a key component in the process (Schweighöfer 2019).

Recommendation on Adult Learning and Education

The *UNESCO Recommendation on Adult Learning and Education (RALE)* brought together major developments, experiences and insights in light of the BFA and the SDG (UN 2015). It was a revision of the earlier *Recommendation on the Development of Adult Education* (UNESCO 1976) which had been called for in the BFA. It is also a sort of normative document which was adopted by the UNESCO General Conference in 2015, through all UNESCO Member States, including of course Armenia, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine. When defining ALE the document begins with:

“Adult learning and education is 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, organisations and societies.”

RALE summarises the diversity of activities within three domains following a variety of pathways:

“The types of adult learning and education activities vary widely. Adult learning and education includes many learning opportunities for equipping adults with literacy and basic skills; for continuing training and professional development, and for active citizenship, through what is variously known as community, popular or liberal education. Adult learning and education provides a variety of learning pathways and flexible learning opportunities, including second chance programmes to make up for lack of initial schooling, including for people who have never been to school, early school leavers and drop outs.”

The rapid changes in ALE through increased digitalisation since COVID 19 may call for some revision of RALE soon. Unclear so far is also the future impact of artificial intelligence. Meanwhile there is this statement:

“Information and communication technologies (ICT) are seen as holding great potential for improving access by adults to a variety of learning opportunities and promoting equity and inclusion. They offer various innovative possibilities for realizing lifelong learning, reducing the dependence on traditional formal structures of education and permitting individualised learning. Through mobile devices, electronic networking, social media and online courses, adult learners can have access to opportunities to learn anytime and anywhere”. (UNESCO 2015: 2)

UNESCO reports

So far there have been three more far-reaching reports by independent international commissions which reflect on past developments and augur for a brighter future.

The first was the so-called Faure Report *Learning to be: The world of education today and tomorrow* (Faure et al. 1972), coming around the same time as *The World Educational Crisis* (Combs 1968) as well as a more general discussion in *The Limits to Growth* (Meadows et al. 1972) which already, back in the early 1970s, highlighted the educational, economic and ecological challenges which we face today. The chairperson of the Commission was Edgar Faure, a former Education Minister of France, and the importance of the report has just been analysed in *The Faure Report – 50 Years on* (Elfert & Draxler 2022). Reflections on adult education were only marginal.

The second was the so-called Delors Report *Learning: The treasure within. Report to UNESCO of the International Commission on Education for the Twenty-first century* (Delors et al. 1996). It came about 25 years after the Faure Report and the chairperson at this time was the President of the European Commission. “Learning to live together” is one of the four pillars, next to “learning to know, learning to do and learning to be”. The International Council for Adult Education (ICAE) was invited to contribute a statement; it was titled *Adult education and lifelong learning: Issues, concerns and recommendations* (ICAE 1994).

The third was *Reimagining our futures together: A new social contract for education*, with Sahle-Work Zewde as Chair of the International Commission; she is the President of the Federal Democratic Republic

of Ethiopia. There is a chapter on adult education which is based on the perspective of education as a human right – including all adults. A few quotations may help to understand its orientation: “We are no longer well served by framing the right to education simply around schooling. Everyone everywhere should have a right to lifelong learning. Learning should be lifelong, life-wide, with weight and recognition given to adult education.” (UNESCO 2021a: 117)

As an organisation, the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL) has taken all these more recent developments in LLL on board its agenda. This began when it changed its name from the UNESCO Institute for Education (UIE). It has also produced and widely disseminated *Making lifelong learning a reality: A handbook* (UIL 2022a) to guide and help interested persons and organisations.

At this stage we must also acknowledge the contribution of the International Council for Adult Education (ICAE). At on the invitation of the International Commission, they formed a writer’s group which produced a statement titled *Adult Learning and Education (ALE) – Because the future cannot wait*. It stressed two important areas in the context of ALE institutionalisation and professionalisation: “strengthening the institutional structures (like community learning centres, for delivering ALE) and securing the role of ALE staff” as well as “improving in-service and pre-service education, further education, training, capacity building and employment conditions of adult educators”. (ICAE 2020).

Marrakech 2022

CONFINTEA VII was the first in the series organised in a hybrid mode. In addition to those who travelled to Marrakech, there was a similarly large participation online. In accordance with the war-stricken realities of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, and the crises, conflicts and wars in other parts of the world, the Marrakech Framework for Action (MFA) deepened the peace perspective: “Quality education and lifelong learning are important mechanisms for implementing SDG 4 and are also prerequisites for ... just, peaceful, inclusive, violence-free societies ... and climate action” (UIL 2022b). Further on, in clause 12: “At a time when societies are threatened by rising fanaticism and violent extremism, growing distrust in science and rising inequalities within and between countries, we reaffirm that ALE can constitute a powerful policy response to consolidate social cohesion, enhance socio-emotional skill development, secure peace, strengthen democracy, improve cultural understanding, eliminate all types

of discrimination, and promote peaceful living together and active and global citizenship.”

The MFA strengthens the understanding of ALE in two dimensions: On the one hand it is an important component of education or even a prerequisite towards the fulfilment of all SDGs. On the other hand, we have to see ALE as part of the right to education in a lifelong perspective as outlined in clause 36 “Quality education and lifelong learning are important mechanisms for implementing SDG 4 and are also prerequisites for poverty reduction (SDG 1), health and well-being (SDG 3), gender equality (SDG 5), reduced inequalities (SDG 10), gainful employment and decent jobs (SDG 8), inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable cities (SDG 11), just, peaceful, inclusive, violence-free societies (SDG 16) and climate action (SDG 13). Furthermore, adult education is part of the right to education and crucial for the realisation of all human rights.”

Looking at the MFA in terms of its contribution to the institutionalisation and professionalisation of ALE as a subsector of the education system, as a profession and an academic discipline, we are inclined to say that it adopted a set of very relevant recommendations which civil society can make use of in its advocacy with governments on a national and local level. It states in clause 22: “We recognise the value of multi-sectoral platforms to support the governance of ALE with all relevant and key actors, including in particular ministries, civil society organisations, youth, the private sector, universities and ALE providers. We also underline the importance of dialogue between workers and employers, and their organisational structures, which, in many countries, contributes to governance – particularly in terms of continuing professional development.”

In the capacity building and training of adult educators, universities are seen as important partners. Clause 26 states: “We stress the key role of teachers and educators, including volunteer tutors and other professionals engaged in adult learning and education. We commit to implementing policies and strategies to upskill and further professionalise and specialise adult educators through pre-service, in-service and continuing training – in association with universities and research institutes – and by improving their working conditions, including their salaries, status and professional development trajectories. We further recognise ALE competency frameworks as strategic instruments for the professionalisation of educators and the enhancement of their qualifications” (UIL 2022b: 7).

ICAE was deeply involved in CONFINTEA VII and concluded the Civil Society Forum on the eve of the Marrakech conference with a Declaration on *Adult Learning and Education – Because the future cannot wait* which started with the following principle: “First and foremost, ALE is a

fundamental human right of all youth, adults and older adults – both women and men – a public endeavour and a global common good, of which the state is the main duty bearer. This implies recognizing its twin vocation: as a right in itself and as an enabling contributor to poverty reduction, gender equality, and sustainable development.” (ICAE 2022: 2)

Looking at CONFINTEA as a process with regular conferences approximately every twelve years, it became clearer how these different instruments and activities are interconnected: the findings and recommendations of the BFA, SDG and RALE, the UNESCO Reports of GEM, GRALE and on the Futures of Education are all overlapping. The unfortunate reality of underachievement, however, is also shown quite clearly through the monitoring reports, with implementation and impact lagging far behind.

Adult education and community learning centres

The DVV International Regional Project aims at improving governing frameworks for ALE on the basis of international and national experiences and practices, thereby leading to the strengthening of adult education centres (ALC) and their contributions to achieving the SDGs.

With the institutionalisation of ALE, it is important to consider places for adults and non-formal education, such as community learning centres (CLC). There are adult education centres in a number of countries, for instance in Georgia, in Japan – where they are called Kominkan –, in Nordic countries – where they call them folk high schools –, and in the Republic of Korea where they have lifelong learning centres (Belete et al. 2022). What they all have in common is that they are specific institutions and places for the education of adults and usually have a variety of providers, programmes and participants. Volkshochschulen are the German version of the CLC; they were established in 1919, when they became part of the German constitution (Hinzen & Meilhammer 2022).

In civil society advocacy, the professionalisation and institutionalisation of ALE and its support through respective policy, legislation and financing has always been a key recommendation. DVV International and its partners took up this challenge and created the *ALE Toolbox*, which contains a number of instruments to strengthen institutionalisation and professionalisation, starting a decade ago with the Curriculum globALE, which has become a recommended tool by UNESCO (DVV International 2021).

It may be of interest to have a closer look at the above-mentioned UNESCO-led processes in a perspective of “Harnessing the power and

potential of adult learning and education for a viable future” as it was put as the BFA subtitle. This specific aspect of institutionalisation can be found in the following documents:

BFA: “...creating multi-purpose community learning spaces and centres and improving access to and participation in, the full range of adult learning and education programmes for women, taking account of the particular demands of the gender specific life-course...” (UIL 2010: 8).

SDG: “... make learning spaces and environments for non-formal and adult learning and education widely available, including networks of community learning centres and spaces and provision for access to IT resources as essential elements of lifelong learning” (WEF 2016: 52).

RALE: “...creating or strengthening appropriate institutional structures, like community learning centres, for delivering adult learning and education and encouraging adults to use these as hubs for individual learning as well as community development” (UNESCO 2015: 6).

MFA: “We recognise the importance of strengthening ALE at the local level, as a strategic dimension for planning, design and implementation for learning programmes, and for supporting and (co) funding training and learning initiatives such as community learning centres to be well-resourced with qualified adult educators. We recognise the diversity of learning spaces, such as those in technical and vocational education and training (TVET) and higher education institutions, libraries, museums, workplaces, public spaces, art and cultural institutions, sport and recreation, peer groups, families and others. This means reinforcing institutional capacities for promoting lifelong learning for all at the local level by, for example, encouraging learning city development, as well as fostering the involvement of local stakeholders, including learners, community groups and institutions.” (UNESCO 2022c: 6).

The previously mentioned GEM on *Non-state actors in education: Who chooses? Who loses?* came to the conclusions: “NGO and community organisations are the main providers in adult learning and education... Non-state actors are a driving force in adult learning and education... Community learning centres (CLC) are increasingly recognised as playing an important role in providing education opportunities meetings local communities’ needs” (UNESCO 2021b: 179, 191, 259). These conclusions help substantiate the work of DVV International and its partners.

These recommendations made by member states of the UN and UNESCO in global meetings or general conferences create a normative framework, albeit without being fully normative. They are very much in line with recommendations made when bringing CONFINTEA and the SDGs closer together:

- “Countries should formally acknowledge that the right to education for all includes the right to adult education for all.
- ALE systems should be an acknowledged subsector of a country’s education system (like primary, secondary and higher education) to more fully reflect and act on long-term political and financial commitments in this field.
- Steps should be taken to enhance the provision of, and participation in, ALE within clearly demarcated spaces supported by an explicit infrastructure, one that facilitates local engagement. Community learning centres, for example, and other community-based institutions can be developed as cornerstones to local infrastructure” (Benavot et al. 2022).

However, with all these achievements in mind there is still a certain ambiguity in where we stand and are moving towards as was most recently shown in a study on *Adult Learning and Education within the Framework of Lifelong Learning* which argued:

“In terms of what kind of a policy is needed for ALE, the jury is still out. Some argue for an integrated lifelong learning policy that encompasses all sectors of education. Others caution against this, fearing that it would further marginalise, if not invisibilise, ALE. An overarching ALE policy, should that be an option, must also be considered with caution so as not to limit the ability of local activists and groups to mobilise flexibly and quickly to attend to emerging local issues” (Grotlüschen et al. 2023, 13).

It is a highly interesting study which was supported by DVV International at a time when MFA implementation was just around the corner and will now be relevant for the next seven years. Therefore,

it makes sense to have a look at their recommendations for how to strengthen ALE in LLL for the future:

- build and support sustainable networks and associations;
- build coordination across stakeholders and within sectors that engage with ALE;
- recognise and encourage grassroots efforts that support adult learning in ALE and other sectors;
- support the collection and use of high quality (quantitative and qualitative) data on ALE at both the national and cross-country levels to both advocate for and strengthen provision at the local, state, and national levels;
- highlight and strengthen the role of ALE within LLL by reinforcing the importance of a lifelong and life-wide approach to learning;
- leverage the flexibility and responsiveness of ALE to build on its strengths;
- ensure that ALE meets the wide range of educational, training, and civic needs that learners, employers, and governments have for learning in adulthood; and
- provide meaningful support for ALE at the micro, meso, and macro levels (Grotlüschen et al. 2023: 13, 15).

By now the study has been widely disseminated and will certainly be helpful in orientation and guidance for governments, civil society and academia in their advocacy and implementation of more and better ALE within LLL.

Reflections from the four countries

Within the overall focus of the regional project on the professionalisation of adult education centres there is a central aim to deepen the understanding of key actors in the countries about relevant global processes like CONFINTEA and the SDGs, as well as European policies in respect to ALE. This ensures that these recommendations and experiences are reflected in national discourses and the design of respective governance frameworks, especially towards improved ALE policy, legislation and financing leading to strengthening of institutionalisation and professionalisation.

The project therefore supported the countries already in the process of advancing CONFINTEA VII in Marrakesh through a variety of activities. It also helped with the participation in the conference. A few months later, on 4 October 2022, the “*Regional Online Workshop for reflections on CONFINTEA VII results and the Marrakesh Framework for Action*” allowed for presentations on “*Introduction to the CONFINTEA process and short wrap-up of achievements of previous declarations and reports*” and a “*Review of the CONFINTEA VII and the Marrakech Framework for Action*” followed by comments, questions and answers. Next in line was a panel on “*Advocating and implementing CONFINTEA’s recommendations and acknowledgements onto national policies. Approaches of state authorities and civil society organisations*” with presentations from Finland, Spain and Ukraine. Deepening the discussions and bringing forward experiences from the wider participants was also achieved in respective break-out groups. The Regional Project benefitted from ICAE involvement with the perspective of civil society which was laid out in the Declaration of the Civil Society Forum in Marrakech (ICAE 2022), and thereby highlighted the close collaboration of UNESCO and ICAE in the CONFINTEA process over the past decades (Hinzen 2022).

The international conference on the “*Role of Adult Learning and Education (ALE) in the Development of Local Communities*” was organised in Chişinău from 9-10 November 2022. Keynote presentations on “*The Leadership Role of Local Authorities in delivering SDG 4*” and on “*Cooperation between Local Authorities and Adult Education Centres: Policies and Practices, Examples and Experiences*” provided substantial background for the reflections of case studies that informed

on developments in Georgia, Germany, Greece, Moldova, Sweden and Ukraine. The European level was well represented through the EAEA and the European Training Foundations (ETF). Here again the hybrid mode of online presentations, as well the group work and panel discussions, allowed for wider participation.

