

CONFINTEA VI

MID-TERM REVIEW 2017

The status of adult learning and education in Europe and North America

 REGIONAL REPORT



The status of adult learning and education in Europe and North America

REGIONAL REPORT

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INTRODUCTION

BACKGROUND OF THIS REPORT

The Belém Framework for Action (BFA) – the outcome of CONFINTEA VI (the sixth International Conference on Adult Education) in 2009 – provided a set of recommendations for further developing adult learning and education (ALE) in UNESCO Member States from a global perspective (UIL, 2010). A subsequent CONFINTEA VI follow-up conference took place in Vilnius, Lithuania, in 2013, to discuss priority actions to implement the BFA in Europe against the background of regional specificities.

This report looks at the outcomes of the regional recommendations for Europe resulting from the Vilnius conference as well as outcomes from efforts to implement the BFA in North America. It will provide information for the 2017 CONFINTEA VI Mid-Term Review, which will take stock of developments since 2009 and adopt a strategy for further implementation of the BFA up to CONFINTEA VII (2021), and complement the findings of the third *Global Report on Adult Learning and Education (GRALE III)* (UIL, 2016).

SETTING THE CONTEXT: EUROPE AND NORTH AMERICA

Europe and North America are richly diverse – geographically, economically, politically, socially, ethnically, linguistically and culturally. European demography is influenced by a declining birth rate and an ageing population, ethnic relations and (im)migration. The ageing of Europe, also known as the greying of Europe, is a demographic phenomenon characterized by a decrease in fertility and mortality rates, and a higher life expectancy among European populations. Young people (0 to 14 years old) make up 15.6 per cent of the population, while persons between 15 and 64 years old account for 65.6 per cent of the population. Older persons (aged 65 or over) comprise 18.9 per cent of the population.

Similar numbers are reported in the United States of America and Canada. Statistics from 2016, coming from the United States Census Bureau¹ and Statistics Canada,² put the proportion of young people in the USA at 22.8 per cent, and in Canada at 16.6 per cent. The share of persons aged 65 or older stands at 15.2 per cent in the USA and at 16.9 per cent in Canada.

In Europe, as *Figure 1* shows, unemployment rates remain high, with young people hit particularly hard. According to Eurostat, unemployment rates are the highest in Greece and Spain, at 23 per cent and 19 per cent respectively. The figures are more optimistic for North America, where the current unemployment rate stands at 6.6 per cent in Canada (Statistics Canada, 2016) and 4.4 per cent in the USA (US Bureau of Labor Statistics, as of June 2017³).

In addition to persistent issues such as unemployment, slow economic growth and pressure on public finances, the region faces new challenges, such as the influx of refugees from Asia and Africa to Europe, further increasing the cultural and linguistic diversity of the continent. High immigration rates are also traditionally recorded in the USA and Canada. According to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), 13.1 per cent of the population of the USA and as many as 20 per cent of the population in Canada were born abroad.⁴ Unsurprisingly, *GRALE III* defines 'growing migration flows' as one of the six major global trends in ALE (UIL, 2016, p. 125).

In 2015, 118.7 million people, or 23.7 per cent of the population of the EU, were at risk of poverty or social exclusion (Eurostat, 2016⁵). According to the United States Census Bureau, 13.5 per cent of the country's population live in poverty. Again, 'growing inequalities' are also noted as one of the major global trends in ALE in *GRALE III* (UIL, 2016, p. 127).

1 <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/> [Accessed 6 July 2017]

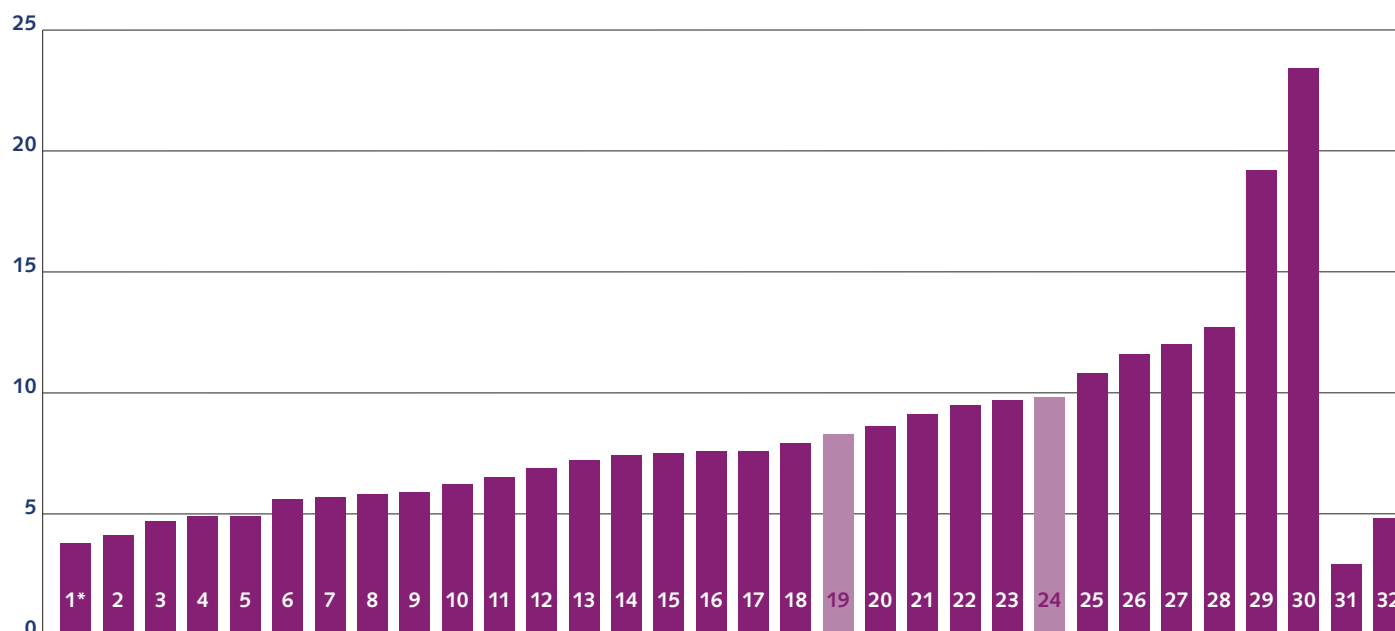
2 <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/> [Accessed 6 July 2017]

3 <https://www.bls.gov/cps/> [Accessed 6 July 2017]

4 <https://data.oecd.org/migration/foreign-born-population.htm> [Accessed 6 July 2017]

5 http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/People_at_risk_of_poverty_or_social_exclusion [Accessed 10 August 2017]

Figure 1: Unemployment rates in Europe (percentages)



*N° / COUNTRY	%	*N° / COUNTRY	%
1 Czech Republic	3.8	17 Slovenia	7.6
2 Germany	4.1	18 Belgium	7.9
3 UK*	4.7	19 EU-28	8.3
4 Hungary**	4.9	20 Finland	8.6
5 Malta	4.9	21 Slovakia	9.1
6 Netherlands	5.6	22 Latvia	9.5
7 Poland	5.7	23 France	9.7
8 Romania	5.8	24 EA-19	9.8
9 Austria	5.9	25 Portugal	10.8
10 Luxembourg	6.2	26 Italy	11.6
11 Denmark	6.5	27 Cyprus	12.0
12 Sweden	6.9	28 Croatia	12.7
13 Estonia**	7.2	29 Spain	19.2
14 Bulgaria	7.4	30 Greece*	23.4
15 Ireland	7.5	31 Iceland	2.9
16 Lithuania	7.6	32 Norway**	4.8

*August 2016 **September 2016

Source: http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/File:Unemployment_rates,_seasonally_adjusted,_October_2016.png [Accessed 3 December 2016]

The numbers across the region vary greatly in terms of educational attainment. According to the UNESCO Institute of Statistics, the percentage of adults in Europe and North America who have at least completed upper secondary education varies between 35 per cent and 91 per cent. In the EU, according to the EU Labour Force Survey (EU LFS), around 75 per cent of adults (25–64) in the EU have completed at least upper secondary education. This means that adults with educational attainment below the upper secondary level represent around a quarter of adult population in the EU – some 70 million adults (European Commission, EACEA and Eurydice, 2015a).

Additionally, the global financial crisis had a significant economic impact. While, initially, it primarily affected the advanced economies of the USA and Western Europe, the spillover of the crisis was unexpectedly powerful. The financial crisis hit the various Member States of the European Union to different degrees, with the extent strongly dependent on their initial conditions and associated vulnerabilities. This has resulted in increasing economic inequalities between Member States and huge difficulties, especially in Southern and Eastern European countries.

UNDERSTANDING ALE IN NORTH AMERICA AND EUROPE

ALE policies in Canada and the United States of America operate in a very decentralized manner, which has important implications for how ALE has developed since the BFA.

In Canada, most policy matters are decided at province level; there is no integrated system of education at national level. As pointed out in the report from the North American regional consultation on *Rethinking Education: Towards a Global Common Good?* (UNESCO, 2015), 'in the 10 provinces and 3 territories, departments or ministries of education are responsible for ... postsecondary education' (COLLO, 2016). That said, the Canadian Council of Ministers of Education does set out some directions for education strategies across the country. The Government of Canada is also responsible for the 'First Nation education of Aboriginal populations who live on reserves' (Council of Ministers of Education Canada, 2012).

In the USA, education is a local responsibility and supported by a complex set of funding formulas combining local, state and some federal aid. Furthermore, there is no mandate for adult education, which is often allocated little funding at any level, with the exception of local and state support for basic literacy and English-language classes. Within the US Department of Education's Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education, the Division of Adult Education and Literacy disburses funds to federal states for adult education and literacy programmes (Adult Education and Family Literacy Act of 1998⁶). In addition to basic grants to states for literacy programmes, competitive grants are available to non-governmental organizations (NGOs) as well as to corporations and individuals in areas targeted by the BFA.

With decentralized policies across the USA and Canada, the ALE landscape remains diverse. Secondary schools, community colleges, workplaces, libraries, family centres, churches, to name only a few, are important providers of learning in formal, non-formal and informal settings in North America. In addition, partnerships among different providers (e.g. schools and universities, universities and businesses, etc.) are becoming more frequent.

In Europe, recent developments on the ALE policy level have varied widely between European countries. While ALE provision across Europe is extensive, encompassing folk high schools, study circles or private institutions – to name but a few – it is often not clearly regulated at policy level. This tends to have far-reaching consequences, affecting the quality of provision, entry-level qualifications of adult educators and their professional status.

Confronting the fragmentation of the adult education sector is certainly an important challenge that European policy-makers need to address. This is illustrated by the participation rates in ALE, which are regularly monitored at the EU level. While some European countries, such as the United Kingdom, Finland or Sweden, have participation levels that reach as high as 35 per cent, in others it falls below 2 per cent (European Commission, 2016c). The European Commission's *Education and Training 2020* (ET 2020) joint report also identified fragmentation at national levels, stating that even basic skills provision is fragmented and dispersed among a myriad of providers, stakeholders, policies, short-term and longer-term initiatives, and is often restricted to individual target groups (Council of the European Union and European Commission, 2015).

ALE MATTERS

Since the 2008 introduction of the OECD's Survey of Adult Skills (PIAAC), which measures literacy, numeracy and problem-solving in technology-rich environments, and the adoption of the BFA in 2009, ALE has received more attention across Europe and North America. The survey's results were discussed at the CONFINTEA VI follow-up conference in Vilnius in 2013.

Data showed that, across the participating countries, between 4.9 per cent and 27.7 per cent of adults on average attained only the lowest levels in literacy, while between 8.1 per cent and 31.7 per cent reached only the lowest level of numeracy. At the same time, only 2.9 per cent and 8.8 per cent had the highest proficiency in problem-solving in technology-rich environments.

Interestingly, while significant variation in skills is observed between countries – with Finland singled out as

6 <https://www2.ed.gov/policy/adulted/leg/legis.html> [Accessed on 10 August 2017]

the top performer – most of the variation happens *within* countries. The OECD reports that ‘in all but one participating country, at least one in ten adults is proficient only at or below Level 1 in literacy or numeracy’ (OECD, 2013, p. 28). In response to these numbers, international institutions have realized that urgent action is needed to improve competence and skills levels across Europe and North America, underlining the growing importance of ALE.

One far-reaching initiative is the 2015 UNESCO *Recommendation on Adult Learning and Education (RALE)*, which complements the BFA in view of the Education 2030 agenda and the Incheon Declaration, and calls for a comprehensive and systematic approach to ALE. The 2015 *RALE* supersedes the 1976 *Recommendation on the Development of Adult Education*, and is a tool for ALE decision-makers, researchers, practitioners from governmental and civil society organizations, and other stakeholders around the globe.

Both *RALE* and the BFA refer to five transversal areas of actions, which are the basis of this report’s structure:

- 1) Policy
- 2) Governance
- 3) Financing
- 4) Participation, inclusion and equity
- 5) Quality

Along with implementation, Member States should also focus on strengthening international cooperation in ALE through increasing cooperation between all relevant stakeholders, capacity-building and shared experiences (UNESCO and UIL, 2016, p. 13) – a matter reviewed in this report. Finally, considering the trans-sectoral approach of *GRALE III*, this report looks at the impact of ALE on health and well-being, employment and the labour market, as well as on social, civic and community life. The following chapters present an overview of the implementation of the BFA in the region and make proposals for further action towards 2021.

The report is based primarily on the findings of *GRALE III*, analysing regional trends in the context of the commitments made in the BFA. *GRALE III* national reports were an important source of information for case studies. That said, the authors have complemented the findings by conducting extensive desk research, looking at the most recent publications available. They have also reached out

to 16 stakeholders in Europe and North America, mainly representatives of key national associations (*Annex 1*). Their answers to the expert questionnaire (*Annex 2*) provided an additional source of information, bringing in a civil society perspective.

1. KEY AREAS

POLICY

BFA WITHIN EU POLICIES

Setting the context

According to the Belém Framework for Action, ‘policies and legislative measures for adult education need to be comprehensive, inclusive, integrated within a lifelong and life-wide learning perspective, based on sector-wide and intersectoral approaches, covering and linking all components of learning and education’ (UIL, 2010, p. 7). Similar principles are reflected in the ALE policies of the European Union.

It is important to mention at this point that while the EU policy documents – similar in this respect to UNESCO frameworks – do not have any binding power over national education strategies (the principle of ‘subsidiarity’) (Milana, 2015, p. 73), they can provide guidance and serve as recommendations. These policies will be briefly outlined in this section, taking account of their alignment with the BFA.

Importantly, the 2013 CONFINTEA VI follow-up conference for Europe in Lithuania was organized jointly by the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL) and the European Commission. The objective of the conference was to launch *GRALE II* in the pan-European region, discuss the results of the PIAAC study, and provide policy guidance for the European Commission’s Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA) on quality and financing of ALE. Participants at the conference, comprising representatives from 39 Member States and several regional and national civil society organizations, debated what action should be taken in ALE to implement the objectives of ET 2020 and follow-up on CONFINTEA VI. While the conference did not result in an action plan for the pan-European region, the discussions concluded in recommendations for future action.

ALE within EU lifelong learning policies

ALE is a vital component of EU lifelong learning policy. It is essential to promoting competitiveness and employability, social inclusion, active citizenship and personal development across Europe. Demand for ALE is increasing and the European Commission is committed to supporting all EU countries in their efforts to create ALE systems characterized by flexibility, high quality, excellent teaching and an enhanced role for local authorities, employers, social partners and civil society and cultural organizations.

The two fundamental frameworks shaping EU policy are *Europe 2020: A Strategy for Smart, Sustainable and Inclusive Growth* and the strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training (ET 2020). Within these frameworks, the European Commission is working with 36 countries to promote the European Agenda for Adult Learning.⁷ The agenda highlights the need to increase participation in adult learning of all kinds (formal, non-formal and informal learning), whether to acquire new work skills, for active citizenship, or for personal development and fulfilment.

A more recent document is the *New Skills Agenda for Europe*. Published in 2016 with a proposal of 10 complementary actions, it aims to tackle skills challenges. Both it and the *Council Resolution on a Renewed European Agenda for Adult Learning* are briefly discussed below.

The Council Resolution on a Renewed European Agenda for Adult Learning

Since CONFINTEA VI, the *Council Resolution on a Renewed European Agenda for Adult Learning*, adopted by the Council of the European Union on 28 November 2011, has constituted the most recent and comprehensive document describing current aims, objectives and benchmarks in the field of learning and education. It represents an important tool for ALE organizations and

⁷ The national coordinators of the European Agenda for Adult Learning are supported by the Erasmus+ programme and the agenda is promoted in both EU and non-EU programme countries and partner countries. The full list of participating countries and national coordinators is regularly updated on the European Commission website: https://ec.europa.eu/education/sites/education/files/adult-learning-national-coordinators_en.pdf [Accessed 18 August 2017].

policy-makers Europe-wide and was adopted to contribute to the Europe 2020 strategy from an adult learning perspective. Europe's 2020 strategy 'for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth' recognizes lifelong learning and skills development as important and includes them in one of the five targets (European Commission, 2010a).

The agenda concentrates on increasing participation in adult learning of all kinds (formal, non-formal and informal) during the entire life span, be it for the purposes of acquiring new work skills, for active citizenship or for personal development and fulfilment. In line with the recommendations of the BFA, special attention is dedicated to poorly qualified and disadvantaged adults, with a focus on developing their basic skills, for example through guidance, validation and access to second-chance initiatives. Furthermore, it encourages countries to participate in the Erasmus+ Global Mobility programme and to take concrete steps to enhance, intensify and coordinate policies on adult learning.

Measuring progress towards achieving the goals of the European Agenda for Adult Learning is facilitated through the specific benchmarks and indicators, while the implementation of the agenda is regularly monitored and adapted to respond to current challenges, with its priorities modified accordingly. The most recent ones, for the period 2015–2020, were set in the 2015 joint report on the implementation of ET 2020 and showed coherence with some of the BFA areas. They include improvements and priorities for ALE up to 2020, focusing on governance, supply and take-up, flexibility, and access and quality (Council of the European Union and European Commission, 2015, p. 35).

In order to facilitate cooperation with the European Commission and other national stakeholders, such as social partners, relevant non-governmental organizations and civil society organizations, Member States were asked to designate a national coordinator for the implementation of the agenda and presentation of national work plans (Milana, 2015, p. 87). In most cases these are based in the federal or national ministries, while in some cases ALE NGOs were asked to act as national coordinators (such as in Ireland, Slovenia and the United Kingdom).

