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Institute for  
Lifelong Learning

**CONFINTEA VII**

**Concept Note**

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**Adult learning and education within the new social contract:**

**A key to sustainable development**

# Adult learning and education within the new social contract:

## A key to sustainable development

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

CONFINTEA VII is planned to take place in Morocco, XXXX in 2022 (precise date tbc.)

### Background

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

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

Adult education is recognized as an essential element of the right to education, and we need to chart a new and urgent course of action to enable all young people and adults to exercise this right. We reiterate the fundamental role of adult learning and education as laid down during the five International Conferences on Adult Education (CONFINTEA I–V) since 1949 and unanimously undertake to take forward, with a sense of urgency and at an accelerated pace, the agenda of adult learning and education. *Belém Framework for Action (Preamble, p.5), adopted at CONFINTEA VI, December 2009*

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

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

and adults', specifically with regard to reaching the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in general, and SDG 4 on education, in particular.

#### **Defining adult learning and education**

Adult learning and education 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, organizations and societies. Adult learning and education involves sustained activities and processes of acquiring, recognizing, exchanging, and adapting capabilities. Given that the boundaries of youth and adulthood are shifting in most cultures, in this text the term 'adult' denotes all those who engage in adult learning and education, even if they have not reached the legal age of maturity.

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

Since 2015, the process of redefining the role of adult learning and education on the international level in the context of the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda is ongoing and, accordingly, the *GRALE* reports are drafted in the framework of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Furthermore, in 2017, on the occasion of the CONFINTEA VI Mid-Term Review, held in the Republic of Korea, representatives from UNESCO Member States underlined in its outcome document – the Suwon/Osan Statement – that ALE is not sufficiently articulated in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and represents the least-supported link in the lifelong learning chain. Underlining the importance of ALE for realizing the 2030 Agenda, they recommended renewing efforts to raise awareness of the potential of ALE among all relevant stakeholders, within and beyond education, in a range of areas, including peace, inclusion, social cohesion, health and environmental sustainability.

## **CONFINTEA VII**

Against this background, the aim of CONFINTEA VII is to bring up opportunities to shape policy directions for ALE within a lifelong learning perspective, in the framework of the 2030 Agenda and beyond, so as to anticipate and strengthen adult learning and education in both the nearer and the more distant future.

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

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

<sup>1</sup> Retrieved from <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/24978R> [Accessed on 10 February 2020].

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

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

and emerging challenges, both locally and globally. Adult learning and education is certainly a means to achieve this, as it is a lifelong process, consisting of flexible paths of learning.

Consequently, CONFINTEA VII will encourage Member States to put in place regulatory frameworks to develop flexible opportunities and skills for living and acting in a culture of human rights, justice, inclusion and equity, values and sustainability, for respecting the environment and for keeping pace with the development of information technology as well as becoming critical and ethical users of such technologies. It is against this backdrop and in respect of UNESCO's longstanding work and experience on this theme, that the role of citizenship education in ALE will be one of the central themes of CONFINTEA VII.

At CONFINTEA VII, participants will review current practices, achievements and challenges for ALE and elaborate a set of recommendations for ALE's further development, which will flow into the CONFINTEA VII outcome document – a new framework for action that participating countries will commit to for the next 12 years in order to guide policy and practice on ALE, while realizing the 2030 Agenda and going beyond it. Reference will be made to the report of UNESCO's "Futures of Education" Initiative to be published in November 2021 and the function of ALE for 'learning to become'.

Preparatory regional conferences (to be held in 2021) will precede CONFINTEA VII. The CONFINTEA VII preparatory conferences will be used to identify the current key issues on ALE in the respective regions and suggest benchmarks and key recommendations for CONFINTEA VII.

### **Outcome document of CONFINTEA VII**

CONFINTEA VII aims to adopt a 'framework for action', comprising strategies, recommendations and benchmarks to ensure stronger partnerships for and renewed strong action in ALE, in order to realize the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and to shape adult learning and education in the future.

### **Date of CONFINTEA VII**

June 2022 (precise date tbc)

### **Venue**

XXXXX, Morocco (precise venue tbc)

### **Duration**

2.5 days

### **Participants**

Approximately 1,300 participants, including a large number of online participants (policy-makers, education researchers, international organizations, non-governmental organizations, private sector representatives, youth representatives, practitioners etc.).

## Methodology

### Preparation

The organization of CONFINTEA VII will be led by the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL) in collaboration with the host country, UNESCO Headquarters, regional Offices, other UNESCO Institutes and UNESCO National Commissions. A Consultative Committee and a Task Force will be established.

### Work to be done between 2020 and 2022

- *GRALE 5* survey monitoring Member States' implementation of the BFA (completed in December 2020);
- Five CONFINTEA VII regional preparatory conferences to be held in 2021;
- Outcome documents of the regional preparatory conferences;
- Drafting of concept notes based on the themes emerging during CONFINTEA VII preparatory regional conferences;
- *GRALE 5* (to be launched at CONFINTEA VII);
- Draft of the CONFINTEA VII framework for action (outcome document).

### Themes to be explored in CONFINTEA VII

- The role of ALE in realizing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development
  - The role of ALE for sustainable environment and climate;
  - The benefits of ALE in health and well-being;
  - ALE and demographic change;
  - The role of ALE in fostering increased life-chances and employment opportunities
- Towards a right to lifelong learning
- Competences needed in the twenty-first century
  - Citizenship education in ALE;
  - The role of ALE to overcome crisis situations such as COVID-19;
  - ALE in conflict, post-conflict and disaster contexts;
- The role of ICTs in ALE: a) to improve access, b) to support learning processes;
  - ALE and artificial intelligence;
- Promoting teaching/learning practice:
  - How to motivate learners; use of incentives (individual learning accounts); effective public financing; effective recognition, validation and accreditation (RVA) of non-formal and informal learning; assessing and measuring learning achievements.
  - Professional development of adult educators;
  - The role of the learning infrastructure (including CLCs);
- The role of ALE in cities and communities;
- The role of social dialogue and partnerships in supporting ALE;
- Monitoring the new framework for action in UNESCO Member States.

### Working methods during the conference

- Plenaries consisting of keynote speeches and roundtables;
- Parallel workshops on themes of the conference;
- Meetings of reporting commission;
- Visits to local ALE initiatives;
- A bar camp as an innovation space.

### Working documents

- UNESCO, Futures of Education: Learning to Become;
- [Belém Framework for Action \(BFA\)](#);
- [2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#);
- [Recommendation on Adult Learning and Education \(RALE\)](#);
- Synthesis report of *GRALE 1, 2, 3, and 4*;
- *GRALE 5*;
- Synthesis reports of the CONFINTEA VII regional preparatory conferences;
- [Suwon-Osan CONFINTEA VI Mid-Term Review Statement](#);
- Background documents prepared by various constituencies.

### Outcome documents

- Draft of the outcome document for CONFINTEA VII;
- Report of the conference.

#### UNESCO – a global leader in education

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



#### The Global Education 2030 Agenda

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