In addition, one should mention the number of project activities which are related to the professional exchange during study tours, the capacity building on advocacy measures or the further refinement of Curriculum managerALE¹ for implementation in the region. Strong partners in all these efforts were ICAE and EAEA, amongst others.

All of this led to this initiative of collecting reflections from within Armenia, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine on ALE at the time the MFA was in preparation and after its adoption. A design for a related publication was developed and agreed upon within the sounding board of representatives of DVV International as well as national and international experts. The guiding questions for respective consultations centred on the debriefing process and reflections, especially from a civil society perspective. In as much as the questions were the same for all the national experts, the implementation of the process generating information and discussions varied – and so do the country level findings.

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^{1/} <https://www.dvv-international.de/en/ale-toolbox/organisation-and-management/curriculum-managerale>

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Findings from Armenia

This article investigates the status and impact of Adult Learning and Education (ALE) in Armenia post-CONFINTEA VII. It identifies significant steps taken by DVV International in Armenia and the Armenian government in promoting the Marrakech Framework for Action (MFA).

Despite existing efforts and gains throughout the years, significant challenges remain, including low participation rates in rural areas, insufficient state support, and inadequate infrastructure for ALE.

The study underscores the potential role of civil society in advancing ALE through advocacy, awareness-raising, and direct educational initiatives. It also suggests that integrating sustainable development principles into ALE programmes can enhance their relevance and impact, contributing to multiple Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Future priorities for ALE in Armenia include improving policy coherence, establishing robust governance mechanisms, increasing funding, and ensuring quality in ALE provision. Strengthening the involvement of universities and academic institutions in ALE policy and practice is also highlighted as a critical area for development.

This research paper was prepared by educational consultant Avetik Mejlumyan, who was selected as national expert for this project. While developing this report, he worked closely together with stakeholders and DVV International Armenia. The methodological approach combines desk-research of relevant documents with semi-structured key informant interviews. National legislation and strategies as well as research, analytical reports, policy briefs, media publications and other available data were analysed.

Directed by the results of the desk-research, semi-structured interviews were conducted in person or via video call. The main aims of the interviews were to verify, complement and supplement the preliminary research findings with the practical knowledge and on-site experience of national key informants. Key informants were chosen based on their respective experience and current activity related to adult learning and education (ALE) or non-formal education. Based on the research questions, the key findings of the analysis and surveys are presented below. Analysed data is grouped in 8 main questions/sections which were also part of the questionnaire. A series of discussions and reviews together with DVV International Armenia helped to improve research findings.

1. Could you identify a the debriefing process after the Marrakech conference in your country?

Zhanna Andreasyan, Deputy Minister of Education, Science, Culture and Sport (MoESCS) of the Republic of Armenia had participated in CONFINTEA VII in Marrakech, June 2022. She took the position of Minister in the MoESCS afterwards, in December 2022.

The main outcome of CONFINTEA VII was the adoption of the Marrakech Framework for Action (MFA) by 142 countries. The MFA sets out the key areas for action required to ensure equitable learning opportunities for all and to create a culture of lifelong learning through a holistic approach that encompasses all types of youth and adult learning (formal, non-formal and informal), and various learning sites. Member states, including Armenia, committed to enhancing governance mechanisms and monitoring frameworks as well as improving the quality of adult learning and education through increased investment.

Later in 2023 the newly appointed Minister Zhanna Andreasyan shared her thoughts and insights on the MFA and its relevance for Armenia¹, which was the only example following CONFINTEA VII where a representative of the government referenced priorities related to the MFA.

DVW International Armenia, guided by the decisions and adopted documents of the conference, took steps through its regional and local offices and partners to raise awareness about the conference outcomes, in addition to localizing and implementing the adopted decisions. In this context, in 2022 DVW International Armenia initiated the translation of the MFA into Armenian and shared it with the MoESCS and partner institutions.

From March-October 2023, DVW International Armenia, in cooperation with the Centre of Continuous Education of the Yerevan State University (YSU), implemented the *Research-Based Conference on Adult Learning and Education* initiative, one of the goals of which was the popularisation of the MFA among academia and students, ALE experts, and institutions specialised in ALE. The initiative had 2 main components:

- conducting research in the Armenian context on the directions highlighted in the MFA by university student groups under the guidance of professors/researchers; and
- a final conference based on the research results.

All research and the respective report papers were finalised by October 2023. The final joint conference with YSU on MFA, presenting student research and other panels, is planned to take place in 2024.

Aside from the abovementioned, no other action has been noticed in the civil society field toward MFA reflection.

2. Did your Government take any specific action in respect to ALE – related to CONFINTEA?

There was not direct significant evidence of Government actions after CONFINTEA. However, the Education Development State Programme² (Programme) of Armenia approved in November 2022 includes direct references to ALE and the Action Plan³ specifies the actions undertaken by the

¹ Opening speech and greetings by Zhanna Andreasyan, RA MoESCS, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ldQSzV4JOa8>.

² The state programme for the development of education of the Republic of Armenia until 2030, <https://www.arlis.am/DocumentView.aspx?docID=171800>.

³ Action Plan, https://www.arlis.am/Annexes/6/2023_N351hav.1.pdf.

Government in the ALE direction. This is believed to be the result of the deputy Minister's attendance (supported by DVV International Armenia) of CONFINTEA VII and intense advocacy by DVV International Armenia in previous years.

While the term "Adult Education" occurs twice in the Programme, it is not defined or interpreted in any way. The Programme also lacks definitions of other terms related to ALE (for example, lifelong learning, additional and continuing education, non-formal learning).

Goal 1 of the "Non-Formal Education" section of the Action Plan includes a component on ALE: "Implementation of mechanisms for recognizing the results of non-formal education, providing environment and conditions for lifelong learning and continuous development of human capital of adults and youth".

The document sets some actions to be taken towards the main goal: Reform the legislative framework regulating the non-formal education sector; define terms related to non-formal education in accordance with international terminology; create the grounds for recognizing and certifying the results of non-formal and informal learning by the state; raise public awareness about the non-formal education sector.

Now there is an ongoing process of development of amendments to the Law on Education. These changes will ensure a more solid legal base for recognizing and certifying the results of non-formal learning. There are some other new regulations related to non-formal education in the draft law on Vocational Education which will go through the adoption process in the Parliament.

Programme and Action Plan refer to the Government Action Plan for 2021-2026, Law on Education and other national legislation documents. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, adopted by the UN, and especially its Goal 4, were also mentioned. Though MFA was not mentioned in the Programme and Action Plan, some basic concepts of MFA can be found in these documents.

3. Which of the recommendations in the MFA seem to be of specific relevance to your country?

These five recommendations in the MFA seem to be relevant to the current challenges and priorities in Armenia – based on desk research and key informants' opinions:

- "22. ... multi-sectoral platforms to support the governance of ALE with all relevant and key actors ... the importance of dialogue between workers and employers, and their organisational structures...".

- “24. ... the importance of strengthening ALE at the local level ... for supporting and (co)funding training and learning initiatives such as community learning centres to be well-resourced with qualified adult educators. ... reinforcing institutional capacities for promoting lifelong learning for all at the local level by, for example, encouraging learning city development, as well as fostering the involvement of local stakeholders, including learners, community groups and institutions...”.
- “25. ... the importance of recognition of prior learning as well as the validation and accreditation of non-formal and informal learning, wherever appropriate and relevant, to include all sections of the population – particularly disadvantaged and underrepresented groups such as people with disabilities – into open and flexible learning ecosystems. Establishing flexible learning pathways is key to allowing mobility between different programmes, levels of studies and sectors of employment...”.
- “29. We commit to increasing public funding and resource mobilisation for ALE and to preventing regression in existing budget allocations. As a component of lifelong learning, ALE should be funded through the contribution of a wide diversity of stakeholders, various ministries, employers and other private actors, local governments and learners...”.
- “32. We commit to significantly increasing participation in both non-formal and formal ALE programmes and encourage countries to set ambitious benchmarks for the participation of diverse groups of learners. To include vulnerable populations and adults currently unreached, we commit to promoting outreach and guidance systems to raise awareness of learning opportunities, expand participation and enhance learner motivation...” (UIL 2022c)⁴.

DVV International Armenia’s planning until 2027 addresses the second recommendation from the mentioned list: “24. ... the importance of strengthening ALE at the local level...”. So far DVV International Armenia supported Adult Education Centres (AEC) in four regions of Armenia. In parallel to hundreds of trainings for development of vocational skills required by the job market, AECs have implemented numerous other activities, including discussions, public hearings and community initiatives, thus

⁴ Marrakech Framework for Action, <https://www.uil.unesco.org/en/marrakech-framework-action>

promoting civic participation and community involvement among AEC's beneficiaries and community residents.

These four centres serve only a very small portion of the population in the regions of Armenia and there are very few alternatives for providing accessible and affordable non-formal educational opportunities for adults, especially those in difficult life circumstances. There are other issues as well:

- low level of participation in non-formal education in Armenia, especially in rural areas and by vulnerable groups (e.g. the unemployed);
- the lack of ALE centres in Armenia supported by either the state or other donors;
- the lack of state, public and private sectors interest toward this issue (underestimating its importance);
- inappropriate infrastructure, finance and other resources needed for expanding the network of ALE centres.

One of the strategic goals of DVV International Armenia is to expand the network of AECs to two more regions and enhance them through compliance with quality standards. DVV International Armenia will also design and implement interventions to improve AECs' services to beneficiaries based on quality standards enhanced at the meso-level.

Another strategic goal of DVV International Armenia for the upcoming years fits other MFA recommendations as well. It sets out two objectives. One is better ALE policy making based on improved national statistics on ALE and increased public awareness regarding ALE, and the other is that the new education strategy includes elements of ALE in the Action Plan.

Here are other priorities of the ALE and non-formal education field in Armenia suggested by key informants:

- Ensure the availability of ALE services in the remote and rural areas. Special legislative regulation is needed to ensure equal access to educational services for everyone regardless of their actual residence or social characteristics. Provision of ALE can become a part of the responsibility of local authorities.
- Promote a practice of paying for education (instead of participating only in free of charge programmes).
- Promote the culture of ALE in the regions and among some vulnerable groups. Inform different social groups about education platforms and opportunities.
- Actively use ALE programmes for reintegration and socialisation purposes, for instance: engaging prisoners, migrants, refugees and other vulnerable groups.

- Expand state funding sources for CSOs which provide ALE. New transparent and competitive mechanisms needed for delivering additional funding to CSOs. This can stimulate delegation of state educational programmes and services to CSOs.

4. In your understanding: What could bring the SDG agenda and CONFINTEA VII closer?

While speaking about the link between SDGs and adult education, usually only SDG 4 is mentioned, which is: “Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all” (UN 2015)⁵. As some of our respondents suggested, we need to rethink this traditional relationship.

They suggest considering Goal 4 and its components as a strategic and supportive base for achieving other SDGs, which can be integrated into educational programmes as topics, principles and values.

For instance, the principles of sustainable development can be integrated into adult education programmes. This includes promoting environmental awareness, social justice, and economic sustainability within the curriculum. ALE programmes have to address not only traditional academic subjects but also skills needed for sustainable living and responsible citizenship.

Integrating skills development and vocational training into adult education programmes will enhance participants’ employability and contribute to economic empowerment, addressing SDG 1 (No Poverty) and SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth).

Recognizing and respecting diverse cultural contexts in ALE programmes align with the principle of promoting cultural diversity and inclusion (SDG 10) and helps tailor education initiatives to local needs.

Integrating climate change education into ALE programmes will address SDG 13 (Climate Action). This can empower adults to contribute to sustainability efforts and mitigate the impacts of climate change.

^{5/} Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, <https://sdgs.un.org/2030agenda>

Reflection

5. How do you see the role of civil society in implementing the MFA – beyond raising awareness?

Among CSOs working with ALE, the most active ones are the NGOs that regularly offer civic education opportunities in the form of small conferences, workshops, and training courses. Topics suggested to the trainees typically cover human rights, the fight against corruption, democracy, civic activism, and its toolkit, investigative journalism, media literacy, and others. This type of ALE mostly targets individuals and groups interested in civic and public activism, which to some extent narrows down the scope of its influence. CSOs need to pay more attention to the inclusiveness of their educational activities, not limiting access to participation to only young people or to socially active individuals and/or groups with civic competences. ALE programmes can serve as a good base for reintegration and socialisation purposes, engaging prisoners, migrants, refugees and other vulnerable groups.

CSOs can also play an important role in expanding and ensuring availability of ALE services in the regions, in the remote and rural areas. Sometimes NGOs and civic networks have more flexibility to reach geographically and socially disadvantaged groups than state agencies.

CSOs have wider opportunities for promoting awareness and education on some specific or sensitive topics than state agencies which have some limitations in term of their capacities or traditional (outdated) approaches. For instance, CSOs can provide more quality services and educational products in the directions of media literacy, gender sensitivity, civic participation, anticorruption activities, etc.

CSOs can have a positive impact on adult educational programmes offered by state agencies trying to integrate best ALE approaches, methods and experiences in it. CSOs' relevant experiences are quite valuable and can serve as an example/source for improving state programmes. It is important to integrate ALE quality methodological approaches in different educational programmes regardless their theme direction or sphere.

6. Can you identify areas where civil society advocacy could make a difference in the coming years?

Here are some priority areas of ALE in Armenia where the efforts of civil society can have an impact. Those can be grouped in 4 main categories: policy, governance, funding, and quality.

Policy

- 1) Main educational laws and by-laws offer mostly inconsistent terminology for the field of ALE. The variety of terms in use is especially confusing when there is a need to bridge the local and international contexts. The international policy vocabulary has long moved from AE to ALE and the government of Armenia, being a UN and UNESCO member state, needs to keep the relevance of its national documents choosing the definition that best explains the aims of ALE in Armenia.
- 2) Active citizenship skills should become a strategic priority for the MoESCS, focusing also on citizenship education and training of adults. This field should not be self-regulated by the CSOs, NGOs, and international donor community only, but rather grounded in institutional practices. AECs and local ALE-providing NGOs should be given the opportunity to apply for programme-based state funding. In addition, all ALE providers should capitalise on the currently favourable conditions for the promotion of civic education on the level of policy and practice.
- 3) Research-based or evidence-based policy making is also a strategic objective. Most ministries and state agencies lack strong research-based analysis for defining policy priorities and solutions.

Governance

- 4) There is a need to develop and implement institutional, credible mechanisms for collecting both statistical and qualitative data on ALE in Armenia. Inter-agency shared data collection and a unified database for the exchange of statistical information by all state stakeholders should be developed. These changes will require corresponding changes in legislation.

Funding

- 5) A separate programme dedicated to ALE should be envisaged both in the state budget and in the Medium-Term Expenditure Programmes. The use of the term ALE in the financial documents is important for indicating the state priorities for the development of the field.
- 6) The financial support to ALE should be increased to serve a greater number of adults and to continuously increase participation. The state budget should be directed not only to cater for the needs of civil servants and vulnerable groups but the wider society as well. It could serve as an incentive for more inclusive participation of adults.