New Skills Agenda for Europe

In June 2016, the European Commission adopted the comprehensive *New Skills Agenda for Europe*. The aim of this agenda is to improve the quality of skills and

their relevance to the labour market, acknowledging the strategic importance of skills. It aims to strengthen and streamline (some existing) initiatives to better assist Member States in their national reforms.

The *Skills Agenda* is centred on three key work strands:

- Improving the quality and relevance of skills formation.
- Making skills and qualifications more visible and comparable.
- Advancing skills intelligence, documentation and informed career choices. (European Commission, 2016a, p. 3)

The *Skills Agenda* includes 10 actions. Arguably, the most relevant one for European ALE is 'Upskilling Pathways', adopted by the Council of the European Union in December 2016. Upskilling Pathways aims to help low-skilled adults acquire a minimum level of literacy, numeracy and digital skills and/or progress towards an upper secondary qualification or equivalent (EQF Level 4) through three steps:

1. Skills assessment: Enable low-qualified adults to identify their existing skills and their upskilling needs.
2. Learning offer: Design and deliver an education and training offer tailored to the specific needs of each individual and of the local labour market.
3. Validation and recognition: Validation and recognition of the skills acquired (Council of the European Union, 2016).

Member States have committed to putting in place pathways for upskilling, established in cooperation with social partners and education and training providers, as well as local, regional and national authorities.

NEW ALE POLICIES SINCE THE BFA IN EUROPE AND NORTH AMERICA

Despite the guidance given in EU policy documents, national policies in Europe remain widely fragmented. While some countries have started new policy initiatives on ALE and adopted (first) legislative frameworks, others still lack adequate recognition at policy level. *GRALE III* found that 94 per cent of 15 countries in Central and Eastern Europe and 91 per cent of 23 countries in North America and Western Europe have enacted new ALE policies since 2009 (UIL, 2016, p. 36).

New ALE policies in Europe and North America⁸

In **Bosnia and Herzegovina** (BiH), a *Strategic Platform for Adult Education in the Context of Lifelong Learning (2014–2020)* has been implemented. It is the legal basis for the operation and cooperation of authorities, institutions, organizations and individuals at all levels in terms of admission and full implementation of the strategy and other development documents related to adult education. Laws on adult education were adopted in the entity of Republika Srpska and six cantons (out of 10) of the entity of the Federation of BiH.

A new governmental document in **Georgia** (*Data and Directions 2017–2020*) states that 'Education and Science represent major priorities for Georgia'. To enable sustainable development of the country, the following measures are proposed: development of the lifelong learning system; ensuring equality, accessibility, inclusiveness and quality in education; increasing autonomy and institutional support to educational institutions; development of human resources at all levels of academic and scientific systems, etc.

In **Canada**, several new strategies have been adopted at the province level. The province of Alberta published *Adult Learning System Principles*⁹ in November 2016, with five core principles: accessibility, affordability, quality, accountability and co-ordination. The most recent education policy with a large focus on ALE comes from Quebec: *Policy on Educational Success* was published in 2017. It includes seven quantitative objectives and three broad areas of intervention, in which adult education is frequently highlighted. In a direct reference to the UN Sustainable Development Goals, the policy sets 2030 as the year of achievement for the objectives (Gouvernement du Québec, 2017).

WHAT ARE THE PRIORITIES FOR ALE POLICIES IN EUROPE AND NORTH AMERICA?

Literacy and basic skills

According to *GRALE III*, literacy and basic skills are a top priority for ALE programmes in 86 per cent of the countries in North America and Western Europe, and 59 per cent of the countries in Central and Eastern Europe (UIL, 2016, p. 33).

At the EU level, the launch of Upskilling Pathways in late 2016 illustrates the increasing focus on basic skills. It is estimated that 70 million adults in Europe have not achieved qualifications corresponding to upper-secondary level.

The only national policy in the United States targets illiteracy and basic skills.¹⁰ The Office of Career, Technical and Adult Education (OCTAE) of the US Department of Education provides grants and other services (such as improving programme quality) to states to support the provision of local programmes in adult basic education. The most recent legislation (Public Law 113-218) is the Workforce Innovation and Opportunities Act of 2014¹¹ (superseding the Workforce Investment Act of 1998), with recent performance accountability guidelines that took effect on 18 October 2016.

The concept of literacy in the USA has expanded to include, for example, knowledge and skills in financial matters as a recognized component. As the National Conference of State Legislators (NCSL) reports, many states have in fact enacted legislation mandating financial literacy education in schools, to prisoners prior to release, and to unemployed and other vulnerable groups, all free of charge (other avenues serve the general public). The NCSL website¹² offers annual updated data regarding legislation on financial literacy per state, including archived data from 2011 to the present.

⁸ Unless stated otherwise, these and other case study examples were collected by the authors from national experts by means of a questionnaire (see list of experts and questionnaire in the annexes).

⁹ <http://advancededucation.alberta.ca/ministry/about/new-adult-learning-principles/> [Accessed 7 July 2017].

¹⁰ For a full history, see *Federal Adult Education: A Legislative History 1964–2013*: https://lincs.ed.gov/publications/pdf/Adult_Ed_History_Report.pdf [Accessed 20 September 2017].

¹¹ <https://www.doleta.gov/wioa/> [Accessed on 10 August 2017].

¹² <http://www.ncsl.org/>

Policies that prioritize literacy and basic skills in Europe and North America

In **Germany**, a National Strategy for Literacy and Basic Skills was announced in 2011; this was followed by the National Decade for Literacy and Basic Skills (2016–2026) agreement (*GRALE III* national report for Germany). A general focus on literacy has been noted in a number of countries in Western Europe: in **Switzerland** and **Austria**, special funds have been earmarked for literacy training.

New investments in literacy have also been reported in **Canada**. Learn Canada 2020, the framework set out by the Council of Ministers of Education in 2008, cites literacy as a key activity area (Council of Ministers of Education, Canada, 2008). This is reflected in several provincial and territorial policies published since then. Quebec's Policy on Educational Success, published in 2017, lists adult literacy as one of the major objectives, resolving to 'increase by 5 percentage points the proportion of the adult population of Quebec who demonstrate high-level literacy skills according to PIAAC 2022' (Education et enseignement supérieur Québec, 2017).

Towards employability

European ALE policies have a strong tendency to look at adult education from the perspective of the labour market. After the inclusive approach of the European Commission's *Memorandum on Lifelong Learning* (2000), and the *Action Plan for Skills and Mobility* (2001) that followed, later EU policy documents show an increasing focus on employability, upskilling and reskilling, and economic growth, with active citizenship and social cohesion given secondary importance. For example, the European Commission's *Agenda for New Skills and Jobs: A European Contribution Towards Full Employment* (European Commission, 2010b)',¹³ one of the flagship initiatives of Europe 2020, calls for comprehensive lifelong learning strategies to support employability, while the European Commission's *Rethinking Education: Investing in Skills for Better Socio-Economic Outcomes* (European Commission, 2012a) attempts to respond to mass youth

unemployment across Europe, perceiving education as a way of delivering employability.

Additionally, European policies on adult education are increasingly targeting both general and continuing vocational education and training (CVET). Both vocational and non-vocational adult education are often mentioned side by side in larger EU strategies (for example, in the above-mentioned *Agenda for New Skills and Jobs*). The recent relocation of the Adult Education Unit from the Directorate General (DG) of Education and Culture to the DG of Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion within the European Commission is yet another reflection of the growing integration of adult education and CVET.

Shifts of understanding of ALE in Finland

On a national level, general ALE faces a similar threat of being relocated from national educational policy and systems. For example, the **Finnish** Ministry of Education and Culture no longer has a special department or unit for adult education; authority has been divided between the departments of vocational and general education.

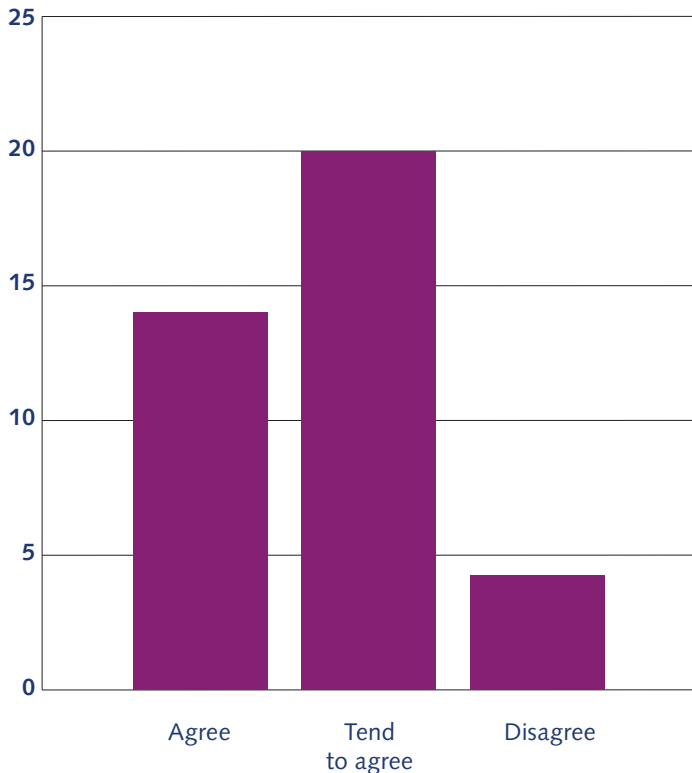
ALE providers note that prioritizing employability often undermines the importance of ALE for social, civic and community life, which – as will be argued later in this report – should not be overlooked. A market-oriented approach to ALE leaves behind underprivileged groups, which are often deemed less useful to the labour market and are, therefore, excluded from learning activities (EAEA, 2015a).

In the last few years, the strengthening of citizenship skills and civic education has been placed higher on the education and training policy agenda as a response to political instability and growing radicalization in Europe. It still, however, needs to be made explicit in ALE policies. A larger overview of ALE and citizenship, employability, and health and well-being, taking into account the most recent policies in this respect, will be presented in Section 3.

¹³ Launched in order to reach the EU 2020 targets for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth.

Figure 2: Monitoring and evaluation systems according to Member States in Europe and North America

Since 2009, the governance of ALE has developed more effective monitoring and evaluation systems



Source: GRALE III monitoring survey, Question 3.1.

MONITORING ALE POLICIES

The BFA committed to 'establishing appropriate coordination mechanisms, such as monitoring committees involving all stakeholders active in adult learning and education'. The results of *GRALE III* indicate that Europe and North America have achieved progress in this respect, as most of the 38 respondents to this question either 'agreed' or 'tended to agree' with the statement that their country had developed more effective evaluation and monitoring mechanisms, as shown in *Figure 2*.

Monitoring systems in Europe

In **Cyprus**, a lifelong learning committee and a supporting technical committee composed of different stakeholders are responsible for monitoring the National Lifelong Learning Strategy (2014–2020) and issuing progress reports (DIMA project, 2016).

In **Slovenia**, a consultative body – the Council of Experts for Adult Education – is responsible for monitoring and evaluating the Master Plan for Adult Education (2013–2020). The evaluation is done on the basis of the financial data presented by the seven ministries involved and the targeted number of participants (DIMA project, 2016).

The implementation of major European policy documents is regularly monitored and reviewed at European and national levels. For example, the implementation of ET 2020 is analysed on a wider scale through the publication of joint interim reports, with the aim of identifying the areas that need to be improved. Since 2010, the EU institutions have also had a system of coordinating policy actions between the EU and Member States, the so-called European Semester. It allows the European Commission to judge if the targets for 2020 are likely to be met, and to publish country-specific recommendations. Member States are also encouraged to conduct peer reviews. That said, the European Semester tends to be very broad in its recommendations. Also, the orientation towards jobs and growth favours labour-market related advice. In 2016, 10 countries received recommendations to address skills mismatches and skills shortages to improve employability, with a focus on vocational education and training, apprenticeship systems, lifelong and adult learning; four of the recommendations target adult and lifelong learning directly.¹⁴

In some cases, monitoring and evaluation also include a wider range of stakeholders. At the European level, the so-called 'Open Method of Coordination' is in use, while,

¹⁴ https://csee-etuice.org/images/attachments/NationalCSRs2016onET_w_summary_table.pdf

at the national as well as at the EU level, benchmarks, frameworks and indicators are used to monitor processes and developments in adult education policy implementation (Rasmussen, 2014, pp. 26–29). These usually include benchmarks for participation in learning activities. Monitoring progress in achieving the intended benchmark, however, appears to be challenging due to problems in data collection. The problem of insufficient data collection has already been acknowledged at the EU level; it constitutes the fifth priority area of the 2011 European Agenda for Adult Learning: ‘improving the knowledge base on adult learning and monitoring the adult-learning sector’ (Council of the European Union, 2011). In addition, the BFA committed to ‘lending greater support to ... knowledge management systems for the collection, analysis and dissemination of data and good practice’.

RECOGNITION, VALIDATION AND ACCREDITATION OF ALL FORMS OF LEARNING SINCE THE BFA

The BFA committed Member States to developing and improving ‘structures and mechanisms for the recognition, validation and accreditation of all forms of learning by establishing equivalency frameworks’. Recent years have brought several developments in this respect, both in Europe and in North America, although to a varying extent.

At the European level, recognition, validation and accreditation (RVA) has consistently been promoted, allowing more permeability, flexibility of education pathways and inclusion. Perhaps the most important policy development is the establishment of the European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning (EQF), adopted by the Council of the EU and the European Parliament in 2008. The aim of the EQF is to ‘make qualifications more readable and understandable across different countries and systems in Europe’ (European Commission, 2008, p. 3). It can presently be used in as many as 29 subject fields at eight levels.

The Council of the EU’s 2012 *Recommendation on the validation of non-formal and informal learning* (Council of the European Union, 2012) and European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training’s 2015 *European guidelines for validation of non-formal and informal*

learning (CEDEFOP, 2015) called on member states to make relevant agreements and link national qualification frameworks (NQFs) to the European Qualifications Framework. It states that disadvantaged groups are particularly likely to benefit from RVA, since it can increase their participation in lifelong learning and their access to the labour market. National referencing reports are made available on the EQF portal following the presentation of the results to the EFQ Advisory Group. According to CEDEFOP, by April 2017 as many as 32 countries had linked their national qualifications levels to the EQF.¹⁵

GRALE III found that, out of 22 countries in North America and Western Europe, four had established a policy framework since 2009 to recognize, validate and accredit non-formal and informal learning (Cyprus, Greece, Malta and Sweden). Out of 17 countries in Central and Eastern Europe, nine had established a policy framework (Bulgaria, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Russian Federation, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia and Ukraine) (UIL, 2016, p. 36).

The development and implementation of such frameworks is monitored through the *European Inventory on Validation of Non-Formal and Informal Learning*. This publication, most recently updated in 2016, describes the current RVA situation in 33 countries, monitors key developments and proposes possible solutions to move forward. While noting a high level of development for a number of principles – such as the accessibility of guidance and counselling or transparent quality-assurance methods – the inventory also calls for the prioritization of disadvantaged groups and of professional development for staff (CEDEFOP, the European Commission and ICF, 2017).

The report from the North American consultation on *Rethinking Education* states that, frequently, ‘learning from non-traditional sources is not validated and recognized by more formal organisations and employers’ (COLLO, 2016, p. 4). There have, however, been several endeavours at the state or institutional level in the United States to address this problem, as discussed in a recent publication released by the Council for Adult and Experiential Learning. *State Policy Approaches to Support Prior Learning Assessment* (2015) argues for advancing accessible, consistent, transferable and transparent policies and practices. The publication presents

15 <http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/events-and-projects/projects/european-qualifications-framework-eqf> [Accessed on 5 July 2017].

case studies with state- and system-level approaches to prior learning assessment (PLA). The document includes a sample roadmap, a sample PLA policy and a comprehensive list of policies on PLA state by state.

Developments in RVA in Europe and North America

The recent adoption of the National Qualifications Framework in **Austria** comes with a set of challenges. Currently, validation is based on two pillars: one leading to the recognition of competences and certificates, the other focusing on raising awareness of learning outcomes. The adoption of the NQF raises questions as to how validation processes will now develop and whether they might lead to a possible formalization of the sector.

The Qualifica Programme in **Portugal** aims to establish permeable and complementary systems that can combine multiple formats of education and training, and works with a strong credit system. Several measures are proposed: introducing a passport (Passaporte Qualifica) to compile educational and training paths of individuals, making more professions available for validation, and reinforcing the network of centres for validation.

Georgia has also initiated the establishment of mechanisms of recognition of non-formal education. In 2015, a non-formal education thematic group (created in 2014 with the assistance of the European Training Foundation) under the Ministry of Education and Science drafted a concept paper and action plan for recognizing non-formal education.

A number of policies enacted in the **United States** focus on the recognition of learning of military service members and veterans. A large-scale initiative was launched in March 2012 in Illinois, Indiana and Ohio. The initial three-state partnership, which has now grown to 13 states, 'allows states to exchange best practices in the areas of military credit, certifications/licensures and technology, with the ultimate goal of helping to remove barriers that service members might encounter and increase access to and participation in higher education' (CAEL, 2015, p. 24).

THE CIVIL SOCIETY VIEW ON RVA SYSTEMS

The European Association for the Education of Adults (EAEA) collected views of European ALE providers on RVA in the project AVA: Action Plan for Validation. According to the AVA report, *Action Plan for Validation in Europe* (AVA, 2016b), most European countries use RVA tools that are nationally legitimate and widely recognized – for example, (e-)portfolios, discussions, reading certificates, EU tools such as Europass and Youthpass, and so on. European credit systems such as NQFs and the European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET) are also generally regarded as applicable for RVA. Unfortunately, only a few Member States report using specific methods and instruments for disadvantaged groups (AVA, 2016a).

RVA in the Nordic countries

In **Nordic countries**, valuing and recognizing learning outcomes has been of high importance for some time now. The Nordic Expert Network on Validation within NVL has compiled the report *Validation and the Value of Competences. Road Map 2018* (NVL, 2015), which provides a wide overview on current validation issues.

There is common agreement among ALE stakeholders in Europe on the need to develop RVA processes that are coherent, transparent and structured. Many ALE providers perceive their countries' attempts at implementation as incoherent and/or fractional. Regional differences as well as competitiveness between institutions can increase such fragmentation. Missing regulations are seen as an obstacle to moving 'one step up'; likewise, the apparent lack of systematic practices and lack of support of the organization and its administration. These obstacles are detrimental to the acceptance of RVA as such and especially to the inclusion of disadvantaged groups who are being denied the benefit of validation arrangements (AVA, 2016a).