Quality

7) Some of the challenges related to the quality assurance (QA) system for ALE are the result of a lack of awareness and understanding of how the learning outcome-based assessment could be applied to recognition and validation of non-formal and informal learning results. The government should consider involving advisory bodies and other key stakeholders experienced in QA. As it was mentioned above, there is an ongoing process of changing the Law on Education to ensure recognition and validation of non-formal and informal learning results.

Networks

8) Effective advocacy efforts require establishment of representative stakeholder networks. Those can be created by engaging people from academic institutions, civil society and other ALE providers (including private sector). There can be two main levels of network operations – at the macro or national level and at the community level. The national network should work on policy, legislation, infrastructure and funding improvement, while local networks can address the gaps of communication and cooperation among ALE providers in communities. Actual data, concerns and recommendations coming from local networks can serve as strong supporting evidence for the advocacy of national networks. The needs of beneficiaries revealed during grassroots activities on the local level can shape the direction of ALE strategy on the national level.

7. Do you see opportunities to also get university and academic institutions involved in MFA follow-up?

The law “On Higher and Postgraduate Professional Education” (Ministry of Justice of the Republic of Armenia, 2004) does not impose mandatory requirements for the higher educational institutions (HEIs) to execute supplementary educational programmes. In particular, clause 5 of Article 6 (autonomy, competence and academic freedom of higher education institutions) establishes that “... the structural subdivisions of higher education institutions can execute general education, middle vocational, as well as supplementary education programmes under the current legislation of the Republic of Armenia”. This definition suggests supplementary educational programmes can be offered by the universities on a voluntary basis.

There is no uniform model for HEIs to follow when organizing supplementary education programmes. Some universities, for instance, organize supplementary and continuous education (SCE) through their faculties of humanities, where, on top of their major qualification, the students can study for two years and obtain a second degree with a different specialisation. In other universities, structural subdivisions (e.g. YSU) or a specially created learning centre (e.g. American University of Armenia, Yerevan Brusov State University, etc.) take an active role in offering supplementary education for different interested parties. Armenian universities offer SCE programmes to civil servants, academic staff, and other public personnel seeking opportunities for retraining and the development of their professional skills.

The main challenge of the situation described above is the narrow vision of universities toward ALE. They are acting as service providers, but do not target policy change or the overall development of the non-formal education field.

Another challenge is underestimation of ALE methodology and approaches by HEIs while providing educational programmes. They don't pay sufficient attention to issues such as how to adopt teaching and learning methods to current needs of adults. Methods of working with students (young adults) are usually determined by past practice.

8. Which of the experiences in the four countries may have relevance for partners beyond the region?

Respondents emphasised some Armenian practices which may be of interest to other countries:

- Attestation and professional accreditation systems are now widespread in Armenia, especially in these fields: general or secondary education (for teachers), higher education system (for professors), and military forces (for those serving in the military). These systems are operating on both a voluntary and mandatory basis. Specialists are interested in participating in these processes in order to secure an increase in salary or to receive privileges and other bonuses.
- Besides attestation and professional accreditation, training programmes are very common, particularly in the state agencies (ministries, bodies, committees) and local self-governing bodies. These are mandatory for civic and community servants for capacity building or for career growth.
- Some non-formal educational programmes offered by NGOs and other civil society actors can be explored and designed as best

models. For instance, there are some useful examples of social entrepreneurship education programmes implemented in Armenia. Usually, these kinds of programmes are followed by providing some small financial assistance and resources for beneficiaries to start their own projects. These are illustrations of the learning-by-doing approach.

- Other good examples are leadership and critical thinking schools for youth. Very often these training sessions are followed by community projects and civic initiatives implemented by graduates.

Note:

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Findings from Georgia

This report was prepared by Tamar Samkharadze, who was selected as national expert for this project. She benefitted from the active cooperation of the Skills Agency and DVV International, the involvement of civil society and from consultations with relevant public, private, international organisations as well as educational institutions and non-formal education centres.

During the work process, in parallel with individual meetings and consultations, as well as the analysis of relevant information, two workshops were held (on 8 and 13 November) where the priorities of the MFA and the country's challenges on this topic were discussed. Representatives of civil society, relevant ministries and partner international organisations participated in these workshops, and where preliminary conclusions and recommendations are presented here, they have been agreed upon with a wide range of stakeholders. An outline of the report was presented at the validation workshop held on 20 November, which was made possible by the joint efforts of the Skills Agency and the Georgia's office of DVV International. Along with the above-mentioned organisations, representatives from the private sector, formal and non-formal education providers, state agencies and other stakeholders were invited. As a result of the discussion, stakeholders agreed on key challenges and recommendations, which were subsequently reflected in the report. Stakeholders agreed to create a partnership platform within which progress towards the implementation of the MFA will be periodically reviewed and appropriate steps planned.

The report therefore outlines Georgia's main achievements and challenges in terms of implementing the agendas of CONFINTEA and the SDG. It also provides recommendations to better reflect relevant actions in national policy and strategy.

1. Establishing frameworks and governance arrangements

Ensuring the right to lifelong learning (LLL) is the main principle of education reform in Georgia. The country has taken important steps in this direction in the last 10 years. It started with the signing of the association agreement with the European Union in 2014 and continued with the adoption of the new law on vocational education in 2018, as well as the approval of the new national qualifications framework (NQF) which is in compliance with requirements of the European Qualifications Framework (EQF). It should be noted that the NQF is the main instrument of the reform, and with the start of its introduction it became possible to implement the LLL vision into reality. Among the tools for implementing LLL are the non-formal education recognition service (from 2019) and the approval of the regulation on the recognition of prior education (in 2020). However, the use is still not on a large scale, but the legal, institutional and methodological basis have already been created and the piloting stage has been completed.

The Georgian Law on Vocational Education ensures that all citizens have the opportunity to enrol in VET programmes after basic education, with no age restrictions. Starting in 2019 a continuing vocational education and training (CVET) path tailored to the needs of adults has been developed in the formal education system, in parallel with initial vocational education and training (IVET) programmes. Before CVET programmes were part of non-formal education and had attracted a lot of interest from the private sector as a quick way to train/retrain the workforce. In this sense, the economic dimension of CVET has been highlighted as a key priority and the focus on it has increased, both from the public and private sectors. The national authorities have initiated vocational training and retraining programmes, particularly targeting long-term unemployed individuals, aiming to update their knowledge and skills within a short timeframe. The State Employment Support Agency plays a pivotal role in this regard, offering a range of services including career planning, counselling, basic skills programmes, and internships in private companies to job seekers registered on www.worknet.gov.ge. In 2021 alone, 3,812 job seekers found employment through these programmes and services, indicating a positive impact.

Between 2020 and 2022, enrolment in CVET grew by an impressive 159%, albeit from a low base. However, system performance in this domain is constrained by limited enrolment capacity, with demand for

CVET outstripping the number of available places by a sizeable margin. The initiative of the state to formalise short-term training and retraining programmes under CVET, and the subsequent engagement of private sector providers, is a positive step towards meeting labour market needs swiftly. Even so, the scale of this improvement is yet to match the level of success observed in IVET, and CVET is at present a limited option for adult learners in Georgia. Similarly, access to other opportunities for LLL, such as active labour market policies (ALMPs), have shown limited results (European Training Foundation 2023).¹

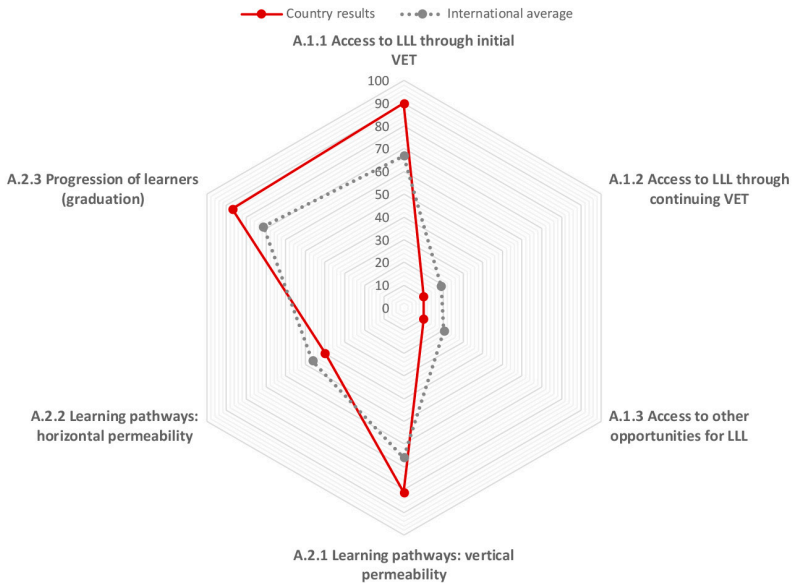


Figure 1: Promoting access and participation in opportunities for LLL – index of system performance, Georgia and international average. Theoretical index range: min/low performance=0, max/high performance=100.

Source: Torino Process monitoring database

As the diagram shows, Georgia has a very low rate in terms of CVET and other LLL opportunities, and a relatively high rate in terms of IVET and learner progression. This high rate is largely due to the fact that in 2020, Georgia implemented a significant reform in the IVET system and developed secondary vocational education programmes that integrate

¹ European Training Foundation. Torino process system monitoring report: Georgia. 2023

the learning outcomes of secondary general education. Through these programmes, it became possible for students to progress from vocational education to higher education. This possibility did not previously exist in the educational field of Georgia. In 2023, the first graduates from the IVET system successfully passed the national exams and continued their studies at the higher education level. Although these so-called integrated programmes (vocational + general education) are primarily intended for young people who come to VET transitioning immediately from compulsory basic education (grade 9), this opportunity is also used by many adults who for some reason left the field of education and later returned to fill the gap. It is due to this circumstance and the still very small scale of the CVET system that the average age of students in IVET programmes is 30 years, although the age range is wide and varies from 15 years to 68 years.

In 2022, the Government approved the National Strategy for the Development of Education and Science (2022-2030), which emphasises increasing the involvement of adults in formal and informal programmes, although it still considers adult education in the context of vocational education. Despite the progress made, VET is very important, but still only part of adult education. As this circumstance is not properly perceived, it prevents the establishment of a unified policy of adult education and its institutionalisation. There is a need for a more comprehensive policy framework that considers the needs of adults in a complex way in order to promote employability, active citizenship or personal growth.

In 2022, the Skills Agency started its activities. It was created through a public-private partnership with the Ministry of Education and Science and the Chamber of Commerce and Industry. From the beginning, the agency was positioned as a partnership platform and brought together public, private, non-governmental and international partners around the goals of developing the country's skills ecosystem. The Agency's mandate is the development of national qualifications in the VET sector, institutional strengthening of VET providers, promotion of inclusive approaches in VET, research and analysis of the skills ecosystem and coordination of international cooperation in the skills sector. It should be noted that the Agency also coordinates the implementation and financing of CVET programmes. Thus, after developing a holistic adult education policy, the Agency can play an important role in developing support programmes/ services and coordinating stakeholders. Stakeholder mapping and coordination is identified as one of the most important tasks to be undertaken in order to develop systemic and holistic adult education policies and approaches.

2. Redesigning systems for ALE

The MFA recognises the increasing diversity of ALE providers resulting from the emergence of complex learning ecosystems. It should be noted that Georgia's potential and capabilities in this regard are enormous. A wide range of providers has emerged in formal CVET. Based on Government decree, any legal entity (company, non-governmental organisation, non-formal education centre) is eligible to obtain the right to implement a training programme, receive state funding, and issue a state certificate. For this purpose, the right to implement the programme must be obtained by the legal entity from the National Centre for Educational Quality Enhancement, after which it applies to the Skills Agency to receive funding for the programme. Notably, the Skills Agency is also working to scale up training programmes, reaching out, attracting, consulting and supporting interested organisations to become formal education providers if they wish. All training/retraining programmes, according to the respective government decree, must be implemented work-based, which ties together learning providers and companies, assuring the relevance and quality of programmes. Due to the work-based learning (WBL) approach, transition and success rates of the certification programme attendees are higher than those for formal diploma course graduates (85% compared to 74%). This is particularly important for adults, who acquire the desired skills in a shorter period of time and smoothly move to the labour market or improve their employment status.

Adult education is supported by state agencies within the scope of competence: the Environmental Education Centre (under the Ministry of Agriculture) is involved in providing formal and non-formal training programmes with environmental protection, green skills and agricultural orientation; the Ministry of Agriculture is working on the development of farmers' extension centres; the Innovation and Technology Agency is actively working on offering a variety of non-formal courses in the IT field. It is a positive trend that universities have also started introducing adult education programmes. Lifelong education centres operate at Tbilisi State University; Ilia State University, Zugdidi University and many other public and private higher education institutions offer courses focused on personal and professional development.

In addition to the in-person ALE options, digital courses and online adult learning opportunities have expanded significantly during the pandemic. This trend has continued even after the pandemic and many organisations are offering a variety of courses online.

Special mention should be made about the promotion of adult education in the regions by ALE centres with the support of DVV

International. These 14 centres are of particular importance in those municipalities of the country where vocational colleges or other educational opportunities do not exist. ALE centres are united under the Georgian Adult Education Network (GAEN), which was established in 2014 with the support of the DVV International Georgian Office. GAEN unites organisations having a similar understanding of the values and advantages of adult education for poverty reduction, civic engagement and community development. The adult/community education centres' role is especially important in socio-economic advancement and integration of the most disadvantaged population of the targeted regions.

Despite the diversity of providers, adult education faces significant challenges, especially in certain regions. One of the reasons for this is the lack of mechanisms for supporting community/local initiatives. At the national or local level, attitudes towards non-formal education are still inconsistent, funding opportunities are limited, cooperation between formal and non-formal education providers is weak, which in turn weakens synergy to overcome existing challenges. Along with these challenges, positive steps should be noted, which help in bringing the field of formal education closer to community/civil organisations. In order to support local initiatives and promote non-formal education and extracurricular activities in vocational schools, the Skills Agency has introduced a new programme, starting from 2022, which is determined to provide funding for local project ideas, which are identified through a competition. As a result, activities such as environmental clubs, civics clubs, healthy lifestyle trainings, art classes, entrepreneurial education clubs and more have been introduced for students and potential students living in the community. It should be noted that these initiatives are implemented jointly by educational institutions and local civil/community organisations.

3. Ensuring quality of learning

Adult education, as a constituent component of the education ecosystem, is considered in connection with other levels of education and together with them creates a unified strategy for the development of competencies. Accordingly, adult education is built on the results of previous education, and, in some cases, it is considered as a compensatory mechanism for the shortcomings of other levels of education.