It is also seen as important that adult education providers develop a sense of ownership of the RVA process, which can be boosted by an increased involvement in policy-making. ALE stakeholders are and should be playing a major role in RVA processes, as they are often the

implementing bodies. Other obstacles are on a bureaucratic or financial level: the level of guidance and training for RVA professionals varies widely between European countries. Finally, it is essential to create more visibility and awareness for RVA, in particular targeting people from disadvantaged groups.

GOVERNANCE

In the Belém Framework for Action, UNESCO Member States adopted two key principles for good governance in ALE. The first is that governance should facilitate the implementation of ALE policy and programmes in ways that are effective, transparent, accountable and equitable. The second is that there should be wide-ranging participation by all stakeholders to guarantee responsiveness to the needs of learners, in particular those in a situation of disadvantage (UNESCO, 2009). The two points will be elaborated on below.

INVOLVEMENT OF ALE STAKEHOLDERS AT THE EUROPEAN LEVEL

European policy development in education and training is subject to subsidiarity – that is, it remains a national responsibility. It aims, in theory, to involve wide consultations with a number of stakeholders at all stages: need stage, draft policy stage and after a policy is finalized.

As part of the Education and Training 2020 (ET 2020) framework, ALE policy is subjected to constant monitoring and evaluation, most importantly as part of the Open Method of Coordination (OMC) by the European institutions. The OMC is used in policy areas where the European Union has limited competences according to the EU Treaties, such as education and training, but where Member States feel there is an added value in working together at the European level. Its mechanisms, introduced during the Lisbon Summit in 2000 ('Towards a Europe of innovation and knowledge'), include benchmarks, reference tools, frameworks, communications, conclusions and recommendations (Lisbon Special European Council, 2000). This is, therefore, an intergovernmental method where Member States assess each other under the supervision of the European Commission.

One example of how the OMC works in practice is the establishment of working groups that are consulted on specific issues. Working group members include representatives of EU agencies, cross-sectoral and education-specific organizations, civil society organizations and experts from Member States and candidate countries. The members meet on a regular basis, usually a few times per year, and are asked to submit feedback reports. Since 2016, nominations for participation in working groups are by means of calls for applications, as opposed to direct invitations.

Other consultative bodies include consultative committees, such as the European Economic and Social Committee, advisory groups (such as the EQF Advisory Group) and high-level groups (such as the High-Level Group on Literacy), which usually do not involve civil society organizations. In some cases, the European Commission conducts a public consultation to which all stakeholders and individuals can contribute. The two most recent examples include a public consultation on Europe 2020, carried out in order to review the existing strategy, and on the European Area of Skills and Qualifications, whose objective was to study the potential benefits of developing such an area. Both consultations resulted in the submission of a number of policy papers and completed questionnaires.

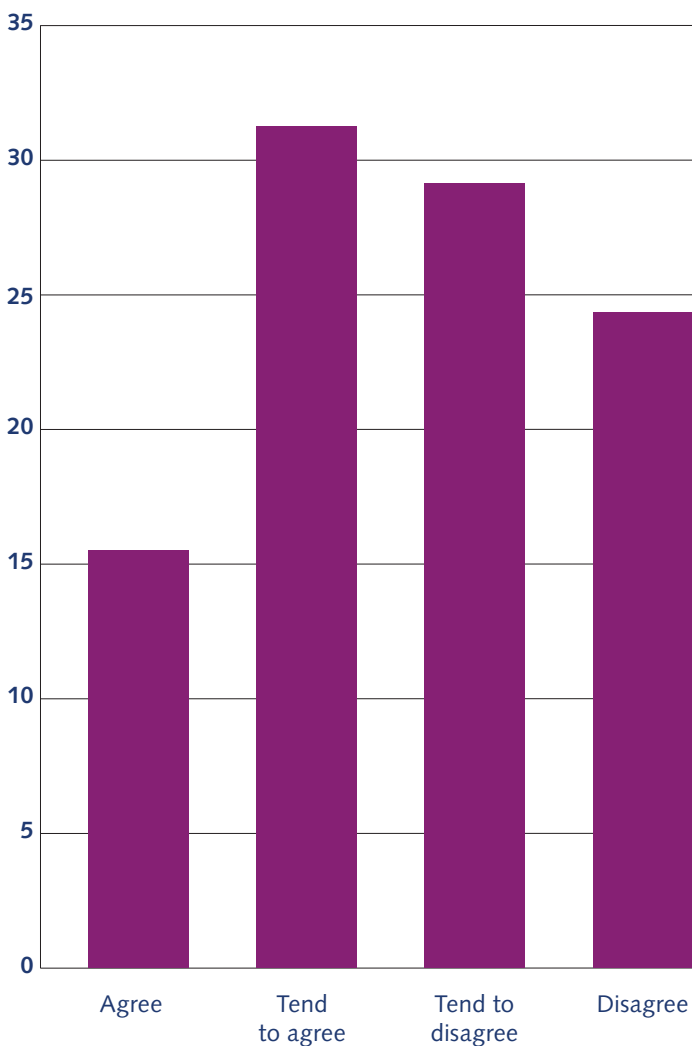
That said, the European Commission has been reluctant to agree on any more 'institutionalized' form of dialogue¹⁶ with civil society, such as the so-called 'structured dialogue' of the youth sector. While cooperation has improved, it is still far from regular or systematic, with civil society involvement depending to a large extent on the goodwill of heads of unit and policy officers. To facilitate the exchange, in addition to the Lifelong Learning Platform, the European Commission has established an annual forum, which has developed from its 2012 beginning as a civil society consultative event to include a much broader range of stakeholders. In order to bring together civil society, the forum is now preceded by a shorter event involving mainly European associations.

16 https://ec.europa.eu/youth/policy/implementation/dialogue_en [Accessed on 18 August 2017].

Also, the European Council resolution adopting the European Agenda of Adult Education highlights the role of civil society and ALE providers in promoting, implementing and monitoring its implementation. To oversee its implementation, the European Commission maintains a network of national coordinators, who are invited to regularly present national work plans and to be in contact with ALE providers and civil society. However, the EAEA RENEWAL project survey (RENEWAL, 2014) found that the majority of respondents report not having had the chance to participate and get involved. Civil society engagement is specifically low in the initial phase of planning and promotion of EU Agenda activities. Some

Figure 3:
Decentralization of governance of ALE according to Member States in Europe and North America

Since 2009, the governance of ALE has become more decentralized



Source: GRALE III monitoring survey, Question 3.1.

national civil society representatives also report that they are not actively involved in the organization of EU Agenda activities such as workshops and conferences.

GOVERNANCE AT THE NATIONAL LEVEL

Decentralization of ALE

The BFA committed to 'creating and maintaining mechanisms for the involvement of public authorities at all administrative levels'. This is further explored by *RALE*, which recommends that Member States 'consider establishing mechanisms and processes at national and local levels that are flexible, responsive and decentralized' (UIL, 2016a). Decentralization brings greater accountability, more transparency and increased stakeholder participation.

According to *GRALE III*, decentralization of ALE to regional and local level is becoming more prevalent, with 48 per cent of the countries in the region that responded to the statement below agreeing that there has been a growing decentralization of ALE since 2009 (*Figure 3*).

Decentralization of ALE in Greece

Greece reports that a new law, passed in 2013, established decentralized services for lifelong learning. The services are monitored by the General Secretariat for Lifelong Learning and Youth. An administration for lifelong learning has been established in each of the 13 Greek regions; more than one in some regions. ALE institutions are also included in the new structures (*GRALE III* national report for Greece).

Trans-sectoral strategies

One of the strongest messages of the BFA, *RALE* and *GRALE III* is the trans-sectoral dimension of ALE. ALE impacts different domains, such as health and well-being, the labour market and society; this needs to be recognized through the adoption of policies that involve different ministries.

According to *GRALE*, the great majority of the countries of Europe and North America agree that, since 2009, governance in ALE has included inter-ministerial cooperation. While progress has undeniably been achieved,

a closer look at the national reports and other sources shows that only a few countries can bring forward fully comprehensive strategies on ALE.

Inter-ministerial cooperation in Europe and North America

In October 2013, **Slovenia** adopted the new Adult Education Master Plan for 2013–2020, defining priorities, programmes, supportive activities, target groups, monitoring instruments and public finances dedicated to ALE. The key innovation is the inclusion of six different ministries alongside the Ministry of Labour, Family and Social Affairs. Each ministry reports about their own programmes and activities organized according to the priorities outlined in the Master Plan. Depending on the ministry, these might include raising awareness of climate change, informing about health hazards or educating about cultural heritage, to name only a few.

Switzerland adopted its first law on ALE, providing a framework for all sectors: health, labour, culture, migration and so on. These trans-sectoral strategies bring more opportunities for cooperation and social debate between sectors.

Bosnia and Herzegovina has also seen the establishment of inter-sectoral and inter-ministerial cooperation. Within the education, labour and social policy ministries, additional work positions are foreseen in order to ensure monitoring and coordination of activities, cooperation and exchange of information in the field of adult education.

An important **United States** policy initiative since BFA has been the passage and implementation of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) in 2014, intended to enable the workforce development system to become more efficient and effective in providing career pathways to Americans of all walks of life. In June 2016, the US Department of Education and Department of Labor, in close collaboration with the health and human services, agriculture, and housing and urban development departments, agreed on the WIOA Final Rules, improving coordination between and among agencies so that workers and job-seekers,

including youth and those with significant barriers to employment, have more seamless access to a system of high-quality career services, education and training through a one-stop service delivery system, known as the American Job Centers, and partners.

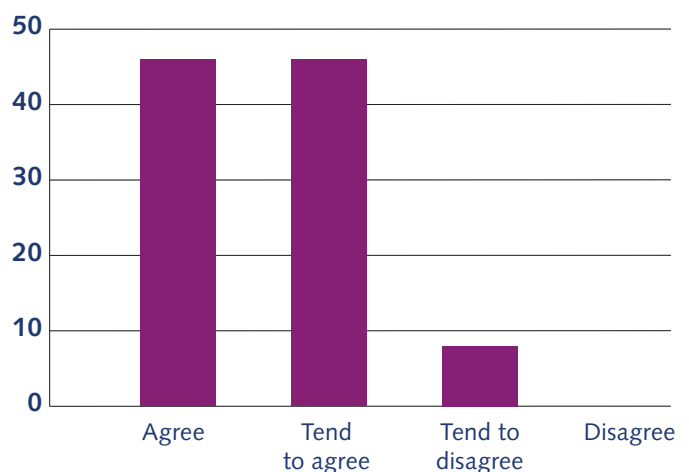
Stakeholder and civil society consultation

The BFA states that ‘representation by and participation of all stakeholders are indispensable in order to guarantee responsiveness to the needs of all learners, in particular the most disadvantaged’. According to *GRALE III*, an overwhelming majority of countries in Europe and North America have improved their cooperation with stakeholders in governance (Figure 4).

National reports for the region show a variety of ways in which governments consult on ALE policies. The report from the United States mentions focus groups, town hall meetings, publishing a public notice for comments, among others. Similarly, the report from Canada lists a variety of consultation methods adopted in provinces and territories, which include ‘leaders going out into communities and engaging in roundtables and open hall discussions’ (*GRALE III* national report for Canada).

Figure 4: Stakeholder participation

Since 2009, the governance of ALE has increased stakeholder participation



Source: *GRALE III* monitoring survey, Question 3.1.

Although some countries in the region have formal procedures for consultation that invite civil society representatives, it seems consultation processes with stakeholders, either formal or informal, are usually limited and held at the early stages of a policy cycle. As a result, there are many concerns over the lack of involvement of civil society in the decision-making process and in ensuring transparency (for example, in administering public funds among adult education providers). This concern is voiced particularly by non-formal ALE providers (RENEWAL, 2014).

Stakeholder consultations in Europe and North America

A positive example comes from **Ireland**, where a new Further Education and Training Strategy is being implemented, which has more focus on evidence-based policy and a learner-centred approach. In this respect, the strategy foresees the establishment of a forum for adult learners to help them influence policy decisions.

Portugal has seen an open discussion with civil society on the law that created and implemented the country's 'Qualifica' centres, where adults can validate their competences, as well as the participatory budgets for individual municipalities. Also noteworthy are the best practices found in regions where self-organized networks promote adult education, especially in the area of RVA.

An expert group has also been established in **Montenegro** with the purpose of reporting on the state of adult education in the country and describing advantages, disadvantages and the measures needed to improve the sector. The group is composed of representatives from relevant ALE institutions.

Finland has a Liberal Adult Education Cooperation Group, which includes representatives of different stakeholders in adult education: the Ministry of Education and Culture, the National Board of Education, the Association of Finnish Local and Regional Authorities and Finnish Adult Education. The body does not have a systematic meeting plan but congregates a couple of times a year to discuss issues of mutual interest.

The Quality Framework for Adult Literacy and Essential Skills Delivery of New Brunswick, **Canada**, was prepared by an internal advisory group, but with a broad consultation process. The stakeholders included 'government staff, non-profit literacy organisations, community-based adult literacy service delivery providers, teachers/trainers and learners' (Government of New Brunswick, Post-Secondary Education, Training and Labour, 2011, p. 4). Some 149 learners took part in focus groups and provided their opinion on what was important to them in a quality adult literacy/essential skills programme.

That said, in many countries ALE has been developed from and is still upheld and lived by grassroots and civil society initiatives and associations. To a certain extent it seems it 'can't be governed, changed or destroyed by political actors and parties' (quote by national expert Stefan Vater, Austrian Adult Education Association).

Cooperation among ALE stakeholders and transnational cooperation

Many adult education providers at the national level underline the importance of a structured dialogue between ALE stakeholders and the establishment of broader associations, as they foster cooperation between ALE providers, decision-makers and community groups. This is also seen as facilitating the consultation process with the public sector, through a common point of view and joined forces. Generally, a stable national umbrella organization ensures the advocacy, representation and consultative ability of adult education providers. It is actually a win-win situation for both civil society and ALE providers, as information-flow, consultation and cooperation are more easily organized.

A new ALE association launched in Georgia

The **Georgian** Adult Education Network, founded in 2014, is one of the most recent examples of national associations. It enables the establishment of adult education centres, promotes cooperation between them and supports the involvement of adults in lifelong learning.

The BFA also committed Member States to ‘fostering transnational cooperation through projects and networks for sharing know-how and innovative practice’. In Europe, the Erasmus+ programme funds transnational partnerships to develop innovative ideas and exchange best practices in the field of ALE.

According to the most recent Erasmus+ Annual Report, in 2015, 386 ALE staff mobility projects were granted, with 832 organizations and 5,077 participants benefiting from the mobility. For strategic partnerships for ALE, 430 projects were approved in 2015, in which 2,610 organizations participated. While the numbers are impressive, it needs to be added that in the area of staff mobility, only 25 per cent of the applications were approved; the success rate for strategic partnerships was even lower at 17 per cent (European Commission, 2017).

The Erasmus+ programme is one of the key programmes of the European Union and has made a significant contribution to the advancement of knowledge-sharing and transnational cooperation among European countries. However, many small ALE organizations feel at a disadvantage when managing a project that requires complicated procedures, while low success rates discourage them from applying. Neighbouring countries, such as Belarus, Moldova and Georgia, cannot participate. This is why EAEA has called in a recent statement for simplified administrative procedures, inclusion of neighbouring countries in the programme and an increase in funding for ALE, which currently stands at 5 per cent of the whole budget (EAEA, 2017a).

FINANCING

AVAILABLE FUNDING FOR ALE IN EUROPE AND NORTH AMERICA

Financing is the most pressing challenge that the European field of ALE currently faces, while different national traditions mean that there is a wide variation in the use of funding instruments. It needs to be noted that identifying common trends in funding or budget levels has proved extremely difficult. The *Global Education Monitoring Report (GEM)* of 2016 found that assessment

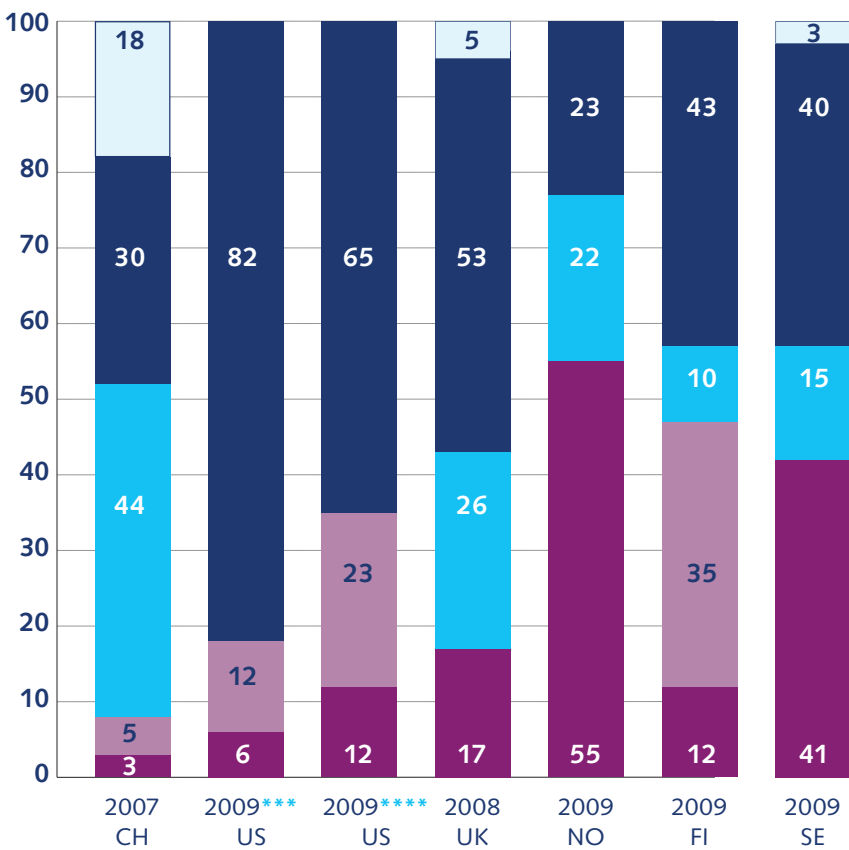
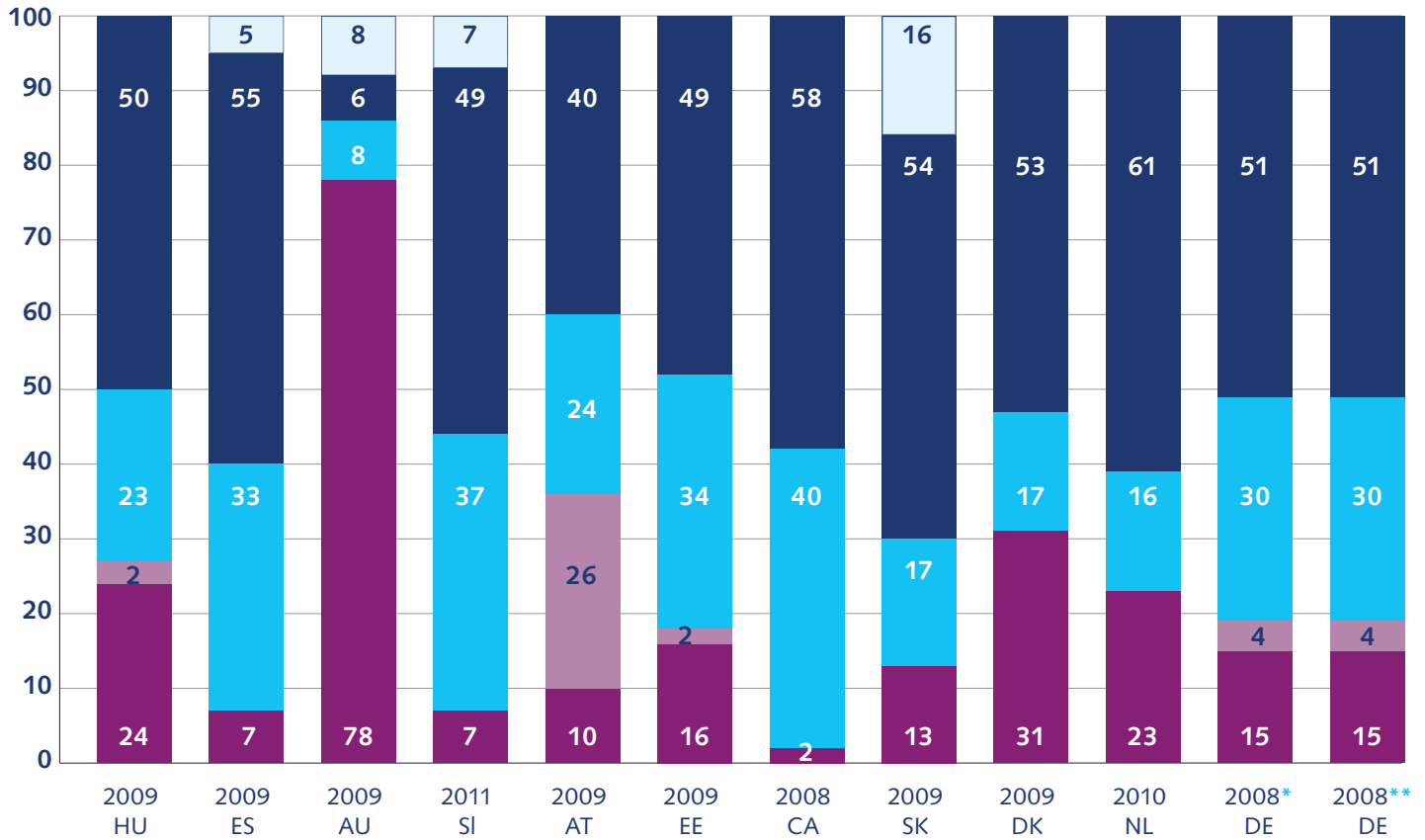
of affordability in adult education is constrained by the greater role of private financing and a lack of information on public financing and participation (UNESCO, 2016, p. 239). Similarly, Tom Schuller and David Watson pointed out in their *Learning through Life: Inquiry into the Future for Lifelong Learning* (NIACE, 2009) the limited availability of data both at the national and the European level. Furthermore, a study conducted by the Institute for Education and Socio-Economic Research and Consulting (FiBS) and the German Institute for Adult Education (DIE) describes data on and financing of ALE as ‘very scarce’ (FiBS and DIE, 2013, p. 23) and a similar point is made in the *Final Report of the Thematic Working Group on Financing Adult Learning* (European Commission, 2013a).

The difficulty in quantifying spending on ALE stems partially from the fact that adult education programmes are usually financed from multiple sources (European Commission, EACEA and Eurydice, 2013, p. 79). Schuller and Watson identified different categories of total expenditure on ALE, including by government, employers, the third sector and individuals. This investment is heavily skewed towards young people (18–25) and those who succeed initially (NIACE, 2009, p. 4).

A large part of funding for ALE comes from public sources, either at the national or European level (such as the Erasmus+ programme or the European Social Fund), or has local, regional or communal origins.¹⁷ On the national level, responsibility for public funding of ALE may come within the remit of several ministries, e.g. education, employment, culture or regional development. Funding approaches therefore reflect the policy priorities of particular ministries and are also influenced by the various mechanisms that exist at a national, regional or sector level for ministries. Government funding may take the form of direct provision of adult education courses or subsidies to accredited providers so that participants pay no fees. It can also take the form of support to individual adults to pay for education (through grants, vouchers and loans) or support to reforms to encourage the development of more education and training opportunities.

¹⁷ It is, however, important to point out that European funding schemes, such as the European Social Fund (ESF), are decided on and distributed regionally. This is particularly important in view of the fact that most ALE providers single out European funds as the major source of funding for adult education. ESF funds are often used on national projects implemented by ministerial institutions, leaving aside private companies and NGOs.

Figure 5: Distribution of funding between stakeholders for adult learning (percentages)
(ALE for age 25+ adjusted)



The study conducted by FiBS and DIE in 2013 counts among more recent attempts to look at financing adult education in Europe and North America. It analysed the distribution of funding for ALE between stakeholders in several European and North American countries (see Figure 5), finding that 'the participation rate is higher in countries where individuals bear a smaller share, while the joint state-employer share is higher' (FiBS and DIE, 2013, p. 19).

- Others
- Employer
- Individuals
- Employment Agency
- State

Source: FiBS and DIE, 2013, p. 18 *off **private: AES 10 ***no HE ****conservative

The FiBS/DIE study demonstrates that funding instruments vary significantly, with only a few regional patterns noted. For example, ‘while almost all European countries employ training leaves, they seem to be rather uncommon in the non-European countries covered [the US, Canada, Australia and Republic of Korea]. In contrast, cost-sharing vouchers are available in all non-European countries, but only in some European countries, where 100 per cent grants are often in place’ (FiBS and DIE, 2013, p. 27).

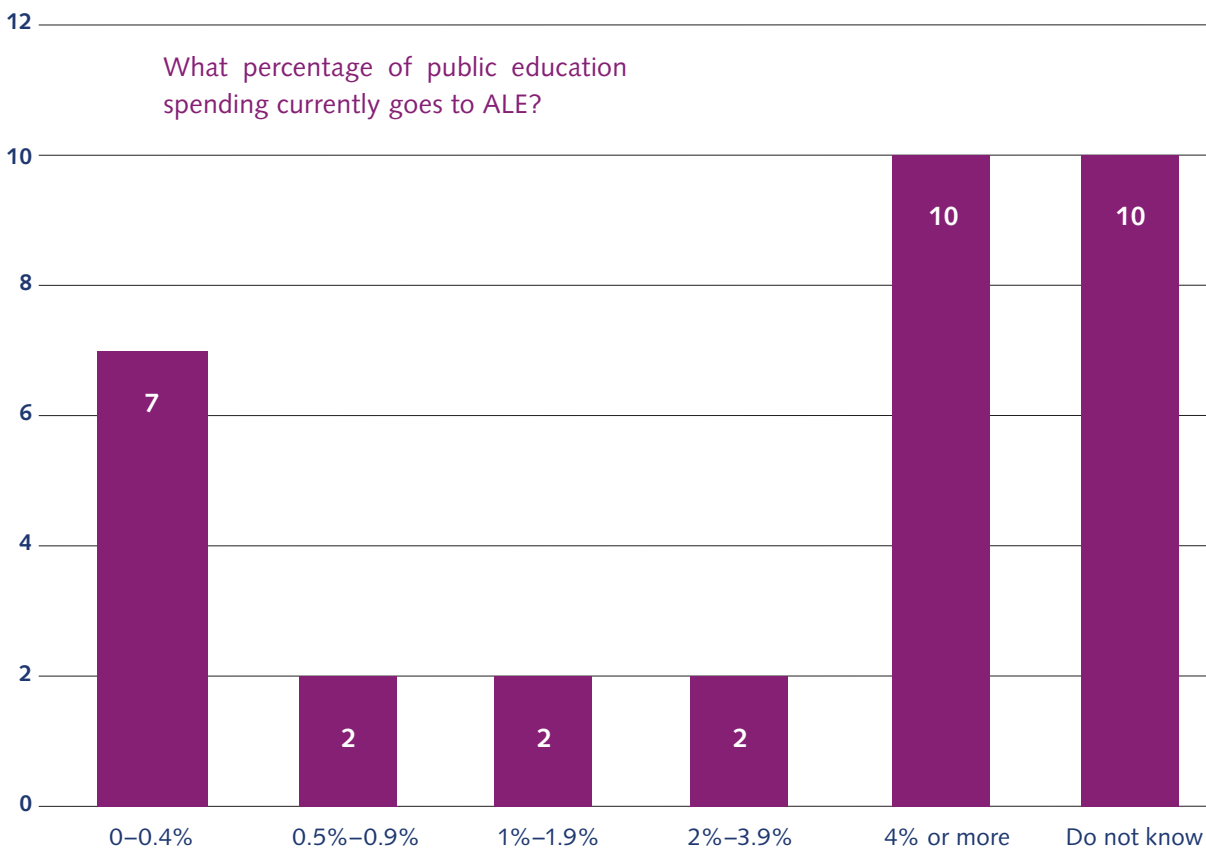
At the same time, Europe has seen a marked shift towards co-financing, ‘where funding is channelled directly to the learner’ (NRDC, 2010, p. 165). Additionally, learners are most likely to shoulder the costs for non-formal learning, undertaken for social, cultural, political and personal development reasons, with financial implications of learning including not only course fees, but also travelling to the place of study, expense of course materials and childcare costs.

Innovations in financing ALE reported in GRALE III national reports

Since 2014, **Poland** has been implementing a National Training Fund. Upon request to the district labour office, an employer can receive financing amounting to 80 per cent of the costs of an employee’s education, while micro-entrepreneurs are entitled to full financing. The resources can be used to assess training needs and organize courses, post-graduate studies and examinations.

In 2009, **Estonia** introduced personalized training vouchers for job-seekers. The voucher is a flexible tool that is intended to match the individual needs of the job-seeker. Eligible courses are approved by the Unemployment Insurance Fund. When looking for employment, the job-seeker can use vouchers up to a maximum of €2,500.

Figure 6: Percentage of public education spending that goes to ALE according to Member States in Europe and North America.



Source: GRALE III monitoring survey, Question 4.1.

Analysing funding volumes, the FiBS/DIE study found that expenditure on ALE ranges from about 0.4 per cent to 1.2 per cent of GDP. *GRALE III* asked Member States about the percentage of public education spending that goes to ALE. In 10 of the 33 countries from Europe and North America that answered this question, the spending on ALE reaches or exceeds 4 per cent of public education spending. However, in seven countries it is as low as 0.4 per cent or below (*Figure 6*).

GRALE III found that between 2009 and 2014, public spending on ALE as a proportion of public education spending increased in 40 per cent of North America and Western European countries, stayed the same in 40 per cent and decreased in 5 per cent of them. In Central and Eastern European countries, it has increased in 38 per cent, stayed the same in 25 per cent and decreased in 13 per cent. Also, 71 per cent of Central and Eastern European *GRALE III* respondents mention that their government plans to increase spending on ALE in the future, compared to 30 per cent of North American and Western European respondents. Twelve countries in North America and Western Europe and five in Central and Eastern Europe have introduced significant innovations in ALE financing since 2009 (UIL, 2016, pp. 46–47).

Nevertheless, most European ALE providers report public funding for non-formal ALE to be in decline. The economic crisis has constrained investment in adult learning in a number of countries (European Commission, EACEA and Eurydice, 2013, p. 80), even in countries with a long-standing tradition of adult education, such as the Nordic countries (EAEA, 2015a, p. 6). Usually only a fraction of the national education budget is devoted to ALE; this is also reflected in the distribution of the Erasmus+ programme funds, which assign only 5 per cent of the budget to adult education. Some ALE providers report finding themselves on the edge of survival and reliant on external donors. They also experience a focus on financing single projects, which leaves few funding opportunities for maintaining structures and thus diminishes the sustainability of adult education activities and institutions (EAEA, 2016a, p. 31). Overall, more information on public expenditure is needed to understand how it is targeted at the groups most in need.

A number of cutbacks have also been reported in Canada. In 2015, the Institut de coopération pour l'éducation des adultes (ICEA) conducted a study analysing the impact of cutbacks in governmental funding on adult education in Quebec and beyond between 2010 and 2015. It found that 65 per cent of the organizations that took part in the study had experienced cutbacks in their financing, especially NGOs and organizations from the popular education sector (ICEA, 2015, p. 41). This had resulted in reductions in staff numbers, working hours and/or programmes on offer.

Financing ALE in Europe

In **Bosnia and Herzegovina**, in a context of inter-sectoral partnership and social dialogue, all actors share common responsibility for financing and developing appropriate strategies and models of long-term and sustainable financing of ALE.¹⁸ These actions and measures are, among other aims, focused on strengthening governmental responsibility for the financing of ALE, relating dedicated funds for ALE, and establishing appropriate policies regarding co-financing through non-formal providers.

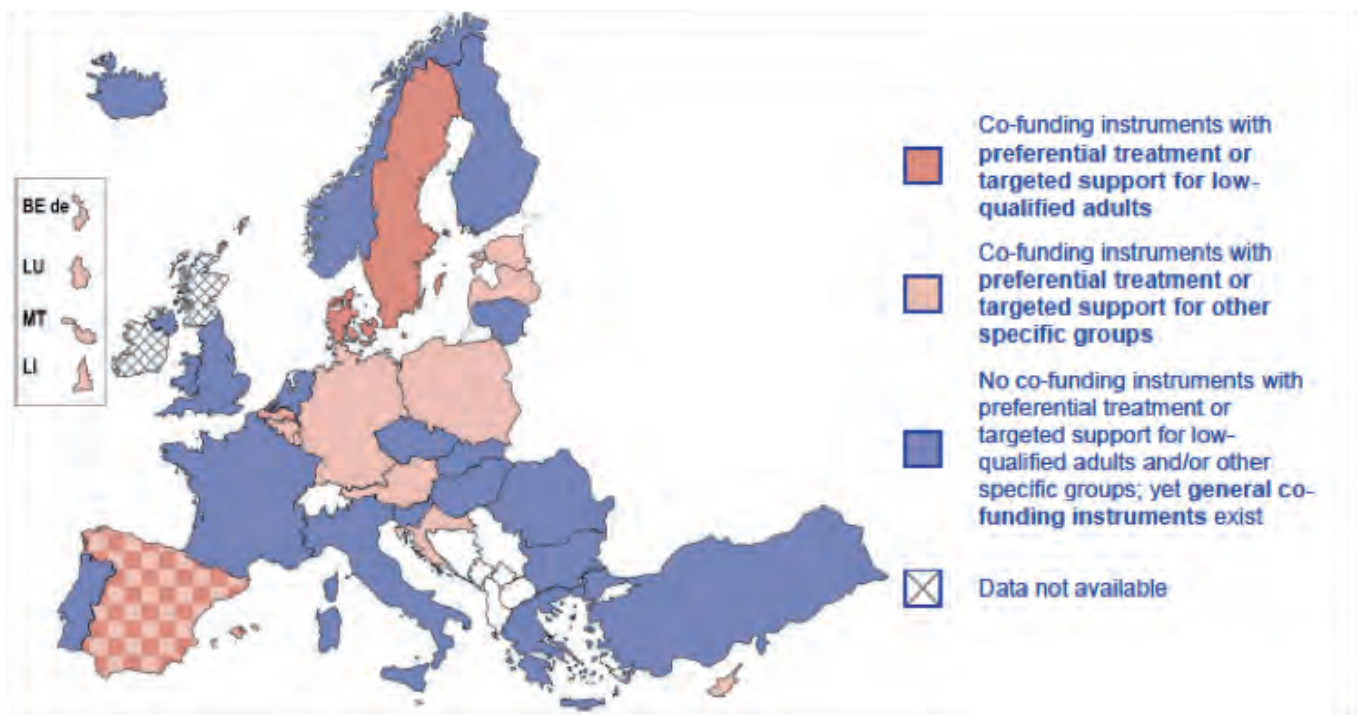
A National Programme for Development of Education and Learning was recently proposed in **Slovakia**. 'Learning Slovakia' proposes the creation of individual education accounts worth €200 for individuals outside formal education and a 25 per cent deduction of staff training expenses from the company tax base (EAEA, 2017a).

PRIORITIES IN FUNDING IN EUROPE AND NORTH AMERICA

While the BFA called for 'prioritizing investment in lifelong learning for women, rural populations and people with disabilities', it seems that adults with low basic skills have been the target group prioritized in funding. Eurydice reports which countries offer co-funding schemes targeting adults with low basic skills, or with low-level or no qualifications (European Commission, EACEA and Eurydice, 2015a, p. 121).

18 Strateški pravce razvoja obrazovanja u Bosni i Hercegovini sa planom implementiranja, 2008–2015 (Strategic Directions of Education in Bosnia and Herzegovina with Implementation Plan, 2008–2015).

Figure 7: Co-funding instruments to support adult participation in education and training, 2013–14



Source: European Commission, EACEA and Eurydice, 2015a, p. 121

Figure 7 shows that, while in all countries a range of co-funding instruments are available to help adults return to education and training, only some countries target such arrangements specifically at low-qualified adults or those with low skill levels: Belgium (the Flemish community), Denmark, Spain and Sweden. These targeted co-funding measures mainly take the form of specific grants and allowances, but also include training vouchers or paid training leave. Apart from co-funding instruments for low-qualified people, other targeted schemes exist, concentrating on other groups considered 'at risk'. For example, some countries have put in place specific financial incentives for unemployed jobseekers to encourage them to take part in education and training.