In terms of competence development, two key indicators are used in the international comparative context: a) the result-normed duration of

school education and b) the share of low-achieving students. The LAYS² (Learning-Adjusted Years of Schooling) measure shows that the result-adjusted duration of schooling in Georgia is 8 years. This means that the years spent by pupils in school are not directly reflected in the learning outcomes and the normalised duration of school education is 4 years less than expected (World Bank 2020). This striking difference in the length of education is seen as a loss of human capital, as students do not acquire relevant competencies at school, which later has a negative impact on their quality of life.

Another relative measure of the quality of education is the share of students with low academic achievement. This indicator is based on the results of the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA). PISA cycles in Georgia, as well as in other participating countries, evaluate the results of students in three areas: reading, mathematics and science. The most important distinguishing feature of PISA from other international assessments is that it does not assess the knowledge acquired within the school programme, but the general readiness of students for adult life. Accordingly, PISA's target group is 15-year-olds who are entering adulthood. PISA ranks students according to achievement levels, with the second level being the critical level. According to the PISA level descriptors, students who fall below level two do not possess the minimum competencies required for an informed and critically thinking citizen. Here, too, Georgia's rate is significantly lower than the average rate of both OECD countries and EU countries. In particular, 64% of students are below the second basic level in the field of reading, 61% in the field of mathematics, and 64% in the field of sciences. In the countries of the EU, these figures are three times lower at a mere 23%. International and national PISA reports point out that caring for low-achieving students is a major challenge not only for general education, but for the entire system of formal and non-formal education. Adult education and vocational education, as post-general education systems, are considered to be the most important tools for the further development of the competencies, as well as for compensating the shortcomings of the previous stages. To fulfil this mission, adult education itself must be equipped with high-quality programmes and services. It is necessary to support the development of human resources involved in the teaching

² LAYS = Average years of schooling × Test scores. The average years of schooling attained by a child in a country is adjusted for how much they will have learnt on average, relative to an "advanced" benchmark of learning such as the TIMSS and PIRLS assessments.

process (teachers, educators), which is often limited to non-formal education providers.

Along with employability and technical skills development, curriculum and learning materials should focus more on topics such as global citizenship, sustainable development, health and well-being, social-emotional skills, transversal and critical thinking skills, digital skills and financial literacy. The Skills Agency has developed and piloted several such non-formal education courses in 2022-2023, as well as launching a competition for teachers to develop digital learning resources to support both the teaching of vocational modules and the development of key competences. However, these efforts are insufficient considering the scale of the problem and require even more resources to expand services and introduce catch-up courses. Starting from 2023 the Skills Agency has introduced a Moodle-based LMS (Learning Management System) by opening the platform for TVET-teachers, adult educators and non-formal trainers to design and upload digital courses and learning resources for students and community. Both, blended and self-paced, free of charge courses will be available for citizens of Georgia from 2024, aiming at the development of key competences, including digital, financial, entrepreneurial and technical skills.

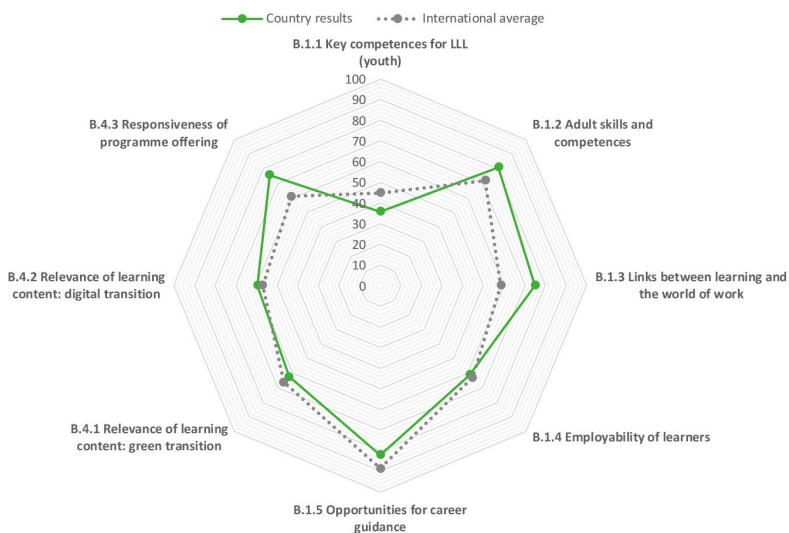


Figure 2: Supporting quality and relevance of LLL – index of system performance, Georgia and international average (2023). Theoretical index range: min/low performance=0, max/high performance=100.

Source: Torino Process monitoring database

In that dimension of performance, the skills system of Georgia delivers a mixed, but still positive message. The focus on the green transition in the learning outcomes trails behind the international average as the country is still in the process of developing effective ways of integrating green competences into different modules of subjects dedicated to key competences, as well transversally into sectorial curricula. However, the emphasis on digitalisation in VET exceeds the norm among countries participating in the Torino Process. This result could be seen as a positive step towards enhancing employability in a digitally driven labour market. The incorporation of digital competences in all CVET and IVET programmes as a mandatory component, along with the elaboration of a concept for technology-enriched and blended learning, are indicative of the strides being made to modernise and upscale students' digital competences.³

With the development of a research component (Skills Observatory) in the Skills Agency, it became possible to institutionalise and systematise such studies as employer satisfaction surveys, tracer studies (including CVET programmes), community attitudes surveys, research and evaluation of the effectiveness of the skills ecosystem in general, which are of great importance for evidence-based policy development. Apart from that, Georgia was able to make a better contribution to international assessments, including the preparation of the Turin Process Report, which is a system monitoring tool. The focus of monitoring is on the contribution of IVET and CVET to the learning activities of youth and adults in any learning setting (formal and non-formal), undertaken to improve their knowledge, skills, competences, and qualifications for personal, social and/or professional reasons. The purpose of the Torino Process monitoring exercise is to provide decision-makers, practitioners, and stakeholders with a reliable basis for informed decisions about policy improvement, resource allocation, strategy design and follow-up analysis in support of lifelong learning.

Stakeholder discussions highlighted that although skills ecosystem research and assessment have improved significantly in recent years, it is clear that there is still a lack of focused research on adult learning problems that should underpin measures to improve the quality and accessibility of adult education.

³ European Training Foundation: Torino process system monitoring report: Georgia. 2023

4. Increasing funding

Adult education in Georgia is financed from various sources. Non-formal education is mainly financed by the students themselves and is also often supported by various donor projects (DVV International, USAID, UNDP, EU financed projects) and a small portion by state allocations (Environmental Information and Education Centre under the Ministry of Environment Protection and Agriculture; Georgia's Innovation and Technology Agency under the Ministry of Economy and Sustainable Development; Tbilisi City Hall). It is important to note the share of the private sector, which is increasing year by year, both in the non-formal and formal education sectors. In a grant competition organised by the USAID Industry-led Skills Development Programme, where the contribution of the private sector is one-to-one, an analysis of the applications submitted by companies revealed that the willingness to contribute exceeded 100 million dollars, which means that the private sector is interested in developing the skills ecosystem and being involved in this process. This spirit is reflected in the new initiative of the Minister of Education and Science: Open Call to Employers, which implies an expression of interest by the private sector in the development of a specific collaboration, whether it be co-founding or co-investing in a new VET college or co-participating in the development of existing ones. At this stage, consultations with the interested private sector are actively underway and the results will be announced next year.

Adult education within the framework of formal education is fully financed by the state, with the main contributor in this regard being the Ministry of Education and Science. In addition, the national authorities have initiated vocational training and retraining programmes, particularly targeting long-term unemployed individuals, aiming to update their knowledge and skills within a short timeframe. The State Employment Support Agency plays a pivotal role in this regard, offering a range of services including career planning, counselling, basic skills programmes, and internships in private companies to job seekers registered on www.worknet.gov.ge.

During the past decade, the Georgian government emphasised entrepreneurship skills development among the population. The programme supported by state budget – Invest in Georgia – has been launched to support all citizens having business ideas and without financial resources. Micro, small and medium grants are being given to individuals, who receive comprehensive trainings to start their own enterprises. The Regional Development Agency of the Ministry of Agriculture and Environmental Protection (RDA) also supports individuals in various regions who are willing to start their own agricultural

businesses/farms. Beyond these opportunities, trainings in entrepreneurial skills are provided in both formal settings (TVET schools/certification programme providers) or in the form of non-formal learning. The Skills Agency encourages entrepreneurial learning, develops learning resources and supports local partnerships between TVET schools and non-formal education providers like CSOs, which are introducing innovation hubs or entrepreneurial clubs to transform local societies and individuals.

Furthermore, international collaborations such as the Skills4jobs programme of the EU and the USAID Industry-led Skills Development Programme are contributing towards improving the employability of the population, especially in the regions. These programmes, with a combined investment of several million Euros, aim to bridge the gap between skills training and high-value employment opportunities, targeting underrepresented members of society, including women, ethnic minorities, and residents of rural communities.

Starting from 2021, a 41.2 million Euro loan agreement with the Asian Development Bank for the implementation of the Modern Skills for Better Employment Programme was launched. The project envisages the development of skills hubs in two regions of Georgia (Kakheti and Imereti) and will create an opportunity to provide professional education in 20 public schools.

An important investment is also the project provided by the loan agreement of KfW. KfW's commitment is aimed at modernising the vocational training system in Georgia. The process is supported by financing a centre of excellence for construction and logistics. These are two occupational fields that will become increasingly important in the future due to the country's geostrategic position between Europe and Asia.

About 6% of Georgia's education budget goes to VET funding, and an even smaller portion of that goes to adult education (the exact amount is not identified because adults study in both CVET and IVET programmes). This means that it will be difficult for the country to achieve international benchmarks without diversifying the sources of financing and without a sharp increase of the state budget. At present, the VET financing framework does not include needs-based funding to address the material and financial requirements of students. Instead, the responsibility for providing financial support for elements like transportation, accommodation, and essential equipment (e.g., tools for personal services) falls on municipalities or relevant line ministries overseeing social services. However, this support is not consistently distributed.

As a result, increasing the volume of funding and focusing more on the needs of vulnerable groups was highlighted as one of the important recommendations from the stakeholders. Emphasis was made on the

limited funding and support mechanisms at the municipal and local level of governance. The recommendation also concerns the further expansion of state funding in the direction of non-formal education, especially for courses focused on the development of key competencies.

5. Promoting inclusion

The reform of the educational system of Georgia during the last ten years was significantly focused on the introduction of inclusive approaches, especially at the level of vocational education. The infrastructure in educational institutions was significantly improved and adapted to the needs of disabled people; special support services have also been developed (transportation, inclusive support specialists in all colleges, personal assistants, sign language interpreters, etc.). Nevertheless, the proportion of students with special education needs in the total admission rates did not change substantially during recent years and remains around 2%.

Immediately after its establishment, the Skills Agency started mobilizing stakeholders to work on aspects of social inclusion, which are related to persons in or out of state care, of young people not in education and employment (NEETs), inclusion of persons below the poverty line and citizens with other additional needs in vocational education who are in need of support for their training and further employment. In 2022-2023, the regulatory framework for inclusive vocational education was prepared and submitted to the Ministry. With the support of the EU technical assistance project, a Continuing Professional Development (CPD) model for an inclusive development team in a vocational educational institution was prepared and has since started to be implemented. With the support of UNDP, an orientation service was created, which throughout the year will provide an opportunity for persons with disabilities and persons with special education needs to utilise the service and make an informed decision. In order to introduce the orientation service, a detailed guide and package of tools were prepared.

In 2022, the Skills Agency prepared and submitted to the Ministry the “Programme of the State Language”. The programme gives anyone (from the age of 15) the opportunity to master the state language (levels A1 to B2 included). The programme, in parallel with language competences, ensures the development of key competences such as civic, intercultural, digital and independent learning competences. It is important that the providers of the mentioned programme will be colleges, as well as general

education and higher educational institutions, which will significantly increase the scope of teaching the state language and promote the full inclusion of ethnic minorities in the programmes of different levels of education. It should be noted that state language courses are offered to adults by Zurab Zhvania State Administration School, as well as various NGOs, although the scale is still unsatisfactory. Since the state language is a tool for social integration for ethnic minorities, the new state language programme should become an important component of adult education in the future, especially in regions inhabited by ethnic minorities.

In 2022, with the support of the EU technical assistance project, a career counselling strategy for all levels of formal education was created and submitted to the Ministry. In the field of VET, the Agency is actively working on the implementation of components of the strategy, namely: a model of continuous development of career managers is being developed with the support of the EU project; a professional network of career managers was created and capacity building activities were implemented in several stages; a career education course is being developed to help VET students develop career management skills. The course was piloted in two colleges in 2023. The development of career services is given great importance because one in three young people aged 15-29 in Georgia are classified as NEETs. A closer look at NEETs also shows a high level of inactive youth within this category – neither working nor actively seeking employment. This subgroup accounts for approximately one-fifth of all 15-29-year-olds and about two-thirds of the NEET category in Georgia.

Over the past few years, the overall gender gap in VET has increased in favour of men and is presently at 7%. However, the growth of the gap is mostly explained by the overall increase of enrolments in a few specific fields (IT, construction) which are considered as having a larger gender gap in favour of men in general. In most of the other fields/sectors there is a discernible trend towards greater gender balance during 2021 and 2022. More specifically, the fields of electricity, mechanics, and transport services are seeing an increase in women's representation, while men's representation is on the rise in health care, textile production, and hotel, restaurant, and catering (HORECA). With the support of ADB, a gender action plan was developed by the Skills Agency, which aims at gender mainstreaming at the vocational education level.

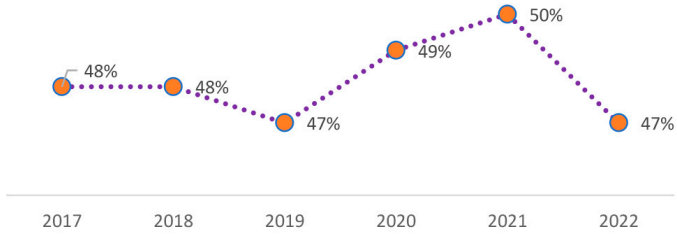


Figure 3: Proportion of female students by year in TVET (EMIS 2017-2022)⁴

It should be mentioned that in the TVET sector the completion rates for socially disadvantaged individuals are higher (EMIS)⁵ at 60% compared to those without this status, which stands at 56%, which indicates that socially vulnerable students have relatively higher motivation to study. However, the proportion of socially disadvantaged students in vocational education has also been stable for the last two years and forms approximately 20% of total admissions.

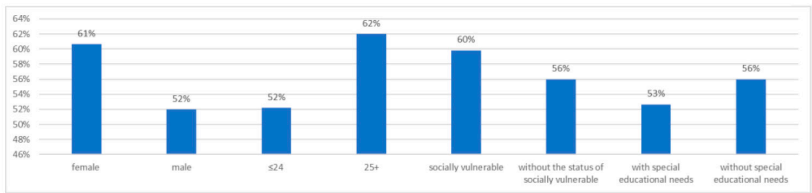


Figure 4: Share of graduates by characteristics (EMIS 2022)⁶

The data presented in the national report (VET development in Georgia 2023)⁷ indicates that certain groups have limited access to vocational education benefits. Efforts must continue to develop specialised support services and infrastructure tailored to the needs of socially disadvantaged students, national minorities, as well as students and applicants with various types of special needs. It is also important to raise awareness among students and all stakeholders, such as educators/

⁴ The source of data is EMIS (Education Management Information System) available at <https://emis.uis.unesco.org/>

⁵ EMIS

⁶ EMIS

⁷ Skills Agency of Georgia. VET development in Georgia - Key indicators. 2023;

teachers, about the characteristics and significance of an inclusive learning environment. Effective strategies for creating and fostering this environment should also be emphasised.