The tendency towards employability, discussed in the introduction, is also reflected in the available funding schemes and priorities. Most European education funding programs (EU funds, European Social Fund, etc.) are focused on employability, entrepreneurship, professional development and skills for the labour market. Also,

referring to the digital era we live in, European funding gives priority to actions that promote innovative digital methods, learning materials and tools, as well as actions that support the effective use of information and communication technologies (ICTs).

In North America, literacy remains a priority for funding. In Canada, it was defined as one of the objectives of Learn Canada 2020, the framework set out by the Council of Ministers of Education in 2008. For example, the province of British Columbia announced '\$2.4 million in funding toward community adult-literacy programs that will support adults wishing to improve their literacy and numeracy skills'.¹⁹

Another funding priority in North America concerns skills for employment. Each year, the Government of Canada invests over \$2 billion in Labour Market Development Agreements (LMDAs) with the provinces and territories to support unemployed Canadians with employment assistance and training (CMEC, 2012).

¹⁹ <https://news.gov.bc.ca/releases/2016AVED0121-002388> [Accessed 4 July 2017].

PARTICIPATION, INCLUSION AND EQUITY

As an outcome of the BFA, countries agreed to introduce measures to facilitate more equitable access to ALE programmes – in particular, programmes addressing the needs of groups previously excluded from learning opportunities. However, as the *Global Education Monitoring Report* (UNESCO, 2016b) points out, diversity of provision makes monitoring access to and participation in ALE particularly difficult.

PARTICIPATION IN ALE: EUROPEAN DATA

In Europe, the Education and Training 2020 (ET 2020) framework includes measurement tools facilitating the

collection of comparable data, and has set seven EU benchmarks for education. One of them is to have at least 15 per cent of adults participating in lifelong learning by 2020.²⁰ According to Eurostat, in 2015 the proportion of persons aged 25 to 64 from countries within the European Union who participated in education or training was, on average, 10.7 per cent.

There are two major household surveys that gather information on ALE participation in the EU: the Labour Force Survey (LFS) and the Adult Education Survey (AES). Importantly, the surveys differ in terms of definitions, reference periods and the coverage of non-formal education, which means that they are not directly comparable (compare UNESCO, 2016b, p. 239).

Figure 8: Adults' participation in learning

	Total population (25–64 years)		55–64 years		Unemployed (25–64 years)		Low-qualified (25–64 years)	
	2012	2015	2012	2015	2012	2015	2012	2015
EU	9.2	10.7	4.5	6.0	9.4	9.5	3.9	4.3
Belgium	6.9	6.9	3.6	4.0	10.2	9.0	2.9	3.0
Bulgaria	1.7	2.0	: ^u	: ^u	1.5 ^u	: ^u	0.5 ^u	: ^u
Czech Republic	11.1	8.5	4.8	3.7	6.5	3.8	2.4	1.9
Denmark	31.6	31.3	23.9	23.6	32.7	28.9	22.4	21.7
Germany	7.9	8.1	2.9	3.1	5.6	6.2	3.2	3.4
Estonia	12.8	12.4	5.6	4.5	11.7	9.9	3.9	4.5
Ireland	7.4	6.5	3.2	2.7	7.4	7.4	3.2	2.4
Greece	3.3	3.3	0.7	0.5	3.3	2.7	0.4	0.4
Spain	11.2	9.9	5.2	4.0	13.2	11.2	4.7	3.6

²⁰ The *Global Education Monitoring Report* states that 'useful lessons can be drawn from the experience of Europe. Ever since the European Union set a target of reaching an adult education participation rate of 15 per cent by 2020, major efforts have been made to develop relevant data-collection tools' (UNESCO, 2016b, p. 237).

Figure 8: Adults' participation in learning

	Total population (25–64 years)		55–64 years		Unemployed (25–64 years)		Low-qualified (25–64 years)	
	2012	2015	2012	2015	2012	2015	2012	2015
France	5.7	18.6*	2.6	12.8	5.4	14.7	2.5	7.7
Croatia	3.3	3.1	0.3 ^u	: ^u	2.5 ^u	2.4 ^u	: ^u	: ^u
Italy	6.6	7.3	3.0	4.0	6.3	5.3	1.6	2.0
Cyprus	7.7	7.5	3.1	3.5	7.2	5.8	2.4 ^u	1.6
Latvia	7.2	5.7	4.2	2.6	7.4	5.3	2.9	2.4
Lithuania	5.4	5.8	1.9 ^u	3.1	3.0 ^u	: ^u	: ^u	: ^u
Luxembourg	14.2	18.0 ^b	5.9	7.1 ^b	17.7	22.0 ^b	5.3	7.0 ^b
Hungary	2.9	7.1 ^b	0.6	3.1 ^b	1.9	2.3 ^b	0.6	3.4 ^b
Malta	7.1	7.2	2.7	3.3	9.3 ^u	9.3 ^u	2.4	2.4
Netherlands	16.9	18.9	8.8	11.8	17.0	18.3	10.3	9.3
Austria	14.2	14.4	6.8	7.5	18.9	16.6	5.1	4.5
Poland	4.5	3.5	0.8	0.8	4.6	3.4	0.7	0.6 ^u
Portugal	10.5	9.7	4.1	4.1	13.9	11.3	6.1	4.2
Romania	1.4	1.3	: ^u	: ^u	2.1 ^u	2.1 ^u	: ^u	0.3 ^u
Slovenia	13.8	11.9	6.0	4.0	13.5	13.1	2.7	2.8
Slovakia	3.2	3.1	1.1	0.9	1.1	1.0 ^u	: ^u	: ^u
Finland	24.5	25.4	14.1	15.6	18.2	19.1	11.3	12.8
Sweden	27.0	29.4	18.6	20.8	43.0	44.0	18.3	20.0
United Kingdom	16.3	15.7	10.4	10.8	16.0	14.2	7.8	6.8

Source: Eurostat (European Union Labour Force Survey, 2012–2015)

According to the 2015 results of the LFS (see *Figure 8*), Denmark, Sweden and Finland had significantly higher proportions of their populations participating in lifelong learning in the four weeks preceding the interview, ranging from one-quarter to one-third. The Netherlands, France, Luxembourg and the United Kingdom were the only other member states where the participation rate in 2015 had already exceeded the 15 per cent target. By contrast, Romania, Bulgaria, Croatia, Slovakia, Greece and Poland reported lifelong learning participation rates of 3.5 per cent or less. Needless to say, with only five years from the date of the survey until 2020, and now only three, the achievement of the 15 per cent participation benchmark seems far from likely.

Overall participation in education and training between 2004 and 2013 has increased in 18 out of 31 countries, with the largest increases noted in Denmark, Estonia and Sweden. The participation rate has fallen in 12 countries, with the largest decrease noted in the United Kingdom. *GRALE III* reports that participation levels have increased in 65 per cent of countries in North America and Western Europe, and in 71 per cent of countries in Central and Eastern Europe (UIL, 2016).

ALE in Europe: Who participates?

Participation in education and training varies between different groups of adults. It starts to drop with age: younger people (aged 25–34) take part in ALE more frequently than older people (aged 55–64).

Participation rates are also correlated with qualification levels. Adults with higher qualification levels (at International Standard Classification of Education [ISCED] levels 5 and 6) are more likely to participate than those with low qualification levels (ISCED 0–2). The highest participation rates among those with low levels of qualifications have been noted in Denmark, Sweden and Iceland.

In most countries, employment status has little impact on participation rates. Exceptions include Austria, Sweden and Iceland, where the unemployed are significantly more likely to participate in learning; the opposite has been found in Finland, France and Switzerland, where participation rates are higher for the employed (European Commission, 2015a, p. 41).

Adult participation in education and training is closely linked to skill levels. PIAAC reveals that adults with low-level basic skills are less likely to take part in ALE compared to those who have higher skill levels. Comparing country differences, when considering adults with literacy performance below Level 1, the highest participation levels of this group in education and training was recorded in Norway (50.9 per cent), followed by Sweden (41.7 per cent), the Netherlands (40.8 per cent), Denmark (38.9 per cent) and Finland (36.5 per cent). In contrast, in Slovakia and Poland, the participation of adults with a literacy score below Level 1 was only 7 per cent and 9.8 per cent respectively.

Participation levels among the most vulnerable groups (such as Roma, socio-economically disadvantaged, low-skilled workers, early school leavers, people with low literacy levels, older people, internally displaced persons, etc.) remain dramatically low and these groups are less likely to participate in ALE. Interestingly, in some countries the participation of migrants and refugees in ALE actually exceeds that of the native-born population, which might be explained by their enrolment in language or integration courses (Eurostat, 2017, p. 34).

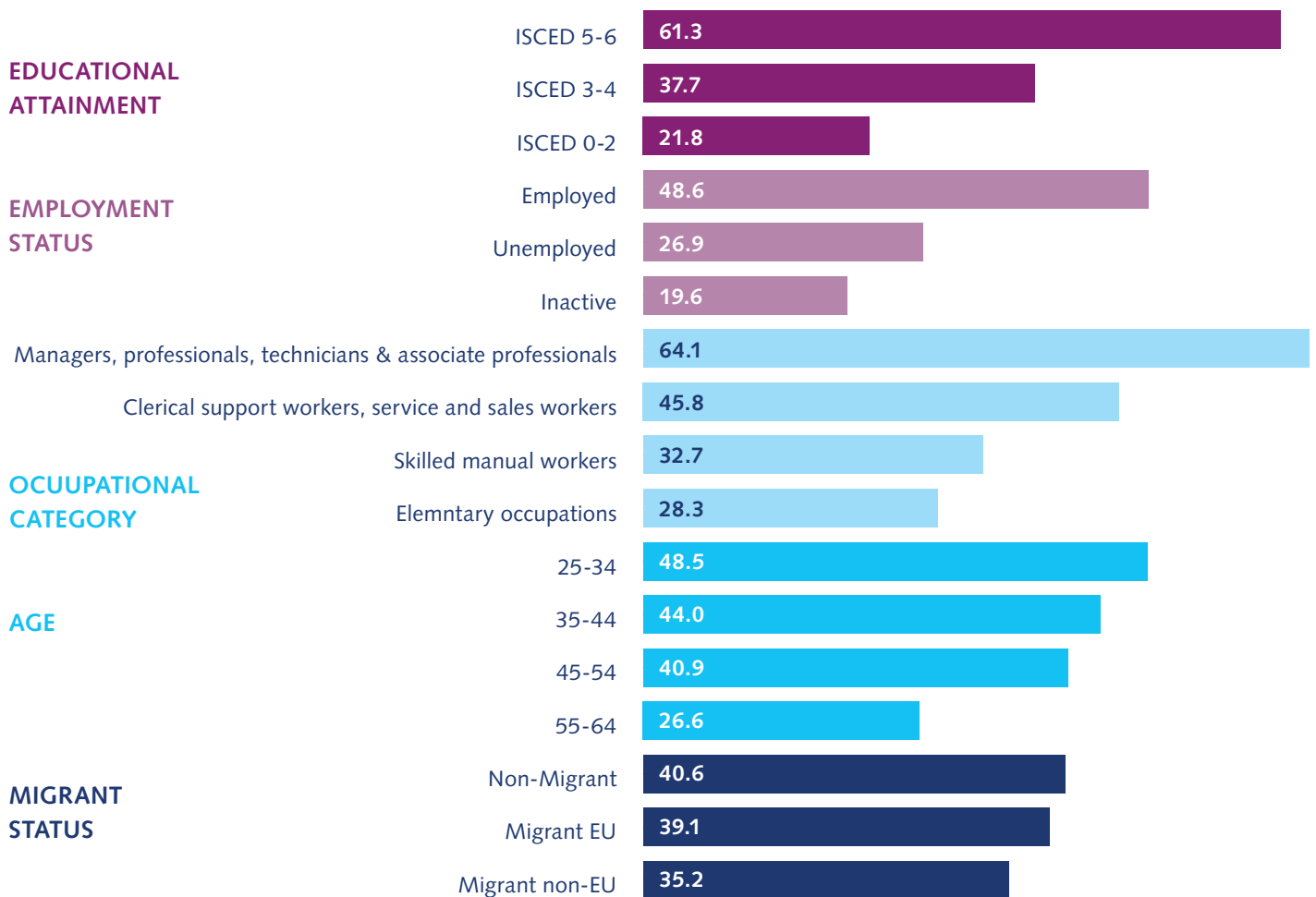
These numbers clearly demonstrate that there is an urgent need to improve access to ALE across Europe and to have specific strategies targeting vulnerable groups. On EU policy level, there have been some attempts to empower disadvantaged groups – most notably through the Opening up Education strategy (European Commission, 2014) and the European Platform against Poverty and Exclusion. Eurydice reports some positive policy developments in member states as well: ‘Virtually all European countries report that their recent policy documents indicate support for adults with low basic skills or low level qualifications in accessing opportunities for skills development or further qualifications’ (European Commission, EACEA and Eurydice, 2015a, p. 9).

PARTICIPATION IN ALE: NORTH AMERICAN DATA

In North America, surveys monitoring adult education participation are less regular than in Europe. According to the National Center for Education Statistics in the United States, the last adult education survey was conducted in 2005,²¹ when overall participation in ALE among individuals aged 16 or older was at 44 per cent. More recent statistics (2014) are available for state-administered adult

21 https://nces.ed.gov/nhes/surveytopics_adult.asp [Accessed 5 July 2017].

Figure 9: European adults (25–64) participating in education and training in the 12 months prior to the survey (%), 2011



Source: European Commission, EACEA and Eurydice, 2015a, p. 25

basic education, adult secondary education and English-as-a-second-language programmes. The state-by-state list is published by the *Digest of Educational Statistics*.²²

Similarly, the most recent government survey covering the participation of adults in education in Canada predates the BFA – it was conducted between June and October 2008. According to the survey, ‘between July 2007 and July 2008 an estimated 10 million Canadians aged 18 to 64 had participated in some type of formal education credit program or training’ (CMEC, 2012, p. 34), which represents 47 per cent of the Canadian population aged 18 to 64.

That said, a series of national surveys in Canada was also conducted by the Work and Lifelong Learning (WALL) research network – admittedly, the most recent one relatively soon after the adoption of the BFA, in 2010. The survey differentiates between different forms of learning: formal schooling, further education, informal education and self-directed informal learning. Similar to the government survey from 2008, ‘about half of Canadian adults were found to participate in further education courses annually’. At the same time, about 20 per cent expressed ‘unmet demand for further education’. The survey also found that as many as 95 per cent participated in ‘any informal learning’ (Livingstone and Raykov, 2013).

22 https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d15/tables/dt15_507.20.asp?current=yes [Accessed on 5 July 2017].

INCLUSION AND EQUITY ACCORDING TO TARGET GROUP IN EUROPE AND NORTH AMERICA

GRALE III asked UNESCO Member States to position their policies on ALE according to the groups of learners that are prioritized. The answers presented in Figure 10 – restricted to Europe and North America – confirm the tendency to focus on low-skilled adults, already mentioned in the first section of this chapter.

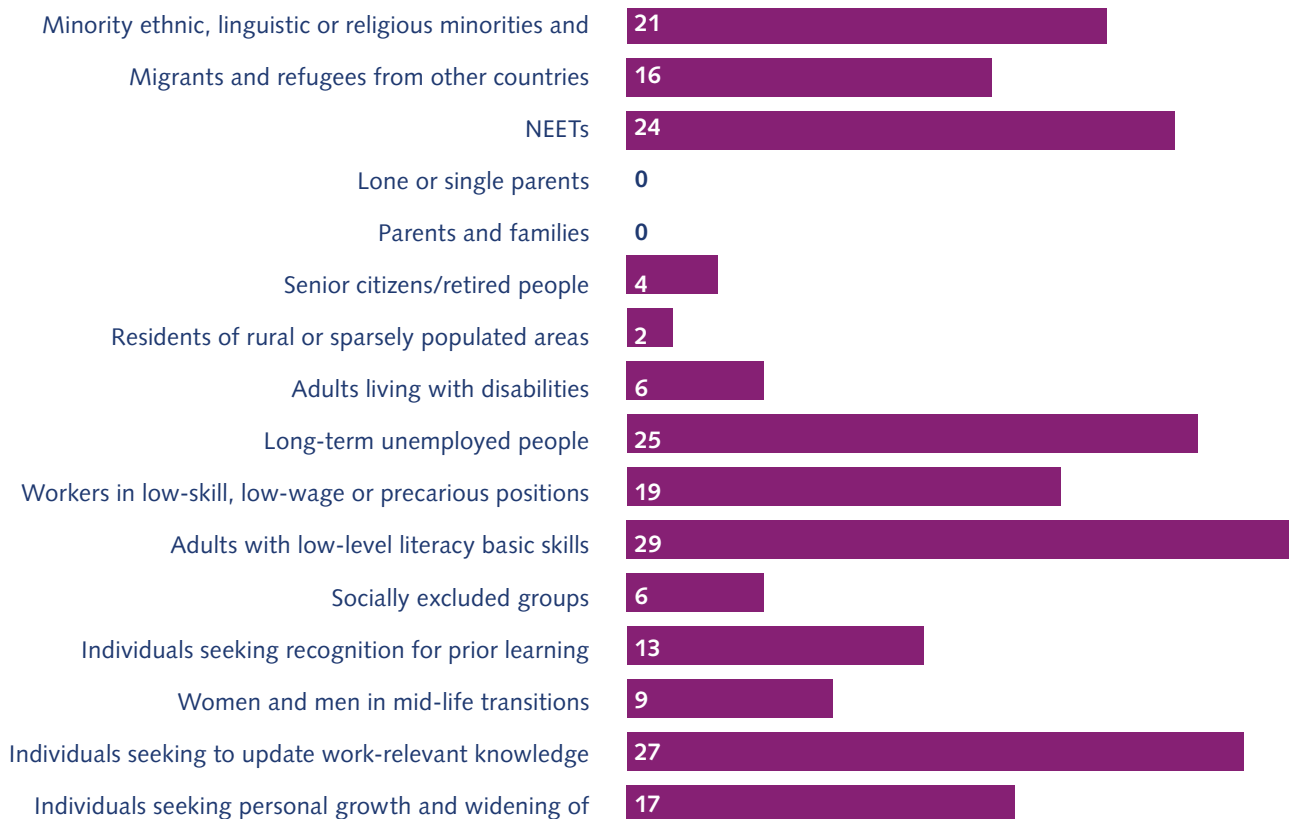
As can be seen from the graph, ALE policies in Europe and North America focus predominantly on adults with low-level literacy or basic skills as well as those that seek upskilling and reskilling. Seventeen respondents state that their national policy focuses on ‘individuals seeking personal growth and widening of knowledge horizons’.

A relatively high number – 16 – have policies that focus on migrants and refugees from other countries. Twenty-one respondents selected ‘minority ethnic, linguistic and religious minorities and indigenous peoples’.

A recent study conducted by Eurydice (2015a) examined the extent to which national policy agendas have taken up and introduced explicit commitments to support adults with low basic skills or low-level qualifications (see Figure 11). The study analysed major policy documents issued after 2009 that referred to opportunities for adults with low basic skills or low-level qualifications to access skills development and further qualifications.

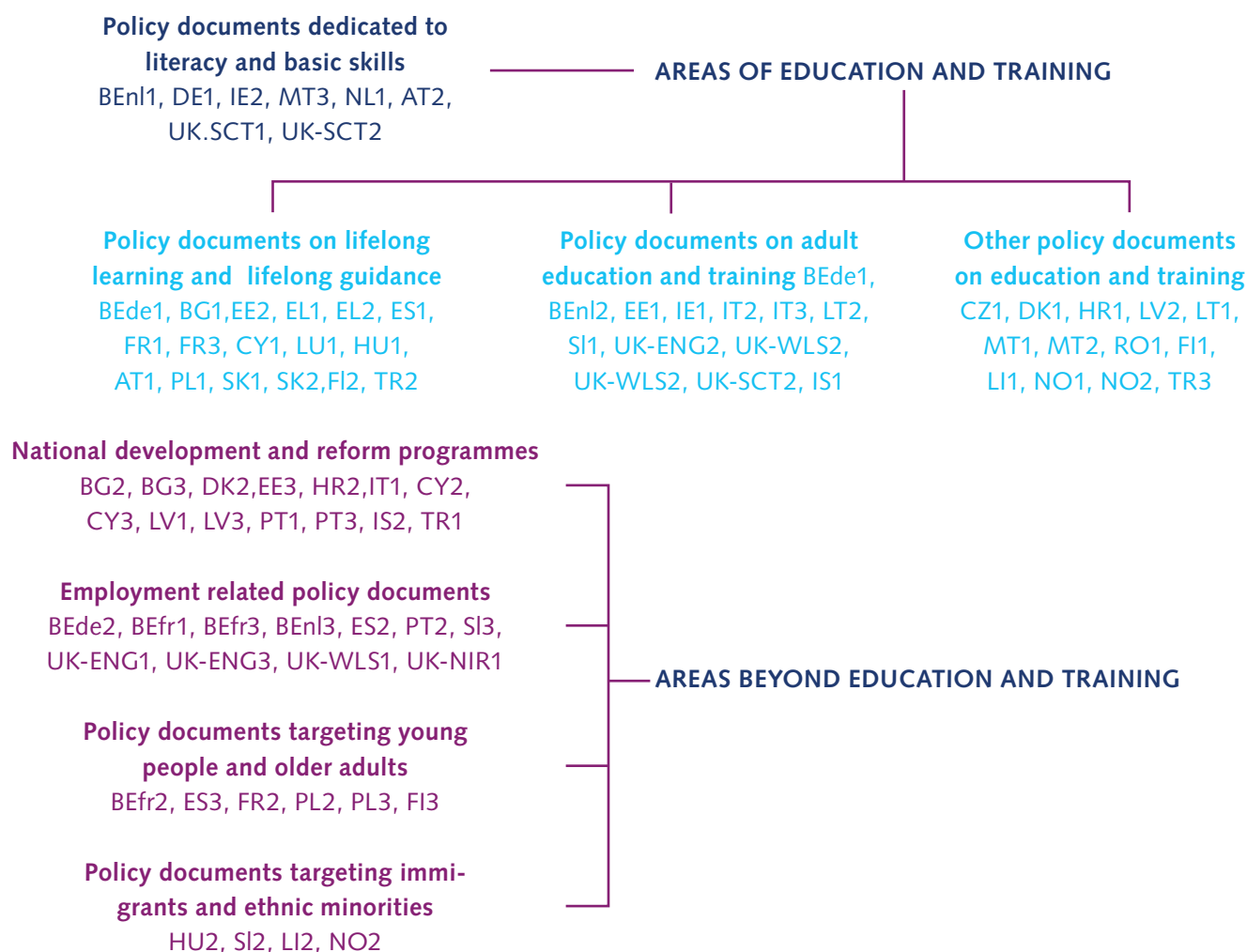
Figure 10: Target groups important in ALE policies according to Member States in Europe and North America

Which target groups of (potential) learners are especially important in ALE policies in your country?
Check up to five groups.



Source: GRALE III monitoring survey, Question 2.2.

Figure 11: Types of recent EU policy documents (issued between 2009 and 2014) addressing access to opportunities for skills development or further qualifications for adults with low basic skills or low-level qualifications



Source: European Commission, EACEA and Eurydice, 2015a, p. 30.

The findings reflect those of *GRALE III*: virtually all European countries report that their recent policy documents indicate support for adults with low basic skills or low level qualifications in accessing opportunities for skills development or further qualifications. References ‘may be found in strategy documents dedicated to education and training, including literacy and basic skills strategies, lifelong learning strategies, strategies on adult education or other steering documents referring to different areas of education and training’ (European Commission, EACEA and Eurydice, 2015a, p. 30).

National policies in Europe tend to underline the needs of groups whose level of skills or qualifications is particularly alarming, such as the unemployed, young people,

older workers, immigrants and ethnic minorities (ibid., p. 30). Some of these groups have also been highlighted by the BFA. However, most countries have not set specific benchmarks for participation of disadvantaged learners in adult learning. This is also true in the case of EU policy: while there is a benchmark for participation in adult learning (15 per cent by 2020), the inclusion of vulnerable groups is not measured separately, which makes monitoring harder.

Refugees and migrants

The BFA committed to ‘developing effective educational responses for migrants and refugees’. This commitment appears to have gained particular importance in the region since 2011 as increasing numbers of refugees from

the Middle East began to make their way to Europe. Sixteen respondents to *GRALE III* in the region selected migrants and refugees as a target group of their ALE policies; these are primarily countries that have recently experienced an influx of refugees or that traditionally have high immigration rates, such as Germany, Sweden, Finland, Norway and the United States.

ALE for refugees and migrants in Europe

Significant changes have taken place in **Sweden**, where the government has proposed that programmes of Swedish for immigrants are included in the municipal ALE system instead of the school system. This means that the municipality will be responsible for developing an individual study plan for each student. The government has also given the National Council of Adult Education the opportunity to fund, through study associations, activities for asylum seekers (*GRALE III* national report for Sweden).

Since 2012 the **Austrian** 'Initiative adult education' has been promoting basic skills and literacy courses for adults and migrants, as well as enabling disadvantaged young people to complete compulsory schooling. Both programmes are free of charge.

ALE providers across Europe have stressed the role that ALE can play in the integration of refugees and migrants in the new communities. New programmes for newly arrived migrants and refugees have been adopted and include language training, vocational training and citizenship modules. National governments often prioritize the employability of newly arrived migrants and undervalue the role that ALE could play in integration.

Many initiatives that work towards integrating refugees and migrants have been developed in line with another BFA commitment, to 'a holistic, integrated approach, including a mechanism to identify stakeholders and the responsibilities of the state in partnership with civil society organizations, labour market stakeholders, learners and educators'.

Multi-stakeholder partnerships to support integration of refugees through ALE

'From Destruction to Creation. Ways of Reconciliation in Ukrainian Society' was a civic initiative led by the Integration and Development Centre for Information and Research in **Ukraine** and DVV International. Focused on the integration of internally displaced persons in their new communities, the project funded 16 local initiatives in 11 regions of Ukraine. The activities were developed and implemented by local partnerships that included NGOs, libraries, museums, galleries, as well as teachers, students and public servants. The project received the EAEA Grundtvig Award 2016 (EAEA, 2016b).

A large partnership between enterprises and NGOs has been implemented in **Ireland** by Business in the Community. Co-funded by the Irish government and the EU, the EPIC (Employment for People from Immigrant Communities) programme helps migrants and refugees to learn about public services in their new communities and to prepare for employment. Thanks to partnerships with a wide range of enterprises, learners attend IT skills training, mock interviews, CV training, workplace visits and placements. Several NGOs deliver workshops on Irish society and services, for example on access to health, social welfare and understanding the political system. Importantly, EPIC encourages equality and non-discrimination practices also among the companies and HR staff. As of 2017, 2,600 people of over 100 nationalities have taken part in the programme, 67 per cent of whom have continued their training or found employment (EAEA, 2017b).

A variety of stakeholders coming from different sectors have been involved through a collective impact model by the Office of Career, Technical and Adult Education in the **United States**. In five sites that work on integration of immigrants, partners include community colleges, social service agencies, employers, citizenship services and professional certification services (US Department of Education Office of Career, Technical and Adult Education, 2015, p. 10).

Valuing indigenous cultures, knowledge and methodologies

Various initiatives to promote indigenous cultures, knowledge and methodologies, following the BFA commitment, are undertaken in North America. An example of a US government initiative that deals with the protection of ethnic minorities is the Bureau of Indian Affairs. A very long-standing initiative of the United States (dating to 1824), its mission is to ‘enhance the quality of life, to promote economic opportunity, and to carry out the responsibility to protect and improve the trust assets of American Indians, Indian tribes and Alaska Natives’. Over the years, its actions and modus operandi have adapted to societal changes and ‘its role now is as a partner with tribes to help them achieve their goals for self-determination while also maintaining its responsibilities under the Federal-Tribal trust and government-to-government relationships’.²³

A number of initiatives have also been launched in Canada to support indigenous peoples, reflecting the commitment to support writing and literacy in indigenous languages. Importantly, the pan-Canadian strategy Learn Canada 2020 lists promoting and supporting ‘programs for minority-language education’ as one of its priorities.

Support for indigenous cultures in Canada

In 2010, the **Northwest Territories** released the 10-year *NWT Aboriginal Languages Plan: A Shared Responsibility*, which was updated in 2017. The policy highlights the development and implementation of regional language plans by Aboriginal governments, but also mentions a large number of other stakeholders that are involved in the process. The document also emphasizes the importance of informal and non-formal learning, such as family learning, and the role of some community members – such as elders – in promoting the integration of languages (Government of Northwest Territories, 2017).

Similarly, in 2012 the Ministry of Advanced Education in **British Columbia** released the *Aboriginal Post-Secondary Education and Training*

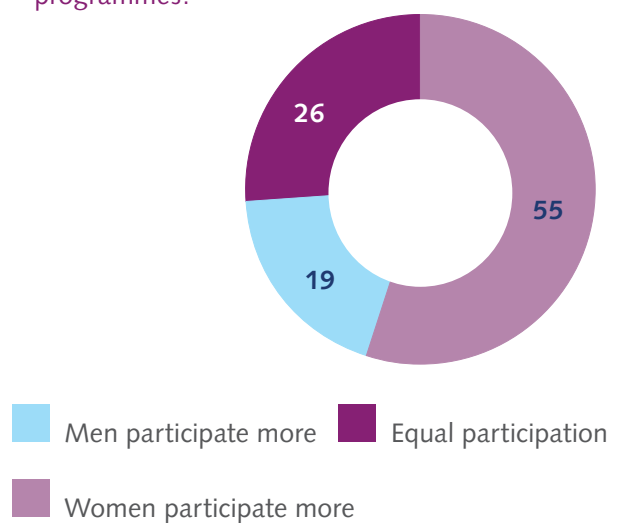
Policy Framework and Action Plan. Developed by a working group of British Columbia’s Aboriginal Post-Secondary Education Partners, it sets out a number of principles, such as ‘support for successful transitions for Aboriginal learners throughout the lifelong learning continuum’ and ‘support for innovative and flexible approaches to meet the needs of the diversity of Aboriginal learners’ (AVED, 2012, p. 12). Each of the five goals includes several objectives, actions and foreseen short-, medium- and long-term results; progress reports are regularly published.

ALE programmes for women

While the BFA made a commitment to ‘improving access to, and participation in, the full range of ALE programmes for women’, this is less visible in the priorities reported in Europe and North America. This might be explained by the fact that the regions are characterized by higher participation rates in ALE for women than men, as reflected in *GRALE III* (see *Figure 12*).

Figure 12: Differences in participation rates between women and men according to Member States in Europe and North America

What differences are there between women and men in terms of their participation rates (%) in ALE programmes?



Source: *GRALE III* monitoring survey, Question 5.2

Nevertheless, the region has seen several initiatives that promote quality ALE programmes for women. For example, in the United States, the League of Women Voters (LWV) and the American Association of University Women (AAUW) continue their fight for the rights and opportunities of girls and women. In the election year of 2016, the LWV was particularly active in educating new citizens, minorities, the elderly and low-income Americans about voting, while the AAUW played an instrumental role in effecting legislation in six states for equal pay in closing the gender pay gap.

Prisoners, learners with disabilities and people living in rural areas

The BFA listed several target groups the inclusion of which in ALE should be encouraged. These included inmates, people with special needs and those living in rural areas. A few initiatives since 2009 have addressed the needs of these groups but, as seen above, most countries in Europe and North America have prioritized other groups.

The European consultation on UNESCO's *Rethinking Education*, which took place in October 2016 in Brussels and was jointly organised by UNESCO, the International Council for Adult Education (ICAE) and the European Association for the Education of Adults (EAEA), highlighted the need for policies that would target learners with disabilities. Several speakers underlined the necessity for flexible and accessible programmes, noting that learning environments too often pose a barrier for learners from this target group.

Inmates, learners with disabilities and those living in rural areas

In 2016, the Second Chance Pell Program, with a budget of \$30 million, was launched in the **United States**. It was made available to inmates in 141 state and federal correctional institutions. The grant allows inmates to pursue a college degree of two or four years with a grant of up to \$5,815.²⁴

Portugal welcomed an ALE programme with specific methodologies, teaching and learning methods to promote the access and success of people with disabilities in getting qualifications. These activities are developed under the supervision and direct sponsorship of the Ministry of Education, Work and Social Affairs. *Guidelines for the recognition, validation and certification of skills* for validation centres demonstrate how to implement the process of validation for people with disabilities. These specialized validation centres also work with citizens without disabilities, promoting inclusiveness.

In 2015, the Government of **Ontario** in **Canada** opened eCampus Ontario, an e-learning programme to address the need for flexible learning options, especially for the population living in rural and remote communities (*GRALE III* national report for Canada).

ENCOURAGING PARTICIPATION: LEARNING FESTIVALS

Adult learners' weeks and learning festivals have frequently been recognized as an appealing way of promoting ALE to a wider population. They are increasingly popular in Europe and North America and the BFA acknowledged their importance.

More detailed information about ALE festivals in Europe was collected in an internal consultation conducted by the EAEA throughout 2016. The consultation showed that most adult learning festivals in Europe were launched in late 1990s or early 2000s; some countries, such as Belarus, describe it as a 'tradition' and an important celebration for learners and educators alike.

Frequently large in scale and mobilizing the ALE community across the country, ALE festivals include many parallel events. For example, in 2016, during the Irish Adult Learners' Festival organized by AONTAS, as many as 350 learning events took place: creative writing classes, foreign language conversations and drumming classes, directly engaging learners. In the United Kingdom, the

²⁴ <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/politics/2016/06/24/pell-grants-prisoners-obama-give-inmates-second-chance-college/86312598/> [Accessed on 10 July 2017].

Festival of Learning organized by the Learning and Work Institute encourages learners to take part in 'Have a Go' activities, with thousands of creative outreach events. Both the United Kingdom and Ireland organize award ceremonies for inspirational learners as part of their festivals.

ALE festivals also tend to promote the celebrations under a specific theme. In 2016, a few focused on the topic of digitalization, but the themes varied across countries. Organized primarily by national ALE associations or ALE providers, the festivals tend to include large-scale partnerships, for example with local municipalities, NGOs, libraries and cultural centres, depending on the theme.

The CONFINTEA VI follow-up conference for the pan-European region, in Vilnius, listed an EU-wide campaign, such as a year of adult learning, as one of the recommendations for promoting ALE and encouraging participation. While, regrettably, there has been no EU Year of Adult Learning, EAEA has mobilized its membership and other organizations in a Europe-wide campaign, '2017: The Year of Adult Learning in Europe'. Under the theme of the EAEA *Manifesto for Adult Learning in the 21st Century*, it underlines the power and joy of learning. As of June 2017, 47 organizations from 24 countries had joined the campaign, with a total of 80 events.²⁵

QUALITY

As the BFA states, quality in learning and education is 'a holistic, multidimensional concept and practice that demands constant attention and continuous development' (UIL, 2010). Quality in ALE has evolved from a situation where individual trainers were responsible for the quality of processes and outcomes to being a high priority for a wide range of stakeholders. It is particularly challenging to monitor the full range of quality dimensions for adult education. As the GEM report found, proposed frameworks have included aspects ranging from the existence of certification, recognition, validation and accreditation to the degree to which programmes target population groups in need (UNESCO, 2016b, p. 240).

ADDRESSING QUALITY IN ALE IN EUROPE AND NORTH AMERICA

Several studies and policy developments at the EU level have addressed quality assurance in ALE since the adoption of the BFA. It was the focus of the Thematic Working Group of the European Commission in 2011–2013 and remains one of the objectives of the European Agenda for Adult Learning.

A study on quality in ALE in Europe (Panteia, 2013) identified the main challenge to be the fragmented approach to quality assurance in adult learning. While fragmentation does not directly lead to a lack of quality, it hinders quality development. The study notes challenges visible in most countries to a certain extent: the lack of attention to adult-specific elements in quality systems for formal learning, insufficient requirements for adult-learning staff, the limited availability of guidance on and validation of non-formal and informal learning, and the lack of monitoring data.

The study identified three clusters of countries on the basis of their quality approaches in formal and non-formal adult learning: countries that have quality systems in place at macro level for formal and non-formal ALE (such as Austria, Denmark and Estonia), those that have a number of fragmented quality systems at macro level for non-formal ALE and quality systems for formal ALE (for example Germany, Poland and Portugal) and those with no or limited quality systems for non-formal learning and no quality systems for formal ALE (for example Bulgaria, Romania and Slovakia). According to the study, the countries that have quality systems for non-formal ALE tend to exceed the average for the ET 2020 benchmarks on participation in LLL [life-long learning] and adults with a higher educational attainment (Panteia, 2013, p. 30).

²⁵ See the campaign website at <https://adulthoodeducation2017.eu/> for details.