In adult education, including vocational education, greater emphasis should be placed on developing transferable skills such as planning, problem-solving, communication, foreign language proficiency and digital competencies. It is crucial to foster the development of such cross-functional skills systematically, both within the programme and through extracurricular activities, rather than being limited to courses that are solely dedicated to this purpose.

6. The main challenges

- 1) In terms of policy formulation, adult education is still perceived as a part of VET, which prevents the formation of a holistic vision and strategy on adult education.
- 2) Absence of a coordination mechanism, which prevents discussion of challenges and planning as well as implementation of response actions in a multisectoral and multistakeholder approach.
- 3) Small scale of adult education – lack of formal and non-formal education opportunities, as well as lack of resources (human/ financial) to offer appropriate/targeted services.
- 4) Insufficient resources, motivation, competence of regional and local stakeholders (in most cases local governments) and the absence of systematic mechanisms for their support.
- 5) Insufficient and unsystematic support mechanisms for informing, motivating and involving the adult population (especially vulnerable groups) in education.
- 6) Scarcity and fragmentation of data and information, which hinders seeing the big picture and developing evidence-based policies.
- 7) Emphasis of state programmes only on the economic dimension and employment goals of adult learning and less focus on social inclusion and personal development goals, which once again shows the fragmentation of the policy.
- 8) Cultural phenomenon, which causes low encouragement from society towards learning in adulthood, could be seen as a barrier to the adult education development.
- 9) Insufficient scale of private sector involvement, especially in the regions.
- 10) Insufficient use of opportunities and potential of non-formal education providers and local CSOs, including inadequate perception of their role/contribution in state policy implementation approaches.

7. Recommendations

- 1) Mapping of stakeholders and opportunities must be undertaken to see the big picture and analyse available resources, with broad stakeholder engagement, developing a holistic adult education policy and strategy that integrates aspects/goals of economic empowerment, social inclusion and personal development.
- 2) It is essential to establish a partnership platform with the support of DVV International, institutionalizing the coordination mechanism of the involved parties and expanding the mandate of the Skills Agency for this purpose.
- 3) In order to change the mindset of society and raise awareness on the importance of LLL and adult education, information campaigns, including social media interventions, should be conducted.
- 4) Activating the role of municipal governments, developing their capacities and motivating them to establish mechanisms of funding and support for adult learning at the local level.
- 5) Full use of the capabilities of local/community organisations, non-formal education providers in the development and implementation of a holistic adult education policy.
- 6) Focusing on the specific needs of different target groups requiring special attention (including IDPs, migrants, residents of mountainous regions, socially vulnerable persons, persons with disabilities, representatives of ethnic minorities, residents living in the occupied territories and adjacent to the so-called dividing line, returnees from emigration, former prisoners, women living in rural areas, survivors of gender-based violence and others), introducing mechanisms and services for informing, motivating and supporting them by mobilizing and consolidating resources for this purpose.
- 7) Advocating for an increase in public spending on adult education.
- 8) It is important to maintain a systematic research and evaluation mechanism for evidence-based adult education policies. It is significant that Georgia, conducting studies like PISA, PIRLS, or TEMS on a regular basis, has never joined the Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC) study. It is recommended to join the PIAAC initiative with other OECD countries to enrich an opportunity for benchmarking and analysis.
- 9) Strengthening cooperation with the private sector to expand the scope and capacity of delivery.
- 10) Strengthening international cooperation and discussing projects and initiatives focused on adult education with donors and international organisations in order to receive their support.

Resources

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UIL 2022c - CONFINTEA VII Marrakech Framework for Action: harnessing the transformational power of adult learning and education. Hamburg. UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL)

Findings from Moldova

This report highlights the findings on the adult education sector in Moldova and the approach aiming to bring the SDG agenda and CONFINTEA VII closer. Combining the desk study, discussions with stakeholders and consultations with DVV International Moldova, it analyses the legislation on ALE, the perception of ALE within the national education sector and the state of convergence of ALE with EU policies.

By describing the modest progress in promoting ALE and LLL in Moldova, this article highlights key aspects and challenges to be taken into consideration while advancing within the sector.

ALE-programmes in Moldova focus on employability skills; participation is low and legal frameworks remain inconsistent. The National Development Strategy Moldova 2030 and Education 2030 emphasise lifelong learning, but funding and policy development are limited. Civil society plays a crucial role in ALE, advocating for better funding, consistent terminology, and increased participation. Universities can also contribute by integrating ALE into their curricula and community outreach programmes.

The report on Moldova was prepared by Tudor Lazăr, who was selected as the national expert. He combined desk study and discussions with stakeholders and benefitted especially from a consultation on 23 November 2023 in the office of DVV International, whose participants are mentioned below. He also met with the international expert during a meeting of the ALE Platform on 11 November in Orhei.

1. Introduction and brief context regarding adult learning

Demographic profile: According to the data from the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS), the usual resident population as of January 1, 2023¹ was about 2,512 million (NBS 2023). By major age categories, the contingent of people of working age constitutes the highest share in the total population. On 1.1.2023, the 15-64 age group had a population of 1,656 million people or 65.9% of the total population (NBS 2023)². According to the data³, 598,300 people are aged 60 and over, which is 23.8% of the total population of usual residents (NBS 2022).

The quality of pre-university education and transition of students into adult life: According to the latest results of PISA testing⁴, nearly half of the students can be classified as functionally illiterate, with 55% scoring below proficiency in mathematics and 50% in reading and science (PISA 2022). These suboptimal outcomes on the PISA test underscore the critical state of the educational system, revealing inefficiencies in both quality and educational practices. Consequently, a substantial proportion of primary education graduates, comprising almost half of the student body, enter adulthood ill-prepared, adversely impacting their prospects for lifelong learning.

Higher education reform: In the summer of 2022, the reform of the university system started based on the argument that Moldova had an excess of universities and a decline in student enrolment, with only about 56,000⁵ students in the 2022-2023 academic year compared to 107,813

¹ National Bureau of Statistics (NBS). Key indicators regarding population in Moldova.: https://statistica.gov.md/en/statistic_indicator_details/25

² NBS: https://statistica.gov.md/ro/numarul-populatiei-cu-resedinta-obisnuita-pe-sexe-si-grupe-de-varsta-in-profil-t-9578_60448.html

³ NBS: https://statistica.gov.md/en/elderly-population-in-the-republic-of-moldova-in-2022-9578_60729.html

⁴ PISA 2022 Results: Factsheets Moldova: <https://www.oecd.org/publication/pisa-2022-results/country-notes/moldova-23239952/>

⁵ NBS: https://statistica.gov.md/en/statistic_indicator_details/5

in 2010-2011. In Moldova, as of 2023, and as a result of university mergers and liquidations, 13 institutions remain. According to data from the NBS, in 2023, out of approximately 56,000 students, about 34% are over the age of 24, while the remaining 66% fall within the age range of 19-23 years (NBS 2023)⁶.

Challenges and progress in the field of ALE: The adult education sector in Moldova focuses mostly on skills for employability and there is low participation in adult learning. This is partly because of high unemployment rates, a lack of consistency in the legal framework for education and few non-formal learning opportunities.

The Republic of Moldova, being a UN member, is committed to implementing the SDGs and has achieved candidate status for EU membership. Key policy documents, like the National Development Strategy Moldova 2030 and Education 2030 Development Strategy⁷ emphasise the importance of lifelong learning and education for all, aligning with SDG 4. Despite reform efforts, Moldova's education system lags behind Central and Eastern European countries, as per the Global Competitiveness Report 2019 (World Economic Forum 2019)⁸. The strategy aims to ensure accessible lifelong learning opportunities to harness individuals' potential and adapt to evolving socio-economic demands. However, the focus on lifelong learning is limited to the 15-64 age groups within the specified indicators. This important element of the education sector is not perceived as a public good, is barely funded from the state budget and policy development is limited. According to the report of the Educational Centre Pro Didactica from 2022, as a member of the European Association for the Education of Adults (EAEA), the situation of ALE in Moldova has stayed the same in recent years. Also, according to the "Generations and Gender" Study (GGs), the share of people aged 55-74 involved in lifelong learning activities is only 2%, well below the EU average (4.5%).

Legislation regarding ALE: In the Republic of Moldova, adult continuing education is governed by several key legislative acts:

⁶ NBS. Students by types of institution and age group, 2005/06-2022/23: https://statbank.statistica.md/PxWeb/pxweb/en/30%20Statistica%20sociala/30%20Statistica%20sociala_07%20INV_INV010/INV010400.px/table/tableViewLayout2/?rxid=b2ff27d7-0b96-43c9-934b-42e1a2a9a774

⁷ <https://gov.md/en/content/moldovan-government-approves-education-2030-development-strategy>

⁸ World Economic Forum. Insight report. The Global Competitiveness Report 2019: https://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_TheGlobalCompetitivenessReport2019.pdf

- The Constitution⁹, affirming the right to education.
- The Education Code¹⁰, dedicated to lifelong learning (Title VII).
- Government Decision No. 193 (24.03.2017)¹¹, approving the regulation on the continuing education of adults which “aims to regulate and develop the regulatory framework in the field of adult education in a European perspective” (Government of the Republic of Moldova 2017).
- Government Decision No. 1224 of 09-11-2004 on the organisation of continuing vocational training.¹²
- Government Decision No. 616 (18.05.2016)¹³, approving a methodology for external quality assessment and fee regulations for technical vocational, higher education, and continuous training programmes and institutions.
- Government Decision No. 201 (28.02.2018), establishing the organisation of National Agency for Quality Assurance in Education and Research.
- Government Decision No. 1016 of 23-11-2017 approving the National Qualifications Framework of the Republic of Moldova¹⁴ and the relevant normative documents on the development of professional standards and qualifications.¹⁵
- Labour Code of the Republic of Moldova, amendments approved in 2014, Title VIII “Professional training”¹⁶, article 213 (point 3):

⁹ Parliament of the Republic of Moldova. Constitution of the Republic of Moldova. Retrieved from https://www.legis.md/cautare/getResults?doc_id=136130&lang=ro#

¹⁰ Parliament of the Republic of Moldova. Education Code of the Republic of Moldova. Retrieved from https://www.legis.md/cautare/getResults?doc_id=138917&lang=ro#

¹¹ Government Decision No. 193 (24.03.2017), approving the regulation on the continuing education of adults which “aims to regulate and develop the regulatory framework in the field of adult education in a European perspective” Retrieved from https://www.legis.md/cautare/getResults?doc_id=131781&lang=ro#

¹² Government Decision No. 1224 of 09-11-2004 on the organisation of continuing vocational training. Retrieved from https://www.legis.md/cautare/getResults?doc_id=10894&lang=ru

¹³ Government Decision No. 616 (18.05.2016), approving a methodology for external quality assessment and fee regulations for technical vocational, higher education, and continuous training programmes and institutions. Retrieved from <http://lex.justice.md/viewdoc.php?acton=view&view=doc&id=364908&lang=2>

¹⁴ Government Decision No. 1016 of 23-11-2017 approving the National Qualifications Framework of the Republic of Moldova. Retrieved from https://www.legis.md/cautare/getResults?doc_id=101860&lang=ro

¹⁵ Ministry of Education and Research of the Republic of Moldova. National Qualifications Framework. Retrieved from <https://mecc.gov.md/ru/node/8402>

¹⁶ Parliament of the Republic of Moldova. Labour Code of the Republic of Moldova, amendments approved in 2014, Title VIII “Professional training”. Retrieved from https://www.legis.md/cautare/getResults?doc_id=8452&lang=ro#

“The conditions, modalities and duration of professional training, the rights and obligations of the parties, as well as the amount of financial resources allocated for this purpose (in the amount of at least 2 percent of the wage fund of the unit), they are established in the collective labour contract or in the collective agreement” (Parliament of the Republic of Moldova 2014).

- Government Decision No. 693 of 11-07-2018 in Section 3 “Deduction of expenses for the professional studies of employees” art. 45 states that “The employer is entitled to deduct the expenses for professional studies/professional development, incurred for the benefit of the employees during the fiscal period, provided that such expenses are incurred exclusively within the framework of the entrepreneurial activity and that it is taken into account of the need for these studies/improvements for the category and specific activity of the employees” (Government of the Republic of Moldova 2018)¹⁷.
- Law on Youth No. 215 of 07-29-2016 (Parliament of the Republic of Moldova 2016)¹⁸.
- Regulation on the validation of non-formal and informal education, adopted based on the order of the Ministry of Education and Research of the Republic of Moldova no. 885 of 09.01.2022.

ALE is also addressed in several national strategies approved by the government and profile ministries: National Employment Programme 2026¹⁹, Youth Strategy 2030²⁰ and Education Strategy 2030. These strategies include some priorities or objectives regarding adult learning, expansion of non-formal education approaches in all institutions and organisations that work with young people and adults and emphasise the importance of non-formal education for personal and professional development.

¹⁷ Government Decision No. 693 of 11-07-2018 in Section 3 “Deduction of expenses for the professional studies of employees”. Retrieved from https://www.legis.md/cautare/getResults?doc_id=131783&lang=ro

¹⁸ Parliament of the Republic of Moldova. Law on Youth No. 215 of 07-29-2016. Retrieved from https://www.legis.md/cautare/getResults?doc_id=95140&lang=ro

¹⁹ Ministry of Labor and Social Protection. National Employment Programme 2026. Retrieved from <https://social.gov.md/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/Programul-national-de-ocupare-a-fortei-de-munca-2022-2026.pdf>

²⁰ Ministry of Education and Research of the Republic of Moldova. Youth Strategy 2030. Retrieved from https://mecc.gov.md/sites/default/files/conceptul_strategiei_tineret_2030_si_a_programului_de_implementare.pdf

2. De-briefing process after the Marrakech conference

Government representatives did not participate in CONFINTEA

VII: During the 2021-22 timeframe, a series of regional activities were undertaken, during which representatives from the Ministry of Education and Culture (MEC), notably Ms. Marcelina Baleca, who oversees the Lifelong Learning Service (LLL), actively engaged in numerous online meetings. Subsequently, official invitations to attend the Marrakesh Conference were dispatched in both February and May 2022. However, a last-minute communication from the Ministry of Education and Research cited the overwhelming workload of state officials as the reason for non-participation, alongside an unofficial indication of financial commitments within the Marrakech Framework for Action (MFA) that the Ministry could not endorse. This situation potentially serves as an indicator of the prevailing attitudes and approaches toward adult learning and CONFINTEA. Consequently, only a few representatives from CSOs in Moldova were able to participate in the Marrakech conference.

No official debriefing was conducted after CONFINTEA VII:

Following the conclusion of the Marrakech conference, no official debriefing sessions were convened. Notably, DVV International Moldova took the initiative to organise an online regional workshop on October 4, 2022, to which various stakeholders from the professional community were extended invitations. Furthermore, it is noteworthy that the level of familiarity with CONFINTEA appeared to be relatively limited, even among organisations within the educational sector.

Government specific action in respect to ALE – related to

CONFINTEA: There were no direct government actions. However, there were several actions in 2022 and 2023 that could improve the situation of ALE in Moldova and indirectly the implementation of the MFA. The most important actions conducted were: approval of the Education 2030 Strategy²¹ and its Implementation Programme for 2023-2025, amendment²²

²¹ Government Decision No. 114/2023 on approval of the Development Strategy Education 2030 and Implementation Programme 2023-25. Retrieved from https://www.legis.md/cautare/getResults?doc_id=136600&lang=ro

²² Parliament of the Republic of Moldova. Law No. 257 of 17-08-2023 to amend the Education Code of the Republic of Moldova No. 152/2014 and the repeal of Law no. 1070/2000 on the approval of the Nomenclature of specialties for the training of staff in specialised higher and secondary education institutions: https://www.legis.md/cautare/getResults?doc_id=138862&lang=ro

of the Education Code²³ and the start of the amendment process for the Government Decision²⁴ regarding continuing education of adults. The factors which could influence the development of ALE in Moldova following CONFINTEA will be described below.

The newly adopted strategy Education 2030 includes several objectives regarding ALE and aims to develop this concept: The recently adopted Education 2030 Development Strategy contains several sections and objectives regarding lifelong learning and adult learning. The general objective in Section 7 aims to provide lifelong learning opportunities for all citizens in various settings, aligning with several Sustainable Development Goals (SDG 4, SDG 5, SDG 10, SDG 17). Priority actions include focus on extending and strengthening the process of validation of professional skills acquired by adults in non-formal and informal education contexts with a view to ensuring their integration into the labour market and the reintegration of Moldovan migrants into the social and economic life. This includes exploitation of informal education sources (media, professional associations, interest groups) for the development of young people and adults. Another important aspect would be adult learning and education focused on digital competence training and the use of information technologies. Expected results for achieving General Objective 7 by 2030 include: a 10% increase in adult education providers; a 20% increase in adult education programmes; 100% retraining opportunities aligned with labour market demands; improved quality and output of professional training for educators, enhancing student learning outcomes and motivation; expansion of recognition and certification centres for competences acquired in non-formal and informal contexts, covering 60% of the demand. In Section 9, the specific objective 9.6 focuses on the development of modern tools, including digital ones, to monitor and collect data for continuous improvement of education at all levels: pre-school, school, higher education and adults.

Amendments of the legislation regarding the labour force will allow the unemployed to receive scholarships and access vocational training courses: In 2022, a number of amendments were made to the law on labour force promotion and unemployment insurance (Parliament

²³ Parliament of the Republic of Moldova. Education Code of the Republic of Moldova. Retrieved from https://www.legis.md/cautare/getResults?doc_id=138917&lang=ro

²⁴ Government Decision No. 193/2017 regarding approval of the Regulation on the continuing education of adults: https://www.legis.md/cautare/getResults?doc_id=131781&lang=ro

of the Republic of Moldova 2022)²⁵. The respective amendments entered into force on 30.1.2023. According to the Law, the unemployed enrolled in professional training courses benefit from a non-taxable monthly scholarship that is 35% of the average monthly salary²⁶ from the previous year, which is granted in proportion to the attendance of professional training courses. At the same time, they can benefit from vouchers for professional training and take courses at one of the professional training service providers from a list of providers authorised and accredited by the National Agency for Quality Assurance in Education and Research.

Beginning of the review process of the Government Decision regarding continuing education of adults: Starting from July 2023, by order of the MEC, a working group was established to contribute to the amendment of the Regulation regarding continuing education of adults. It is estimated that as a result of the amendments made and the proposals of the members of the working group, improvements will be made to this Regulation and the rules will be brought in line with the provisions of the amended Education Code.

The EU candidate status of Moldova and the association agreement will foster the development of the ALE framework: On June 23, 2022, Moldova was granted official EU candidate status, the first step in the long road to EU membership. The decision was made just one week after the European Commission recommended that Moldova be given candidate status to join the EU. The recommendation came with a number of conditions, including reforms in key areas such as justice, corruption, public administration, human rights, etc. According to the draft of the National Action Plan for the implementation of the Association Agreement for the years 2023-2027²⁷, chapter 26, Education and Culture, includes several actions regarding ALE and LLL, such as: developing a comprehensive normative framework for lifelong learning and adult education to define providers' roles, financial obligations, citizen rights, and standards, including monitoring; diversification of public and

²⁵ Parliament of the Republic of Moldova. Law on labour promotion and unemployment insurance. 2018. Retrieved from https://www.legis.md/cautare/getResults?doc_id=135224&lang=ro#

²⁶ NBS: The average salary recorded in July 2023 was 12,354,7 MDL, the equivalent of 695,3 USD. Retrieved from https://statistica.gov.md/en/statistic_indicator_details/2

²⁷ Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Republic of Moldova. National Action Plan for the implementation of the Association Agreement for the years 2023 – 2027. Retrieved from <https://particip.gov.md/ro/document/stages/proiectul-planului-national-de-actiuni-pentru-implementarea-acordului-de-asociere-pentru-anii-2023-2027/10592>

private educational offerings through the integration of skills forecasting, lifelong learning programme development, digital inclusion, especially for vulnerable groups and individuals with special needs, and staff retraining (Participation Platform. State Chancellery: 2023).

3. Relevant specific recommendations in the MFA

A significant part of the recommendations included in the MFA are applicable to Moldova, specifically articles 8, 22, 24-26, 29, and 37 UIL (2022c):

Article 8. Uphold the Recommendation on Adult Learning and Education (RALE), including the definition of ALE and three key fields of learning. This recommendation is of increased relevance to the Republic of Moldova because both at the population level and among stakeholders, the concept of non-formal learning, adult learning and lifelong learning is still not sufficiently understood. Therefore, there is a need to increase the level of understanding among the population about these concepts and definitions. The role of promoting LLL and ALE as a concept could be undertaken by relevant stakeholders, such as CSOs that have the aim of promoting adult education, the government and the Ministry of Education.

Article 22. Recognition of multi-sectoral platforms and dialogue between workers and employers. The significance of implementing this principle in Moldova with regard to adult education and learning is underscored. The importance of utilizing multi-sectoral platforms for overseeing adult learning and education, involving various key stakeholders such as ministries, civil society organisations, youth, the private sector, universities, and adult learning and education providers, is acknowledged. Additionally, fostering dialogue between employees, employers, and their respective organisational bodies is highlighted as a vital role for government, especially in the context of ongoing professional development.

Article 24. Recognition of the importance of strengthening ALE at the local level and for supporting and (co)funding training and learning initiatives such as community learning centres to be well-resourced with qualified adult educators. In Moldova, there is a scarcity of adult learning centres, with the first one in Chisinau established by DVV International Moldova in 2022. Approximately 25 Youth Centres in the regions can serve young people aged 14-35, including some aged 18-

35, but a UNFPA study²⁸ found limited institutional capacities and service offerings, especially for adults/youth over 20 years old (UNFPA & MECC 2018). To improve access to education for Moldovan adults, particularly in rural areas, Article 24 of the MFA emphasises the need to develop these centres. A special focus should be on securing funding from local/regional, national budgets, and grants for their effective operation. This article and approach is strongly connected to the recommendation in Article 29 of the MFA.

Article 25. Recognition and accrediting non-formal and informal learning is crucial for integrating all individuals, especially those from disadvantaged and underrepresented groups, into versatile educational and career pathways. Despite Moldova's high literacy rate of 98.6%, PISA test results reveal that nearly half of its students are functionally illiterate, especially in math, reading, and science. The literacy crisis is more acute among Roma communities and socially vulnerable groups, with literacy rates below 75%²⁹. An analysis of the educational background of Moldovan detainees and convicted persons³⁰ shows a concerning trend: a majority have incomplete secondary education or less and only 3% have a higher education degree. These findings highlight the urgent need for enhanced formal and non-formal education, particularly for marginalised groups, to foster greater societal integration and education.

Article 26. Commitment to implement policies and strategies to upskill and further professionalise and specialise adult educators through pre-service, in-service and continuing training – in association with universities and research institutes – and by improving their working conditions, including their salaries, status and professional development trajectories. Currently, the attractiveness of the educational sector for specialists and educators is notably lacking. The Federation of Trade Unions of Education and Science advocates

²⁸ Terre des hommes Moldova. Report: The institutional capacities of the Youth Centers from Moldova. 2018: <https://moldova.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/Capacitate%20institutionale%20ale%20centrelor%20de%20tineret%20din%20Moldova.pdf>

²⁹ Institute for Legal, Political and Sociological Research. Roma minority in the Republic of Moldova: Past and actuality. 2019: https://ibn.idsi.md/sites/default/files/imag_file/251-268.pdf

³⁰ Publication within the project "Activities for Education in Penitentiary", implemented by the organisation "DVV International Moldova", in collaboration with the Public Association "Positive Initiative", in partnership with the National Administration of Penitentiaries: <https://positivepeople.md/dreptul-la-educatie-in-penitenciar/>

that educators' remuneration should at least match the national average wage, a threshold that presently corresponds to approximately 81.7% of a teacher's salary. Despite the 2024 State Budget Project proposing a 15% salary increase for educators, this increment is insufficient to substantially enhance the sector's appeal. Looking ahead, in alignment with the recommendations of Article 26 in the MFA, there is a critical need to augment funding levels and prioritise the professional development of educators, with a particular emphasis on those specializing in adult education.

Article 29. Increasing public funding and resource mobilisation for ALE and to preventing regression in existing budget allocations.

According to the State Budget project for 2024³¹, the "Education" functional group in the budget draft for 2024 foresees allocations amounting to 17,386.5 million lei, or 21.1% of the state budget expenses. Currently, the financing of ALE in Moldova falls partially within the recommended parameters in point 29 of the MFA (4-6% GDP and/or at least 15-20% of total public expenditure for education). However, the adult education sector is underfunded, which requires special focus on this component and improvement of the existing situation going forward.

Article 37. Recognising the role of technology in ALE, identification of ways to reduce the digital gap and promote digital literacy. According to the data collected in the Generations and Gender Survey 2020³² carried out by UNFPA, the digital gap between the elderly and young people in Moldova is enormous – only 34% of the population between the ages of 60 and 79 used the Internet, compared to 82% of those aged between 15-59 years. The share of women who use the Internet is 2.1% higher than that of men; they represent 74.7% and 72.6% respectively (UNFPA 2020). Therefore, reducing the digital gap and promotion of digital literacy should be one of the priorities for ALE in Moldova.

³¹ Ministry of Finance. State Budget project for 2024. Retrieved from <https://www.mf.gov.md/en/node/129299>

³² Generations & Gender Programme in the Republic of Moldova: <https://www.ggp-i.org/moldova/>

4. Bringing the SDG agenda and CONFINTEA VII closer

Bringing the SDG agenda and the CONFINTEA VII closer and implementing them in Moldova, with a focus on adult learning and education, should involve a multi-pronged approach that combines policy advocacy, collaboration and targeted actions. Here are some steps and strategies that can be considered:

Policy alignment. In Moldova, the MFA can be aligned with the country's efforts to promote adult education and lifelong learning opportunities, which can contribute to achieving the SDG 4 target on quality education, as well as other relevant SDGs, such as those related to poverty reduction, gender equality and reducing inequalities. While the SDG agenda and the MFA are distinct, they are interconnected, especially when it comes to the role of education and lifelong learning in achieving sustainable development. In Moldova, as in other countries, efforts to implement both agendas should be coordinated to maximise their impact on improving education and lifelong learning opportunities for all.

Promoting international, local and community collaboration. In order to promote the international, local and community collaboration regarding the SDG agenda and CONFINTEA VII there must be engagement with international organisations, such as UNESCO, UNICEF, DVV International, etc., to access resources, technical assistance, and expertise in aligning Moldova's education policies with global agendas. Also, local communities need to be involved in the planning and implementation of adult education programmes to ensure that they meet the specific needs and priorities of different regions within Moldova.

The integration of sustainable development principles, encompassing environmental consciousness, social equity, and economic sustainability into adult education programmes. These programmes extend their purview beyond traditional academic subjects to impart skills conducive to sustainable living and responsible civic engagement. Furthermore, the inclusion of skills development and vocational training within adult education initiatives not only enhances employability but also contributes to economic empowerment, aligning with SDGs 1 and 8. Additionally, recognizing and honouring diverse cultural contexts in adult learning programmes adheres to the principle of promoting cultural diversity and inclusion as in SDG 10, enabling tailored educational approaches attuned to local needs. Lastly, the incorporation of climate change education within these programmes serves to address

the imperative of SDG 13, empowering adults to actively participate in sustainability endeavours and mitigate the consequences of climate change.

5. Role of civil society in implementing the MFA – beyond awareness raising

In Moldova are about 4000 CSOs that are relatively active and which can provide various services. According to the State Register of Non-profit Organisations (SRNO)³³, there were 15,538 non-commercial organisations registered as of December 2022. Besides registered organisations, there are several CSOs that act as non-registered entities, initiative groups and platforms. According to the Civil Society Sustainability Index (CSOSI)³⁴ and data presented by the NBS, only 3,982 organisations (just 25 percent of all registered organisations) filed reports in 2022, approximately 80 percent of which are based in Chisinau. As all CSOs are required to submit annual financial statements to NBS, this is often considered a more accurate representation of the number of active organisations in the country.

The legal framework is permissive and CSOs can provide various services to the beneficiaries, including educational services for ALE. According to the Moldovan legislation, CSOs can implement a large extent of services as long as these are included in their by-laws and do not require any special licensing or permits. Based on previous years, beyond awareness raising, the primary areas in which CSOs provide services are education, legal support, entrepreneurship, institutional development, and home health care services.

Civil society organisations can play an important role beyond awareness raising. In the context of ALE, civil society can play a critical role in implementing the Marrakech Framework for Action beyond awareness raising by focusing on the following key areas:

- **Programme development and delivery:** Civil society can actively participate in the design and delivery of ALE programmes tailored

³³ State Register of Non-profit organisations. Available at: <https://date.gov.md/ckan/ro/dataset/18516-date-din-registrul-de-stat-al-unitatilor-de-drept-privind-organisatiile-necomerciale>

³⁴ USAID. Civil Society Organisation Sustainability Index in Moldova in 2022: <https://storage.googleapis.com/cso-si-dashboard.appspot.com/Reports/CSOSI-Moldova-2022.pdf>

to the specific needs of the beneficiaries, specific groups and communities, etc.