Quality frameworks in Europe and North America

One example is the Overall Framework of Quality in Adult Education **Austria** (Ö-CERT or AT-CERT). The aims of Ö-Cert are: transparency for customers/learners and public authorities, simplified administration, and quality improvement for adult education. To be granted Ö-Cert, providers must fulfil certain requirements. The Ö-Cert-List includes a range of different quality-management systems or quality-assurance procedures. All of them require a mandatory external audit and are valid for a limited period.

In **Portugal** several studies, such as the New Opportunities Initiav', evaluated aspects of quality and impact of processes of validation, considering variables such as continuity of studies, job progression, impact on the household, and changes in subjective variables such as self-knowledge and self-esteem, among others. A 'quality letter' regulates the functioning of the centres, which also have a complaints book available for learners. Complaints are analysed by the National Agency for Qualifications, which may then proceed accordingly. The National Agency also created a platform onto which the materials and methods used by the validation centre can be uploaded for quality checking and sharing among centres.

In the **United States**, the Commission of Professors of Adult Education of AAACE, in addition to providing continuous development for faculty and the field, has developed a standards document for graduate programmes in adult education, which is of use for developing new courses and the self-review of existing ones with an eye to improving the quality of degree programmes.

In **Canada**, a new quality framework was developed in the province of New Brunswick. Published in January 2011, it focuses on literacy and essential skills training, looking at four elements: quality standards, operational support, internal assessment and external evaluation.

A diverse landscape, comprising organizations with different objectives, different modes of delivery, different funding, varied participants, target groups, types of outcome and results means that monitoring ALE on a clear set of indicators is difficult overall, and even more difficult for non-formal adult learning. It is difficult to generalize quality ALE in terms of standardized and comparable measures of achievement.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND EMPLOYMENT CONDITIONS OF ADULT EDUCATION STAFF IN EUROPE AND NORTH AMERICA

A concern common to many countries is the professionalization of adult learning staff. The nature of adult learning professionals' initial and continuing professional development is patchy: a variety of educational pathways lead to the profession and in many countries there is no clear view on the standard competences needed by adult-learning staff to fulfil their professional tasks. In spite of the BFA commitment to improve, among other things, the employment conditions of adult educators, recent publications demonstrate that poor occupational status and career opportunities persist, as will be seen below.

GRALE III asked if there are initial, pre-service education and training programmes for ALE teachers/facilitators in the responding countries. Around 76 per cent of the European and North American respondents answered positively. Eleven countries in North America/Western Europe and 10 countries in Central/Eastern Europe report that they have introduced significant innovations to improve the quality of ALE since 2009 (UIL, 2016, p. 61).

ALE staff need a wide range of skills. A major study on this topic was conducted in 2010 by Research voor Beleid. According to the study, not only do adult educators have to be competent in their subject matter, but they also need a wide range of interpersonal skills. The ability to adapt to different environments and new developments is also crucial in times of social media, digitalization and the ongoing improvement of digital teaching. Competences needed by adult educators and trainers concern a wide variety of target groups. As learners might come from different social, educational, cultural and ethnic backgrounds, trainers have to show a lot of flexibility and constantly readapt their teaching methods according to learners' needs. ALE providers have to respond and adapt to the growing need for flexible learning pathways (Research voor Beleid, 2010).

Furthermore, in light of the increase of migration flow to Europe, it has become pressing to develop and ultimately validate volunteers' skills and competences, an issue that several ALE stakeholders in Western Europe have raised (EAEA, 2016a).

Therefore, regular training coupled with appropriate monitoring is needed to ensure the highest quality of the educational process. This often proves to be difficult, especially since few European and North American countries offer specific training for ALE professionals. Opportunities for professional development and clear prerequisites for entering the profession are rare, and often qualifications of trainers are not regulated. Irregular training of staff is a problem faced by most European and North American ALE stakeholders. According to *GRALE III*, only 28 per cent of the countries in Europe and North America claim that there is sufficient capacity for continuing training (Figure 13).

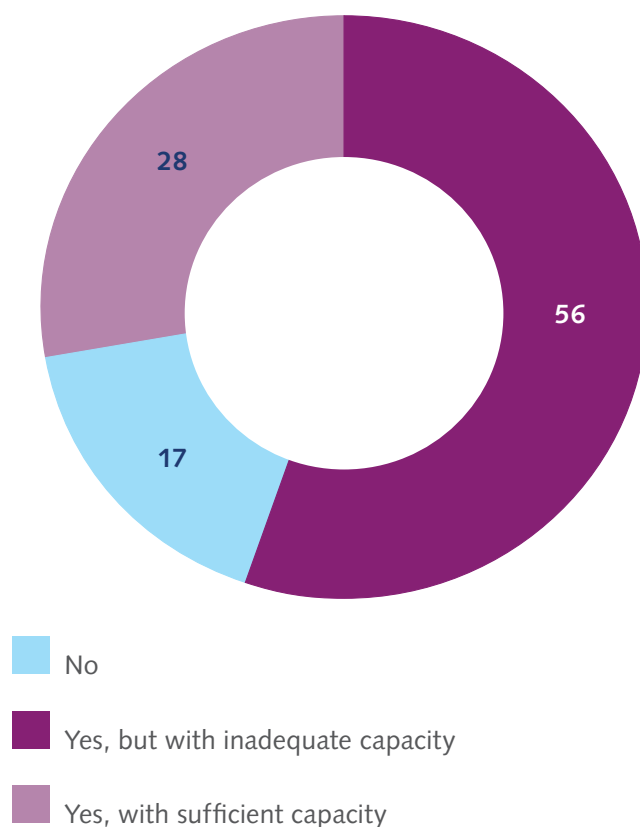
On top of this, ALE staff often work as freelancers, and frequently report difficulties in their working conditions, with their mostly 'precarious employment situations' and their financial insecurity. In some European countries the profession of an 'adult educator' is not recognized at all. Coupled with limited opportunities of career progression in an often relatively small sector, the working conditions in adult education still leave much room for improvement.

Similar circumstances were recently exposed in North America. In Canada, a detailed analysis of the working conditions of ALE staff was published in September 2013. The report is primarily based on interviews with ALE staff, focusing on the literacy and essential skills workforce. The study notes that ALE staff often face precarious working conditions, with practitioners 'working more hours than they are paid for' (Carlson and Tannenbaum, 2013, p. 3). It highlights that it is often difficult for ALE staff to develop professionally due to inadequate funding. Professional development is particularly difficult for Francophone educators. The report mentions that 'whereas all Francophone interviewees have access to Professional Development (PD), one-third mentioned that they believe that they were fewer PD opportunities in French, that any PD offered in French quickly filled up or tended to be in Quebec and might not correspond to their needs' (p. 19).

Dire conditions are also reported in the United States. According to national data, '78 per cent of paid adult

Figure 13: Availability of continuing, in-service training programmes for ALE teachers/facilitators according to Member States in Europe and North America

Are there continuing, in-service education and training programmes for adult education teachers/facilitators in your country?



Source: *GRALE III* monitoring survey, Question 6.4.

education teachers, and nearly half of program administrators, are employed part-time'. Worryingly, 79 per cent of adjuncts at developmental education faculties in colleges report that they do not receive health insurance through their employers, and 'an even higher percentage lack retirement benefits' (OCTAE, 2015, p. 17).

Another concern shared between European and North American ALE stakeholders is the lack of attention paid to adult educators at the policy level. Interestingly, this conclusion was shared by the participants of two regional consultations. The reports from the European consultation on UNESCO's *Rethinking Education*, organized in October 2016 in Brussels, and from the North American consultation on the same publication, organized in

December 2016 in Washington DC, show that the voice of adult educators is rarely taken into account at policy level or in research. The North American report points out that ‘in the North American Region, where decision-making responsibility for educational opportunities for youth and adults is so fragmented and decentralized, adult educators may be the most likely champions to spur dialogue on the concepts proposed’ (COLLO, 2016, p. 13). One speaker at the European consultation pointed out that ‘in many meetings about education experts talk about, but not with educators’.²⁶

A notable initiative supporting professional development of adult education staff in Europe is the Electronic Platform for Adult Learning in Europe (EPALE),²⁷ funded by the European Commission. It offers a place to meet and discuss important adult-learning topics, as well as to exchange ideas and materials in support of professional practice. EPALÉ is a multilingual open membership community for teachers, trainers, researchers, academics, policy-makers and anyone else with a professional role in adult learning across Europe. It aims to improve the quality of adult learning provision in Europe.

RESEARCH ON ALE

In 2009, the BFA called for ‘systematic interdisciplinary research in adult learning and education, complemented by knowledge management systems for the collection, analysis and dissemination of data and good practice’. While the last few years have seen some discussion on the benefits of ALE (see Chapter 3), it seems that data-collection and analysis of those data is still problematic in a number of countries in Europe and North America.

European and North American ALE stakeholders recognize the importance of providing research-based information about the role of the ALE sector in different contexts. The EAEA annual publication *Adult Education in Europe: A Civil Society View*, which gathers reports from EAEA members in 44 countries, consistently shows that adult education organizations need a research-based approach and, especially, evidence on the benefits of ALE. This would help to build strong arguments for advocacy and lobbying work and subsequently increase awareness

of the importance of ALE following an increase in adults’ participation in lifelong learning activities.

Canada’s progress report for the *Global Report on Adult Learning and Education* at the end of the United Nations Literacy Decade states that ‘several jurisdictions are concerned by the lack of consistent data collection and assessment/evaluation tools, including difficulty in tracking learners over multiple years’ (CMEC, 2012). In some instances, even though data-collection mechanisms exist, they are not used in practice. In Slovakia, adult education institutions are asked to provide statistics to the Institute for Information and Prognoses of Education, but only one-third of providers do it (DIMA project, 2016).

ICT AND OER FOR QUALITY LEARNING AND FLEXIBLE DELIVERY

RALE calls on Member States to adopt ‘learner-centred pedagogy, supported by information and communication technology (ICT) and open educational resources (OER)’ (UIL, 2016a). *GRALE III* follows up on this, identifying ‘the digital revolution’ as one of the six dominant trends in ALE globally. The report notes the untapped potential of digital tools, which can enhance both autonomous and peer-learning opportunities. Thanks to new technologies, quality learning opportunities are becoming ‘increasingly affordable and accessible almost anywhere, anytime’ (UIL, 2016, pp. 128–129).

In Europe and North America, the potential of ICT for ALE has not remained unnoticed, with new policies and initiatives springing up since 2009. In the United States, the National Education Technology Plan is updated annually, recognizing the rapid growth of the sector. The 2017 update, *Reimagining the Role of Technology in Education*, while focusing on primary and secondary education, also devotes some attention to ALE. Structured around four areas – learning, teaching, leadership and assessment, and infrastructure – it offers a broad view of how technology can transform learning (US Department of Education, 2017).

In Europe, ICT and open educational resources (OER) have also been described as ‘the key to opening up adult learning to everyone, everywhere’ (European

²⁶ <http://www.eaea.org/en/home/in-focus/rethinking-education-in-the-times-of-blurred-responsibilities.html> [Accessed on 6 July 2017].

²⁷ <https://ec.europa.eu/epale/>

Commission, 2015b, p. 72). A recent study which looked at ICT use in adult learning in Europe and the US, found that the most successful implementation of ICT and OER comes from countries with an integrated strategy for life-long learning and ICT and those that show a high degree of cooperation between public and private actors (European Commission, 2015c).

With a vast number of tools and resources already available, adult learners in Europe and North America still need support in developing their digital skills. A few initiatives at the EU level have focused on enhancing digital skills among adults. The *New Skills Agenda for Europe*, launched in June 2016, comes with a set of supporting actions, one of which – the Digital Skills and Jobs Coalition – invited EU Member States to develop comprehensive national digital skills strategies by mid-2017. The initiative encourages Member States to develop national digital skills coalitions with all relevant stakeholders, including education and training institutions. By the end of 2016, 15 coalitions had been launched.

Another topic of interest at the EU level concerns the assessment of digital competences. In 2016, the European Commission published the so-called 'DigComp': the European Digital Competence Framework for Citizens. In addition to defining digital competences and grouping them into five areas, it suggests tools for (self-) assessment (European Commission, 2016e).

ICT and OER in Europe and North America

In **Spain**, Educablab Procomun²⁸ (Space of Open Educational Resources) was created, combining the teaching exchange of digital learning resources with networking and sharing experiences and ideas. The Spanish Ministry of Education also created a *Common Framework for Teacher Digital Competence*, built around the EU DigComp. The document helps teachers and trainers develop and assess digital competences of learners.

In 2011, the **Serbian** government launched a competence-based curriculum for adult basic education at three levels. Training of trainers is regulated by law and the curriculum has modules not only on key andragogic competences, but also digital literacy.

In **Denmark**, adult education centres are digitally equipped, with some mobile centres now able to reach remote areas. Denmark has also invested in a national digital platform, EMU, with a number of entries that target specific user groups. These include materials for adult educators, providing resources and guidelines (European Commission, 2015c).

The **US** Department of Education's Office of Career, Technical and Adult Education has recently financed virtual peer-learning projects to explore openly licensed educational resources in adult education. According to NETP, a 'small group of far-flung teachers work with a group moderator to identify, use and review openly licensed educational resources in mathematics, science and English language arts' (US Department of Education, 2017, p. 32). Another initiative, Learning Circles, was undertaken by Peer-to-Peer University and the Chicago Public Library. During a pilot programme in 2015, an expert librarian facilitated a peer-to-peer learning environment, advancing Learning Circles into self-sustainability within six weeks (US Department of Education, 2017, p. 15).

28 <https://procomun.educalab.es/> [Accessed on 6 July 2017].

2. INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION

TRANSFORMING OUR WORLD: THE 2030 AGENDA FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

In view of the challenges presented in the previous section, some European ALE stakeholders have been working for the increased inclusion of adult education in development policies and strategies. The success of these efforts was acknowledged when the development framework *Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* was agreed by the UN in September 2015. It includes 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and 169 targets which aim to overcome poverty and build a sustainable future for all. As opposed to the Millennium Development Goals (the former international development framework), which was mainly aimed at developing countries, the SDGs target all countries, including EU Member States and North America. Additionally, the SDGs were built in an open debate with the participation of not only UN agencies and governments, but also civil society and other stakeholders. The efforts for lifelong learning and adult education are mirrored in Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4: 'Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.' In further detail, there are these targets:

- 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.
- 4.6. By 2030, ensure that all youth and a substantial proportion of adults, both men and women, achieve literacy and numeracy.
- 4.7. 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.

None of the education targets explicitly mentions adult education. However, according to an ICAE position paper (2015), adult literacy, skills for life and work, and the promotion of lifelong learning opportunities are integral to SDG 4. The proposed global indicator for Target 4.3 incorporates the concept of adult education, and adult learning, education and training opportunities form a strategy for achieving Target 4.3, according to the Education 2030 Framework for Action.

Moreover, there is wide recognition of the key role of adult education in the achievement of all Sustainable Development Goals. In October 2016, representatives of ministries of education and cooperation and development, and of UN agencies, academia, civil society organizations, the teaching profession and development partners of European and North American states, gathered for a UNESCO regional consultation meeting on SDG4-Education 2030 for Europe and the North America region in Paris, discussing the first year of implementation of SDG4-Education 2030, and the status of international cooperation and financing of education. It recommended Member States to, among other things, 'mainstream SDG4-Education 2030 into national and sub-national policies and plans, including setting contextually relevant national and sub-national benchmarks', and build coordination and partnership mechanisms that would draw on existing regional or intergovernmental mechanisms (such as EU, CoE and OECD) (UNESCO, 2016a, p. 4).

An important commitment was recently made at the European level. The New European Consensus on Development – 'Our World, Our Dignity, Our Future' – was adopted by the European Union in May 2017. The Consensus describes the EU as 'a force for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda', stating:

While recognizing that each country has the primary responsibility for its own economic and social development, the 2030 Agenda must be implemented by all countries and all stakeholders acting in partnership. The development landscape is expanding, encompassing more and new actors.

Parliaments, political parties, regional and local authorities, research institutions, philanthropic organisations, cooperatives, private sector and civil society have become instrumental partners in reaching the most vulnerable and marginalised people. The promotion and defence of space where these development actors can operate safely is critical for achieving sustainable development. (Council of the European Union, 2017)

Generally, it would be important to remind governments that the SDGs are not meant for 'cherry-picking'. The SDGs have marked a paradigm shift from a focus on countries of the Global South to a vision that encompasses all countries and understands development in a broader perspective. All goals need to be addressed if there is a political interest in achieving them by 2030; individual goals should not be selected.

INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION OUTSIDE EUROPE AND NORTH AMERICA

In Europe and North America there are some examples of international cooperation in ALE that reach beyond the region.

Significant work in this respect is done by DVV International. The Institute for International Cooperation of the Deutscher Volkshochschul-Verband e.V. (DVV), the German Adult Education Association, has been active in the field of adult education and development cooperation for more than 45 years. DVV International provides worldwide support for the establishment and development of sustainable structures for youth and adult education. It cooperates with civil society, government and academic partners in more than 30 countries in Africa, Asia, Latin America and Europe. Country and regional offices build local and regional cooperation in order to ensure quality and effectiveness of actions in the partner countries. The work focuses on literacy and basic education, vocational training, global and intercultural learning, environmental education and sustainable development, migration and integration, refugee work, health education, conflict prevention and democracy education.

Together with national, regional and global adult education associations, DVV International promotes lobby

work and advocacy for the human right to education and for lifelong learning. Finally, it supports the European and global exchange of information and expertise through conferences, seminars and publications.

INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION WITHIN EUROPE AND NORTH AMERICA

In Europe, cooperation (also in the framework of exchange programmes such as Erasmus+) is focused mainly on European stakeholders and this dialogue has been used to share good practice, compare experiences and discuss ideas. ALE stakeholders underline the importance of these international projects and policies that can be effectively used to raise awareness of new ways of thinking across the continent and which may help progress within national educational systems.

North America has also seen various collaborative efforts over the years that aim to exchange best practice and research. North American stakeholders join forces to organize conferences and symposia on ALE, which will be detailed later in this section.

The pan-European and North American networks described below are considered to be the main civil society associations; however, this list may not be exhaustive. What follows is a brief description of their activities undertaken after 2009, looking primarily at capacity-building, and exchange of practices and research, as recommended in *RALE*.