- **Outreach and engagement:** Civil society can engage directly with adults and stakeholders to identify their educational needs and preferences. Outreach efforts can help encourage participation in ALE programmes.
- **Capacity building:** Civil society can provide training and capacity-building programmes for educators and facilitators working with adult learners. This includes cultural sensitivity training and strategies for effectively teaching diverse groups.
- **Research and data collection:** CSOs can conduct research on the educational needs and challenges faced by adults, existing opportunities and effectiveness of policies and frameworks.
- **Networking and collaboration:** CSOs can foster collaboration among different stakeholders, including governmental education institutions, and other NGOs, to create a coordinated and comprehensive approach to ALE. The collaboration could take place through formal or non-formal platforms.
- **Information dissemination:** While moving beyond mere awareness raising, civil society can continue to disseminate information about ALE opportunities for adults and stakeholders, ensuring that they are well-informed about their options.

6. Areas where civil society advocacy could make a difference in coming years

Civil society advocacy can play an important role in the advancement of adult learning and the implementation of the MFA in various areas. The areas where civil society advocacy could make a difference may be the following (but not limited to):

Advocating for allocation of financial resources exclusively to ALE in the budgets forecasted by the government. It is essential to incorporate a distinct programme specifically for ALE within the state budget. Currently, the national state budget (and the law for approving it) does not include separate expenses for ALE, nor even the term “adult” in its approximately 460 pages. The expenses allocated for ALE are mostly found indirectly under other categories such as: expenses for staff development, expenses for higher education or postgraduate studies. Therefore, financial allocations for ALE must be augmented to accommodate the growing adult population and to steadily enhance

participation rates. Budgetary provisions and expenditures should extend beyond addressing the requirements of civil servants and vulnerable groups, encompassing the broader societal needs. Such financial commitment would act as a catalyst for ensuring sustainable engagement of adults in ALE initiatives.

Promoting and explaining a unified approach/terminology regarding ALE. In Moldova, the primary educational legislation and regulations exhibit a notable inconsistency in the terminology used for ALE. This inconsistency becomes particularly problematic when aligning local practices with international contexts. With the global policy discourse evolving from “Adult Education” to “Adult Learning and Education”, it is imperative for the government, as a member state of UN and UNESCO, to update and align its national documents. This alignment involves selecting definitions that most accurately reflect the objectives and scope of ALE within the Moldovan context.

Awareness and community engagement. Civil society organisations can raise awareness about the importance of ALE and LLL. By organizing campaigns, workshops, and seminars, they can engage the community, increase their understanding of the benefits of ALE, and encourage participation from diverse societal segments.

Monitoring and evaluation. CSOs can monitor the effectiveness of ALE programmes and provide feedback to educational institutions and policymakers. Regular evaluation can help refine and improve these programmes.

7. Opportunities for university and academic institutions getting involved

Currently, there is low participation in adult learning within the academic and university sector. However, these institutions could represent an important platform for the development and promotion of the concept of ALE as well as the MFA. To get universities and academic institutions involved, several opportunities and measures can be implemented:

- **Curriculum integration and development:** Universities can integrate the goals and objectives of the MFA into their curriculum and development programmes. This involves developing new courses and programmes focused on ALE, emphasizing skills that are critical for sustainable development, inclusivity, and global citizenship.

- **Development of partnerships and collaborations:** Establishing partnerships between universities, government bodies, NGOs, and industry stakeholders can enhance the effectiveness of ALE programmes. These collaborations can facilitate knowledge exchange, provide practical learning opportunities and align educational offerings with the current labour market and societal needs.
- **Research and innovation initiatives:** Encouraging research on ALE methodologies aligns with the MFA's focus on innovative and inclusive education. Universities can undertake research projects that study the effectiveness of ALE programmes, explore new educational technologies and develop innovative teaching methods tailored to adult learners.
- **Community outreach programmes:** Universities can initiate community outreach programmes that offer adult learning opportunities to underrepresented and disadvantaged groups. This includes organizing workshops, seminars and short courses in community centres, in addition to providing online learning resources and offering flexible learning schedules to accommodate working adults.
- **Policy advocacy and advisory roles:** Academic institutions can play an advisory role to governments and international organisations in formulating policies related to ALE. By leveraging their expertise and research capabilities, universities can advocate for policies that support LLL, address educational inequalities and promote the integration of the SDGs.
- **Implementation of a mechanism for founding/opening branches in regions and districts:** Establishing branches of educational institutions in various regions and districts democratises access to quality education, bringing vital learning opportunities directly to local communities. This approach not only bridges geographical gaps in education provision but also allows for the customisation of courses to address regional needs and cultural contexts. By doing so, it enhances local skill development and contributes to equitable educational growth across different areas.
- **Organizing specialised evening or online courses for adults by universities in order to teach adults:** Universities organizing specialised evening or online courses offer a practical solution for adults to acquire digital skills and specialised professional knowledge. These flexible programmes cater to the busy schedules of working adults, providing them with the opportunity to enhance or update their skills in a rapidly evolving job market. This approach supports lifelong learning and helps bridge the skills gap in various industries.

8. Experiences that may have relevance for partners beyond the region

In recent years, Moldova has not witnessed significant advancements in promoting ALE and LLL. Nevertheless, there have been modest yet noteworthy accomplishments that may serve as valuable examples of good practices for other nations to consider:

- **Creation and operation of the ALE platform.** In 2022, the Adult Learning and Education Platform was established. It currently brings together about 30 members/national organisations that focus on the development and implementation of ALE and LLL concepts. Over the last two years, this platform has been actively involved in promoting CONFINTEA and the exchange of experiences and best practices in the field.
- **Launching of the pilot programme University for the Third Age.** The University for the Third Age (UV3) is part of the National Programme for Active and Healthy Aging for the years 2023-2024, which is implemented by the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection in partnership with UNFPA. The purpose of UV3 is to promote the concept of LLL and to encourage older individuals to age actively and healthily. Of the 40 students aged 60+ enrolled, 33 are from the Republic of Moldova and 7 are refugees from Ukraine. Over the course of 7 months, they will attend courses in “Developing Digital Skills” and “Well-being and communication between generations” taught in Romanian and Russian.

Note:

The report on Moldova was prepared by Tudor Lazăr. The participants in the respective consultation on 23 November 2023 were:

Olga Alcaz, Public Association “Education for Development” (AED), Coordinator for didactic materials

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Cristina Deniță-Boțolin, GIZ – Project regarding professional training, Counsellor in professional training (VET)

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Resources

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<https://storage.googleapis.com/cso-si-dashboard.appspot.com/Reports/CSOSI-Moldova-2022.pdf>

Mykyta Andrieiev

Findings from Ukraine

This report, prepared by Mykyta Andrieiev in consultations with key stakeholders, examines the state of Adult Learning and Education (ALE) in Ukraine amidst the ongoing war with Russia. The conflict has severely impacted educational infrastructure, economic stability, and accessibility to education for adults.

Despite these challenges, various public, private, and non-governmental organisations continue to offer educational services. ALE is critical for socio-economic development and the professional growth of citizens, especially for those needing retraining due to job loss.

The report details Ukraine's collaboration with UNESCO on implementing the Marrakech Framework for Action (MFA), highlighting projects like teacher training programmes and mental health support. It also discusses the draft law "On Adult Education", aiming to enhance accessibility and align with European integration goals. Key recommendations include adopting international best practices, improving data reliability on funding, and fostering cooperation between civil society and government bodies.

The report was prepared by Mykyta Andrieiev, former Executive Director of the Ukrainian Adult Education Association, in consultation with stakeholders in the field of adult learning and education (ALE) in Ukraine. In particular, representatives of the governing bodies of the Ukrainian Adult Education Association, the DVV International Representative Office in Ukraine, and the Public Council at the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine were involved. The report outlines the current state of ALE in Ukraine, as well as actions to implement the MFA.

1. General context

Russia's war against Ukraine has worsened access to education and training not only for children but also for adults. A number of factors contributed to this: damage to educational infrastructure, decreased population income and the forced evacuation of residents.

On February 28, 2022, Ukraine submitted an application for the status of a candidate country for EU membership to the European Council, and on June 23, 2022, it was accepted. The process of European integration requires, among other things, the harmonisation of ALE within lifelong learning (LLL).

Despite the war, numerous institutions in Ukraine continue to offer educational services for the adult population. These are public, private, and non-governmental organisations, most of which do not receive budget support due to the demands of the war.

ALE today holds exceptional significance for the socio-economic development of the country, as well as for the professional and personal development of citizens. Due to the war, many people have lost their jobs and require retraining. Additionally, ALE can become a key instrument in the post-war reconstruction and recovery of Ukraine.

2. Cooperation with UNESCO in the context of the implementation of the MFA Marrakech at the state level

The delegation of Ukraine to the VII International Conference on Adult Education, organised by UNESCO, was headed by Andrii Vitrenko, First Deputy Minister of Education and Science. During the first plenary session, he called on the audience to condemn the war and drew attention to the insidious attack of the Russian Federation, the deaths of civilians, the destruction of cities and educational infrastructure, as well as the humanitarian and economic catastrophe caused by the Russian

armed aggression. Andrii Vitrenko noted that education should be based on universal values and emphasised the need to reflect Ukraine's position on the war, expressed in an official letter to the organisers in the conference resolution. The conference was also attended by scientists from the Institute for Pedagogy and Adult Education of the National Academy of Pedagogical Science of Ukraine and representatives of civil society.

On July 20, 2023, a year after the adoption of the *Marrakech Framework for Action: harnessing the transformational power of Adult Learning and Education*, a meeting took place at the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine between deputy ministers of education and representatives of the UNESCO mission in Ukraine.

During the meeting, the parties discussed various issues, including progress in the implementation of the MFA. Today, Ukraine's cooperation with UNESCO in the field of adult education transformation is multilateral and effective. In particular, the following projects and programmes are being implemented within the framework of cooperation. The project "Supporting the Continuity of Education in Ukraine", a teacher training programme — digital pedagogy with elements of Social Emotional Learning (SEL) and Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) — provides for the development of training to improve teachers' professional skills in conditions with lack of resources, as well as distance or hybrid learning. The MHPSS Programme led by UNESCO, in partnership with the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine and with financial support from the Government of Japan, is working on a programme to address the negative mental health consequences of war and provide psychosocial support to students. This programme is also part of the National Mental Health and Psychosocial Support Programmes.

3. Application of the MFA in the context of Ukraine's European integration

The topic of training and education development is part of the EU-Ukraine Association Agreement, in particular, Articles 432–434 of the Agreement are devoted to this topic. Article 433 states that the parties shall explore opportunities for developing cooperation, in particular in the field of LLL.

According to Article 435 of the Association Agreement, the parties shall cooperate to achieve the recommendations listed in Annex XLII to this Agreement, which means compliance with the Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of April 23, 2008, on the

establishment of a European qualifications system for the provision of LLL (No. 2008/C111/01).

In general, within the European Education Area, the EU has set goals to be achieved by 2030. Within this framework, the EU seeks to ensure that education helps in the transition to a digital and green economy, as well as helping people adapt to changes in the economy and acquire relevant skills, not only professional ones. LLL is an important component of European documents. That is why Ukraine's European integration will help to better implement the recommendations set out in the MFA.

It's important to note that the adult learning policy of the EU is aimed at developing key competencies for LLL (knowledge of foreign languages, digital technologies, entrepreneurship, communication skills, active and responsible citizenship, etc.). The priority is inclusive access to lifelong learning and education for all social groups, regardless of age, property, social status or ethnicity. In Ukraine, however, inclusive access is generally not ensured. Therefore, special attention should be paid to the recommendation set out in paragraphs 30–32 of the MFA, which refers to the promotion of inclusion.

The Council Resolution on a new European Agenda for Adult Learning 2021–2030 (No. 14485/21) states that as we navigate increasingly complex and frequent transitions (including the digital and green transitions) and address current and future challenges (such as climate change, demography, technology, health, etc.), adult learning, as an important part of the lifelong learning process, can contribute to making the economy and society stronger and more resilient. It is also important to provide the necessary conditions for individuals to become agents of change through the choices they make (Council of the European Union 2021).

It is also proposed to implement the Council Recommendation on the validation of non-formal and informal learning, with the aim of ensuring accessible opportunities for all adults, offering a second chance and obtaining full or partial qualifications.

The content of these recommendations, as well as Ukraine's actions to implement them, are very much in line with certain paragraphs of the MFA, in particular, paragraph 17 (on using education to address climate change), paragraph 25 (on upskilling) and paragraph 36 (on digital divides) (UIL 2022c).

4. The draft law “On Adult Education” as an implementation of the key principles of the MFA and the goal on “Quality Education” of the SDGs

On January 12, 2023, the Ukrainian parliament adopted the draft law “On Adult Education”¹ in the first reading. One of the goals of the draft law is to provide local governments with the legal ability to adopt and implement programmes to support adult education, including involving business and non-governmental organisations. The document contains many other innovations that will make adult education as accessible as possible, even for the most vulnerable groups.

The content of the draft law is based on serious research conducted in Ukraine by the Ukrainian Adult Education Association and the DVV International Office in Ukraine. This includes studies such as “State Policy of Adult Learning and Education in Ukraine” and “Financing Adult Learning and Education” (Andreev, Bakhrushin, Lukyanova, Panych 2021), which are especially relevant in the context of paragraph 27 of the MFA, which covers the importance of research and evaluation to guide policy and practice to further promote integration, quality and relevance.

However, as revealed by practice, there are serious gaps regarding the completeness and reliability of data on budgetary financing for adult education. Even government agencies themselves face these issues, as the information contained in their reports and other documents is often incomplete, irrelevant and inconsistent. In some cases, such information is wholly absent. Failure to address this problem makes it impossible to implement a number of recommendations of the MFA, in particular those set out in paragraphs 28 and 29, which relate to funding.

It is important to emphasise that the draft law is based on the principles set out in SDG Goal 4 “Quality Education” and the MFA (UIL 2022c). The subject of regulation covered by the draft law aligns with Ukraine’s commitments in the sphere of European integration. The draft law also takes into account the Council Resolution on the new European Agenda for Adult Learning for 2021–2030 (No. 14485/21 of 29.11.2021) (Council of the European Union 2021).

The final adoption of this law will open up many opportunities for Ukrainian citizens. For example, there will be a publicly accountable Adult Learning Support Fund with a clear criteria for allocating funds. It will be easier for people to acquire a new profession or improve their skills in a particular area through training at adult education centres. The quality of

¹ Parliament of Ukraine. 2023: Draft law on adult education. Retrieved from <https://itd.rada.gov.ua/billInfo/Bills/Card/38978>

educational services will also improve. In addition, job seekers will be able to provide potential employers with a so-called “educational portfolio” that will display all the qualifications a person has acquired in a single database.

The issue of adopting the draft law was the focus of public attention during the Forum on Legislative Support of Adult Learning and Education held on April 6, 2023, in Kyiv. One of the main objectives of the Forum was to draw public attention to the role of ALE in post-war reconstruction. The event was organised by the Ukrainian Adult Education Association and DVV International with the support of the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine and with the assistance of the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development.

Ukrainian and international experts, who attended the event, shared their experience and discussed the role of adult education and legislation in the country’s development. Among the guests were Ruslan Stefanchuk, Chairman of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, Yulia Hryshyna, MP, Chairperson of the Subcommittee on Higher Education of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, Tetiana Lomakina, Advisor and Presidential Commissioner for a Barrier-Free Environment, and Levan Kvachadze, Regional Director of “Eastern Neighbours”. In an online format, the Forum was joined by Gustav Fridolin, Minister of Education of Sweden (2014–2019), former Member of the Swedish Parliament, member of the Executive Committee of the European Association for the Education of Adults (EAEA), CEO of the Finnish Lifelong Learning Foundation and Katarina Popovic, Secretary General of the International Council for Adult Education, Professor at the University of Belgrade, among others.

Government representatives emphasised the importance of supporting adult education at the state level in their speeches. They particularly focused on the necessity of rapid retraining and the quality mastery of new professions for citizens. Ruslan Stefanchuk, Chairman of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, noted, “The Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine has adopted the draft law “On Adult Education” as a basis. Now more than a thousand amendments have been submitted to it, but this document cannot be delayed.” He urged the professional community to contribute their proposals. According to him, “Ultimately, through the adoption of the draft law, we should have an effective mechanism for every Ukrainian to have the opportunity for lifelong learning.”

The participants also discussed the mechanism of harmonisation of Ukrainian legislation in the field of adult education with the recommendations of the EU. Some provisions of the SDGs, the MFA and the Resolution on the New European Agenda for Adult Learning for 2021–2030 were discussed.

As a result of the Forum, the participants agreed on a resolution, which among other things stated that the work of key stakeholders on creating legislative support for ALE continued despite Russia's ongoing aggression against Ukraine. It resulted in the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine submitting a draft law "On Adult Education" (registration number 7039) to the Parliament. The developed document is based, in particular, on the results of the Adult Education Study in Ukraine (Andreev, Bakhrushin, Lukyanova, Panych, 2021), as well as on the latest policy documents of the European Union, CONFINTEA, and the EU-Ukraine Association Agreement.

5. Advocacy for the implementation of the MFA through networking

An essential component for implementing international documents such as the MFA and the SDGs is the presence of partners, both international and national, and further networking to seek more such partnerships.

For Ukraine, paragraph 22 of the MFA is particularly relevant, emphasizing the need to strengthen the role of governments in establishing mechanisms and rules, as well as in the allocation of financial and human resources to support ALE structures. This is crucial as the adult education system in Ukraine is still in its infancy and cannot function without the involvement of government agencies.

We take pride in the existence of the Public Council under the Ministry of Education and Science, composed of representatives from 35 civil society institutions working in the field of education and learning. The Public Council is an advisory body established to promote public participation in the formulation and implementation of state policy, effective interaction between the Ministry of Education and Science and NGOs, and to take into account the wishes of the public in the formulation and implementation of state policy in the field of education and training.

Interestingly, the structure of the Public Council includes a Committee on Adult Education, and 9 out of 35 members of the Public Council work in the field of adult education. In July 2023, at the initiative of the Public Council, a decision was made to appeal to the Chairman of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine and the Minister of Education and Science requesting personal oversight in the adoption of the draft law "On Adult Education", considering its Euro-integration status. The appeal emphasised that adult education today is of paramount importance for the socio-economic development of the country, professional and personal development of citizens, especially during and after the war.

The Ukrainian Adult Education Association, as the only union of adult education institutions in Ukraine that is a full member of the EAEA, currently has 90 member organisations. Towards the end of 2023, a General Assembly is scheduled where the implementation of the MFA in Ukraine will be discussed. Members of Parliament and the Deputy Minister of Education and Science are also invited to attend the event.

6. Recommendations

- 1) It's essential to accumulate and implement the best international practices and experiences in the development of adult learning and education through the final adoption and implementation of the Law on Adult Education, taking into account the local context and the realities of war and post-war reconstruction.
- 2) There should be an emphasis on making adult education accessible to all segments of the population, with a focus on digitalizing education and expanding educational infrastructure, acknowledging that many individuals have lost jobs, income and have relocated.
- 3) There is a need to enhance the informativeness, completeness, and reliability of data regarding the budgetary funding of adult education to increase its effectiveness and ensure targeted direction of resources.
- 4) Further cooperation, networking, associations and councils will allow civil society institutions to work more closely with governmental organisations, advising on the further development of the field of ALE.
- 5) It is necessary to use the potential of adult learning and education to enhance citizens' critical thinking abilities and resilience.

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Recommendations from country reports

The countries involved need and seek peace and sustainable development for all their people. They all suffer from war directly or indirectly, endure forced migration, constant instability and personal insecurity. Whatever ALE can do to improve the situation and lessen the hardships for the individuals and communities should be done. However, this often goes beyond the direct possibilities of ALE, but the indirect impact of ALE on helping to achieve higher levels of resilience should not be underestimated.

The country reports include findings and recommendations which may be taken up by partners in planning their work in the near future. Some may become part of the joint cooperation with European partners and the Country or Regional Offices of DVV International, and some may become aims, indicators or activities in the yearly plan of the annual project during the coming years.

In this section only four such pointers from each country have been selected, and they are often presented with the associated concerns. They are either taken as direct quotations or reformulated from the reports, and most of them in the text are related to respective clauses of the MFA, or even to SDG goals beyond education. They are grouped by countries in an alphabetical order.

Armenia:

- The main educational laws and by-laws offer mostly inconsistent terminology for the field of ALE. The variety of terms in use is especially confusing when there is need to bridge the local and international contexts. The international policy vocabulary has long moved from AE to ALE and the government of Armenia, being a UN and UNESCO member state, needs to keep the relevance of its national documents, choosing the definition that best explains the aims of ALE in Armenia.
- Ensure the availability of ALE services in the remote and rural areas. Special legislative regulation is needed to ensure equal access to educational services for everyone regardless their actual residence or social characteristics. Provision of ALE can become a part of the responsibility of local authorities.
- DVV International Armenia has an institutional collaboration with Yerevan State University regarding ALE issues. One of the goals of this initiative was the popularisation of MFA among academia and students, ALE experts and institutions specialised in ALE. Besides this, the Country office of DVV International in Armenia also has a strategic goal of modernisation of andragogy programmes/ curriculum at universities to reflect global developments and international best practice.
- There can be two main levels of network operations – in the macro or national level and at the community level. The national network shall aim policy, legislation, infrastructure and funding improvement, while local networks can address the gaps of communication and cooperation among ALE providers in communities. Actual data, concerns and recommendations coming from local networks can serve as strong evidence for the advocacy of national networks. Needs of beneficiaries revealed during grassroots activities on the local level can shape the direction of ALE strategy on the national level.

Georgia:

- Stakeholder discussions highlighted that although skills ecosystem research and assessment have improved significantly in recent years, it is clear that there is still a lack of focused research on adult learning problems that should underpin measures to improve the quality and accessibility of adult education.
- Increasing the volume of funding and focusing more on the needs of vulnerable groups was highlighted as one of the important recommendations from the stakeholders. Emphasis was made on

the limited funding and support mechanisms at the municipal and local level of governance. The recommendation also concerns the further expansion of state funding in the direction of non-formal education, especially for courses focused on the development of key competencies.

- Greater emphasis should be placed on developing transferable skills such as planning, problem-solving, communication, foreign language proficiency, and digital competencies. It is crucial to foster the development of such cross-functional skills systematically, both within the programme and through extracurricular activities, rather than being limited to courses that are solely dedicated to this purpose.
- In order to change the mindset of society and raise awareness on the importance of LLL and adult education, information campaigns, including social media interventions, have to be conducted.

Moldova:

- With the global policy discourse evolving from “Adult Education” to “Adult Learning and Education”, it is imperative for the Government as a member state of UN and UNESCO, to update and align its national documents. This alignment involves selecting definitions that most accurately reflect the objectives and scope of ALE within the Moldovan context.
- Financial allocations for ALE must be augmented to accommodate the growing adult population and to steadily enhance participation rates. Budgetary provisions and expenditures should extend beyond addressing the requirements of civil servants and vulnerable groups, encompassing the broader societal needs. Such financial commitment would act as a catalyst for ensuring sustainable engagement of adults in ALE initiatives.
- While the SDG agenda and the MFA are distinct, they are interconnected, especially when it comes to the role of education and lifelong learning in achieving sustainable development. In Moldova, as in other countries, efforts to implement both agendas should be coordinated to maximise their impact on improving education and lifelong learning opportunities for all.
- Establishing partnerships between universities, government bodies, NGOs, and industry stakeholders can enhance the effectiveness of ALE programmes. These collaborations can facilitate knowledge exchange, provide practical learning opportunities and align educational offerings with the current labour market and societal needs.

Ukraine:

- It is essential to accumulate and implement the best international practices and experiences in the development of adult learning and education through the final adoption and implementation of the Law on Adult Education, taking into account the local context and the realities of war and post-war reconstruction.
- In general, within the European Education Area, the EU has set goals for 2030. Within their framework, the EU seeks to ensure that education helps in the transition to a digital and green economy, as well as helps people adapt to changes in the economy and acquire relevant skills, not only professional ones. LLL is an important component of European documents. That is why Ukraine's European integration will help to better implement the recommendations set out in the MFA.
- The priority is inclusive access to lifelong learning and education for all social groups, regardless of age, property, social status, or cultural characteristics. In Ukraine, however, inclusive access is generally not ensured.
- It is necessary to use the transformative power of adult learning and education in attempts to counteract the effects of climate change, disinformation, the spread of hate speech, propaganda, and populism.

Regional perspectives on country recommendations

The reflections on the global and regional perspectives which could be found within UNESCO and UN frameworks, in the CONFINTEA process and the SDG agenda, and highlighted most recently in the MFA, as well as on EU level in the New European Agenda for Adult Learning, were in strong support of the importance of ALE within a LLL perspective. ALE development priorities from the perspective of the civil society in the countries reflect these global developments and recommendations. At the same time there is evidence that the orientation and alignment towards European integration and a future membership in the EU provide important guidance for priorities in the field of education and lifelong learning strategies.

The country reports have shown a variety of findings which are due to and conducive to the historical, political and cultural contexts. Putting a comparative lens on them, one can identify and reflect on some communalities, similarities and differences which may lead one to look at suggestions for joint efforts in light of the overall aim of professionalisation

and institutionalisation of ALE centres. Some of those overarching findings are taken up in the regional perspectives below.

A preliminary selection points to seven important areas which in one way or the other are reflected in the national reports as well as global documents and have the potential for successful work and therefore deserve a certain follow-up:

Policy, legislation and financing: Governance frameworks must be developed which will ensure the recognition and support structures for ALE are no less than those for other subsectors of the education system. Despite the varying levels of achievement attained by countries and governments, there is a clear consensus that all can do more to support the development of ALE.

Institutionalisation, professionalisation and digitalisation: ALE requires similar institutions and facilities as other forms of education and training. Additionally, there is a need for professionals who are trained and retrained to plan and implement ALE. These areas are subject to accelerated digitalisation processes, which offer opportunities and challenges.

General, civic and vocational: ALE has not yet reached the level of understanding and recognition that is needed for a holistic approach which fosters all areas of general and basic, civic and environmental, initial and continuing aspects of vocational education and training.

Inclusion – leave no one behind: ALE is a universal concept applicable to all adults. However, there are specific target groups that deserve particular attention. While the relative priorities of different countries may vary, it is essential to ensure that gender equality, adequate services for people with disabilities, migrants, refugees, minorities and people in rural areas are included in any plan of action.

Glossary and terminology: It is evident that there are still a considerable number of terms in use which reflect various historical contexts, yet simultaneously impede the formulation of policy decisions and the implementation of joint efforts. Consequently, it is suggested that the recommended term, ALE, be followed and a related glossary with necessary translations be provided.

Government, civil society and academia: A number of examples from countries around the world demonstrate how strengthening the golden triangle can be improved. It is evident that governments cannot act alone in this regard. Universities can engage in research that benefits the ALE sector, thereby achieving their third mission. Civil society actors are also important because they can be relevant providers.

Networking and cooperation: It is a notable accomplishment to observe the establishment and growth of ALE associations, networks, and

platforms. While they are playing a pivotal role in joint advocacy efforts and capacity building, it is also essential to enhance their capacity to perform their work more effectively.

There is a diverse and wide range of opportunities to take up these challenges and recommendations in the years to come. Fortunately there are a number of potential partners who have the implementation of the SDGs and MFA high on their agendas. The UN and UNESCO related organisations are important, and so are those related to the EU, like the LLL Platform, EAEA or ETF:

- The Education and Academia Stakeholder Group (EASG) brings together human rights-based education, civil society, as well as academia and their networks that work on the right to education with the aim to engage with the monitoring and review of the SDGs. ICAE and DWV International are members and could support advocacy and exchange.
- UIL has started an initiative on European perspectives towards MFA implementation and monitoring. Partners from the four countries were invited to an initial online webinar on 9 October 2023; contact for a follow-up was established and all are open to cooperation.
- EAEA has been a strong partner of most of the activities of the project. There may be additional chances for partners to participate in new projects which may be related to EU accession perspectives.

Abbreviations

AE	Adult Education
AEC	Adult Education Centre
ALE	Adult Learning and Education
BFA	Belém Framework for Action
CLC	Community Learning Centres
CONFINTEA	Conférence internationale sur l'éducation des adultes/ International Conference for the Education of Adults
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
CVET	Continuing Vocational Education and Training
DVW	Deutscher Volkshochschul-Verband/German Adult Education Association
DVW International	Institute for International Cooperation of the German Adult Education Association
EAEA	European Association for the Education of Adults
EFA	Education for All
EQF	European Qualifications Framework
ETF	European Training Foundation
EU	European Union
GAEN	Georgian Adult Education Network
GEM	Global Education Monitoring
GRALE	Global Report on Adult Learning and Education
HEI	Higher Education Institutions
ICAE	International Council for Adult Education
IDP	Internally Displaced People
IVET	Initial Vocational Education and Training
LLL	Lifelong Learning
MDG	Millennium Development Goals
MFA	Marrakech Framework for Action
MEC	Ministry of Education and Culture
MoESCS	Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sport
NEETs	Not in Education, Employment, or Training
NBS	National Bureau of Statistics
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation

NQF	National Qualifications Framework
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
PIAAC	Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies
PISA	Programme for International Student Assessment
RALE	Recommendation on Adult Learning and Education
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
ToR	Terms of Reference
TVET	Technical Vocational Education and Training
UIL	UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning
UN	United Nations
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNICEF	United National Children's Fund
WEF	World Education Forum
VET	Vocational Education and Training
YSU	Yerevan State University

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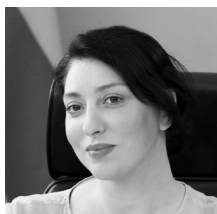
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