- **The European Association for the Education of Adults (EAEA)**²⁹ is a European NGO with 142 member organizations in 44 countries and represents more than 60 million learners Europe-wide. EAEA's purpose is to link and represent European organizations directly involved in adult learning. It regularly consults its members on issues that are included in the BFA and *RALE*, such as integrated ALE policies, RVA systems, financing of ALE and participation of groups that are currently under-represented. In 2011, EAEA launched the so-called 'country reports', which gather a civil society view of national developments in ALE and help in the exchange of up-to-date information on policies and practices in Europe. Also in 2011, EAEA launched Younger Staff

29 <http://www.eaea.org/en>

Training, showing the commitment to capacity-building among European ALE professionals. It has also coordinated and partnered in several projects funded by the EU that fostered Europe-wide cooperation on key issues in ALE, such as Outreach Empowerment Diversity and AVA: Action Plan for Validation. Importantly, EAEA is a member of several other European networks, such as the Lifelong Learning Platform, Social Platform and CONCORD, promoting the contribution of ALE to social and development issues. An EAEA policy officer is currently a member of the Steering Committee of Hub 4 of CONCORD, supporting European developments in implementing SDG 4.7.

- **The European Basic Skills Network (EBSN)**,³⁰ established in 2010, is a non-profit association that brings together policy-makers and policy-providers engaged in basic skills training for adults. It aims to promote excellence in policy design and policy implementation at European, national and regional levels, in a field that has considerable impact on education, employment, social inclusion, the fight against poverty, and sustainable economic growth. The network's focus of attention is on five basic skills: literacy, numeracy, digital competence, oral communication and a second language for immigrants. Its most recent activities include the establishment of the EBSN Academy in 2013, as well as a collection of evidence-based policy recommendations for basic skills in Europe, clustering existing research as a base for policy recommendations.
- **The International Society for Comparative Adult Education (ISCAE)**³¹ is a European organization that defines its main objective as 'providing an opportunity for international networking in the field of comparative education'. Membership is offered to individuals and does not entail any fees. ISCAE members actively contribute to the field of international research, with their most recent publications discussing, for example, Asian and European perspectives for teachers and trainers in ALE (2010). Additionally, ISCAE organizes regular conferences that bring together scholars and ALE stakeholders interested in

comparative education. The most recent one took place in February 2017 in Germany and was held in conjunction with the Winter School on Comparative Studies in Adult and Lifelong Learning.

- **The Standing Conference on University Teaching and Research in the Education of Adults (SCUTREA)**³² is a network of adult educators involved in research into the teaching of adults. It organizes a three-day conference each year. The most recent one (July 2017) focused on the topic of social inclusion. SCUTREA cooperates closely with members (individual or institutional) from Australia, Canada and the United States, as well as ESREA.
- **The European Society of Research on the Education of Adults (ESREA)**³³ is devoted to encouraging and supporting high-quality research in European ALE. Made up of several thematic networks, ESREA contributes to research on topics such as gender and adult learning, migration, transnationalism and racism, and adult learning and communities. Most recent publications of ESREA include a book series published by SENSE and available through open access in line with ESREA's strategy to encourage democratic debate.

Similar networks also exist in Canada and the United States:

- **The American Association for Adult and Continuing Education (AAACE)**³⁴ is a non-profit organization offering both institutional and individual membership for the purpose of lifelong learning. Among eight commissions that AAACE members can join, one is focused on international adult education (CIAE). It publishes leading adult education journals as well as the *Handbook of Adult and Continuing Education* every 10 years. It also brings together major ALE stakeholders in North America during an annual conference, fostering dialogue on common challenges and exchange of practice.
- **The Coalition of Lifelong Learning Organizations (COLLO)**³⁵ consists of national associations and groups that promote lifelong learning in the United States, such as public schools, higher education

30 <http://www.basicsskills.eu/>

31 <http://iscae.org/>

32 <http://www.scutrea.ac.uk/>

33 <http://www.esrea.org>

34 <http://www.aaace.org/>

35 <http://thecollo.org/>

institutions, industry, labour partners and learners. COLLO consistently promotes the international dimension of ALE, having recently (2013–2016) organized a symposium on RVA, a Regional Consultation on UNESCO's *Rethinking Education* and a symposium on the UN's Sustainable Development Goals.

- **Institut de coopération pour l'éducation des adultes (ICÉA)**³⁶ is a Canadian association bringing together networks and civil society organizations that are active in ALE. Focusing on the wider benefits of ALE and its contribution to societies, ICÉA conducts research and promotes knowledge sharing.

Importantly, the three associations mentioned above, also members of the International Council for Adult Education (ICAE), frequently initiate collaborative efforts. For example, ICÉA, when planning the World Assembly of Adult Education in Montreal in June 2015, reached out to AAACE and CIAE, with ICÉA sending representatives to AAACE's annual conference and CIAE's preconference to engage participants to attend the forum. Collaborative action ensued, with preparation and implementation of a COLLO Symposium on the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (October 2016) and the North America regional consultation on *Rethinking Education* (December 3, 2016), which received input from a piloted session at CIAE pre-conference during AAACE's annual conference in November.

Other North American networks active in international knowledge-sharing include:

- **The Canadian Association for the Study of Adult Education (CASAE)**³⁷ is a network of graduate students, researchers and policy-makers interested in ALE, with membership covering individuals and institutions of both the formal and non-formal sectors. As well as bringing North American stakeholders together at an annual conference, it publishes an academic journal, the *Canadian Journal for the Study of Adult Education*. CASAE cooperates closely with the European research networks mentioned above – SCUTREA and ESREA.
- **The Adult Education Research Conference (AERC)**³⁸ is an annual North American conference whose main aim is to share experiences and results of research between scholars, practitioners and students. Over the years, there have been several pre-conferences with an international focus, such as an African Diaspora Pre-Conference and an Asian Pre-Conference. AERC also contributes to quality ALE by conferring graduate research awards.
- **The Nordic Network for Adult Learning (NVL)**³⁹ highlights and transmits competencies and experiences of adult learning in the Nordic Region, by sharing skills and experiences from the five Nordic countries as well as the Faroe Islands, Greenland and Åland. Its objectives are to promote lifelong learning by focusing on cross-sectoral cooperation, to deepen Nordic competence and to foster mutual learning. All NVL networks participate in information activities and create new knowledge by carrying out surveys, investigations, comparative studies and analyses. Expert networks have been set up and have been commissioned to produce reports on various themes. Additionally, thematic/professional networks are formed on the basis of initiatives from sectors within adult learning, or based on a topical theme from a Nordic country that is of pan-Nordic interest.
- **The EU Agenda Nordic Coordinators and Nordic PIAAC Network** is a yearly Nordic meeting held for institutions that have been appointed as national coordinators of the European Agenda for Adult Learning. Additionally, a Nordic PIAAC Network, consisting of members from all five Nordic countries and Estonia, started as informal discussions between the people responsible for the PIAAC survey in their countries. The aim was to share experiences, information, and support in the national preparations and implementations of the survey. In 2010, the National

Additionally, regional European networks, mainly in the Nordic countries and Eastern Europe, play a significant role in promoting the development and strengthening of adult learning and education.

36 <http://www.icea.qc.ca/site/>

37 <http://www.casae-aceea.ca/>

38 <http://newprairiepress.org/aerc/>

39 <http://www.nvl.org>

Project Managers of the PIAAC in the five countries decided to establish an organized network, to apply for funding for it, and to produce a comparative Nordic PIAAC report. The Nordic PIAAC Network decided that the joint Nordic PIAAC database should also be augmented by register data, resulting in the unique Nordic PIAAC database holding a combination of PIAAC survey data and social, educational, and labour market register data from the five countries. This database may be of interest to social and educational science researchers in general.

- **The Nordic basic skills network**⁴⁰ was established as a result of the PIAAC report and the priorities set in this programme. It has identified and discussed ongoing work in the Nordic countries in the field of basic skills. A recent report, presented in May 2016, aims to highlight what is being done in the area of basic skills for adults in the Nordic countries and investigates the needs for new initiatives.

A co-operative programme of the **Nordic Council of Ministers for Education and Research (MR-U)** has guided ministers' efforts on education and research, languages and IT since 2015. The programme is designed to focus and target work which stems from the political agendas of the participating countries and the Faroe Islands, Greenland and the Åland Islands, and chronicles the themes to which the ministers wish to devote particular attention, notably improvement of basic skills. All age groups are included in this priority.

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- **The House of Europe in Saint Petersburg**, an NGO established in 1996, operates a large network of ALE activities in Russia and countries of the former USSR. Among various activities, the association promotes mobile learning activities that travel to inaccessible localities using boats and trains. The association also organizes learning activities for older people, a project which has so far been implemented in Russia, Kazakhstan and Ukraine.⁴¹

Furthermore, thematic networks such as Bridge 47,⁴² which endeavors to bridge educational sectors across Europe and beyond to advance the implementation of citizenship education, and in particular SDG 4.7, increasingly play a role in promoting non-formal ALE and lifelong learning.

40 <http://www.nordvux.net/>

41 www.despb.com

42 <http://bridge47network.blogspot.be/>

3. THE IMPACT OF ALE ON HEALTH, WORK AND SOCIETY

As continuously emphasized in *GRALE III*, ALE should be placed in a broader picture of sustainable development, taking into account the impact it has on social, cultural and economic dimensions. While the BFA called for a more intersectoral and interministerial approach to ALE at policy level, it seems that in Europe and North America there are only a few countries with integrated ALE policies. Many ALE organizations in the region have expressed their belief that to better advocate for integrated ALE policies, more research into the wider benefits of learning is still needed (EAEA, 2016a).

It seems that educational growth tends to be measured primarily by participation rates, both by governments and ALE providers. This was explored in detail by Schuller in 2004, who pointed out that the continuing focus on participation in discourses on ALE is simply pragmatic: 'People are enrolled or not enrolled, whereas what counts as a beneficial outcome from learning is much harder to specify or measure' (Schuller, 2004, p. 5). Quantifying the benefits proves to be difficult for several reasons (for example, tracking former students to ascertain how ALE has impacted their lives is 'difficult and expensive'). Schuller adds that qualitative accounts, when available, are crucial as they bring in the voice of the learner, but might be limited in scale. At the same time, larger studies might take an 'undifferentiated view of learning', without taking subjective factors into account (Field, 2011, p. 288).

Additionally, *GRALE III* reveals that the relation between ALE and individual or societal benefits is complex, frequently indirect and non-linear. Learners' subjective understanding of their learning paths 'may not be articulated or understood in ways that enable simple quantitative comparisons to be made' (Field, 2011, p. 285). Some researchers believe that such subjective factors are best taken into account, for example, through longitudinal studies, which are often deemed as the most persuasive. Albert Tuijnman's study in the 1980s is cited as pioneering in this regard. The so-called 'Malmö longitudinal study' followed men born around 1928 from the age of 10 until their mid-50s (Jenkins and Wiggins, 2015), finding that those who participated in ALE 'found their lives more meaningful and worthwhile' (Field, 2011, p. 286).

Longitudinal research in the United States shows wider benefits of ALE literacy programmes

As ALE initiatives everywhere compete with other governmental activities for scarce programme funding, there is an increasing clamour for evidence that the programmes are effective, efficient and produce positive outcomes. While there has been little research in the past to demonstrate the impact adult literacy skills programmes have on adults, jobs, and future generations, or into the return on investment that such programmes realize, longitudinal research conducted by Dr Stephen Reder examined the correlation between participation in adult basic skills programmes and later increases in income, literacy levels, high school equivalency attainment, post-secondary education engagement, and civic participation/voting activity. His study findings showed a positive outcome for individuals in these five areas.

Reder's Longitudinal Study of Adult Learning (LSAL) took place over nearly a decade, from 1998 to 2007. He randomly sampled approximately 1,000 high school dropouts living in the US's **Portland, Oregon**, metro area, and followed both participants and non-participants in adult basic skills (ABS) programmes. The study assessed the adults' skills during six intervals (waves) over a 10-year period, while monitoring changes in their social, educational and economic status. Its goal was to bring to light long-term outcomes and benefits realized by adults who participate in an adult education programme as they relate to improving economic well-being, health, social cohesion and civic engagement. Morgan, Waite and Diecuch noted the study's findings and implications:

- Economic gains: 'ABS participants showed mean income gains of 53 per cent ... compared to an income drop of 2 per cent for non-participants.'
 - Literacy growth: Those active in literacy programmes were found to be more likely to show an increase in literacy skills than those who
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were not, who showed virtually no literacy skill gain over time.

- **High school education attainment:** Of adults in the study, 35 per cent of those participating in ABS programmes obtained a high school equivalency (HSE) credential, compared to 25 per cent of those that were not in such programmes, significantly increasing their chances in the labour market,
- **Post-secondary engagement:** 'There are significant gains in transition to post-secondary opportunities for individuals who participate in ABS programs. These gains lead to an increase in opportunities for other work-based credentials and certificates. The result is, again, a higher quality labor force and greater opportunities for job advancement for individuals' (p. 12).
- **Voting activity:** 'Civic participation, specifically voting, improves with higher participation in ABS programs. This higher level of involvement leads to greater overall community activity including voting, volunteerism, community engagement, and social cohesion' (Morgan, Waite and Diecuch, 2017, pp. 6–12).

More recent studies, such as *Understanding the Social Outcomes of Learning*, published by the OECD (2007), or the BeLL study (2013), also cited in *GRALE* national reports, have brought similar conclusions, as will be seen below. This chapter will look at the impact of ALE on three important domains: health and well-being, employment and the labour market, and social, civic and community life, following the approach of *GRALE III*. For each domain, the report will briefly look at the most recent research and policy developments in Europe and North America since 2009.

THE IMPACT OF ALE ON HEALTH AND WELL-BEING

A study presented at the European Health Forum in 2013 stated that as many as '47 per cent of the population in eight European countries is estimated to have insufficient levels of health literacy', while 'some 43 per cent had difficulties grasping the notion of disease prevention and 51

per cent struggled with health promotion – or the ability to advance one's own health' (EAEA, 2015*b*). Equally alarming were the results of the PIAAC study, which also showed the correlation between low literacy levels and health (OECD, 2013).

GRALE III details the variety of benefits that investment in ALE can bring, be it due to good general health, healthy behaviours, longer life expectancy or reduction in disease, doctor's visits and hospitalization – to name only a few. Looking at the relation between benefits at the individual and societal level – such as fewer days of illness, resulting in a decrease in health system costs – *GRALE* makes a compelling case for stronger ALE policies.

Several studies conducted in recent years have shown the beneficial impact of ALE on health and well-being. According to data in the United Kingdom, for every 100,000 women who attend ALE courses, 116–134 cancers are likely to be prevented (Schuller and Desjardins, 2007). A large causal effect has also been reported between education and mortality. Taking as an example the American population born in 1960, Lleras-Muney found that 'one more year of education increased life expectancy at age 35 by as much as 1.7 years' (Lleras-Muney, 2005). Finally, as many as 76 per cent of the participants of the BeLL study in 2013 had experienced positive changes in their health behaviour after attending ALE courses (BeLL, 2013).

More research is under way. A large research programme was recently commissioned in the United Kingdom, where the Department of Education invested £20 million in the Community Learning Mental Health Research project. Between April 2015 and July 2017, 52 learning providers in England offered guidance, short community learning courses and refresh sessions to local populations. The findings of the study will be published in 2018.⁴³

ALE providers across Europe and North America have stepped up to directly or indirectly help adults learn more about health. Cooking courses, yoga or fitness classes, peer-to-peer learning groups that offer mutual support are widely provided, but more support is needed at the policy level to promote ALE for personal health and well-being. The case of Men's Sheds, a grassroots movement promoting learning activities among men, shows

43 <http://mhfe.org.uk/clmh-pilots/> [Accessed on 6 July 2017].

beneficial support at policy level. While the initiative has expanded from Australia to several other countries, such as New Zealand, the United Kingdom and Canada, a recent study found that ‘the largest growth in shed numbers has been in Australia and Ireland, the only two countries with a National Male Health Policy’ (Cordier and Wilson, 2013). Indeed, Men’s Sheds are mentioned in the Irish National Men’s Health Policy 2008–13.⁴⁴

A few recent studies in Europe and North America can be used as a reference for countries that lack policies that promote ALE for health and well-being, focusing for example on health literacy. The IROHLA research project, funded with the Horizon 2020 programme and focused on health literacy for the ageing population, produced recommendations targeted at ALE providers and policy-makers.⁴⁵ The Public Health Association of British Columbia developed the Intersectoral Approach for Improving Health Literacy for Canadians, which gives clear recommendations on actions that could be undertaken by governments, the health sector, the education sector, workplaces and communities (Rootman and Mitic, 2012).

Policies and partnerships in Europe and North America that highlight the impact of ALE on health

The **Swiss** Alliance for Health Literacy and Competence was set up in 2010. It links stakeholders from the healthcare and educational systems with researchers, politicians, representatives of the healthcare industry and the mass media to promote health literacy in Switzerland. The alliance has been working with the Swiss Federation Lire et Ecrire on illiteracy; together they released an action guide on promoting health literacy.

Making it Easy. A Health Literacy Action Plan for Scotland was published in 2014. Fitting in with larger Scottish policies – such as Scotland’s 2020 Vision for Health and Social Care – it was developed with a national group of stakeholders that included practitioners, policy-makers and representatives of civil society. Presenting inspir-

ing stories of adult learners, the document shows how ALE can enhance health literacy. Among key actions, the policy proposes a National Health Literacy Resource for Scotland, the ‘Health Literacy Place’, to create a community of practice and a quick guide for practitioners (NHS Scotland, 2014).

In 2010, the **United States** Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion published the *National Plan to Improve Health Literacy*. In a ‘multisectoral effort to improve health literacy’, the plan targets organizations, professionals, individuals, families and communities. It sets out seven goals and links policy with practice by including descriptions of innovative strategies implemented locally, such as collaboration with a Latina community in Florida to prepare a culturally sensitive stress management toolkit or a network of health coaches in Missouri who reach uninsured patients (US Department of Health and Human Services, 2010).

THE IMPACT OF ALE ON EMPLOYMENT AND LABOUR MARKET

Arguably, at the policy level it is the link between ALE and the labour market that has received the most attention in recent years. With large datasets regularly collected and monitored nationally and internationally, it is becoming easier to examine the relation between certain factors such as formal qualifications and employability. Some of the most recent studies and statistics will be briefly mentioned below.

According to *GRALE III*, the labour market outcomes of ALE are threefold, impacting on the individual, the organization, and society and the economy. Ultimately, the individual learner benefits from ALE in terms of earnings. As their employability increases, learners gain access to the labour market, progress along career ladders or switch employment. The relation between educational attainment and employment can be seen from

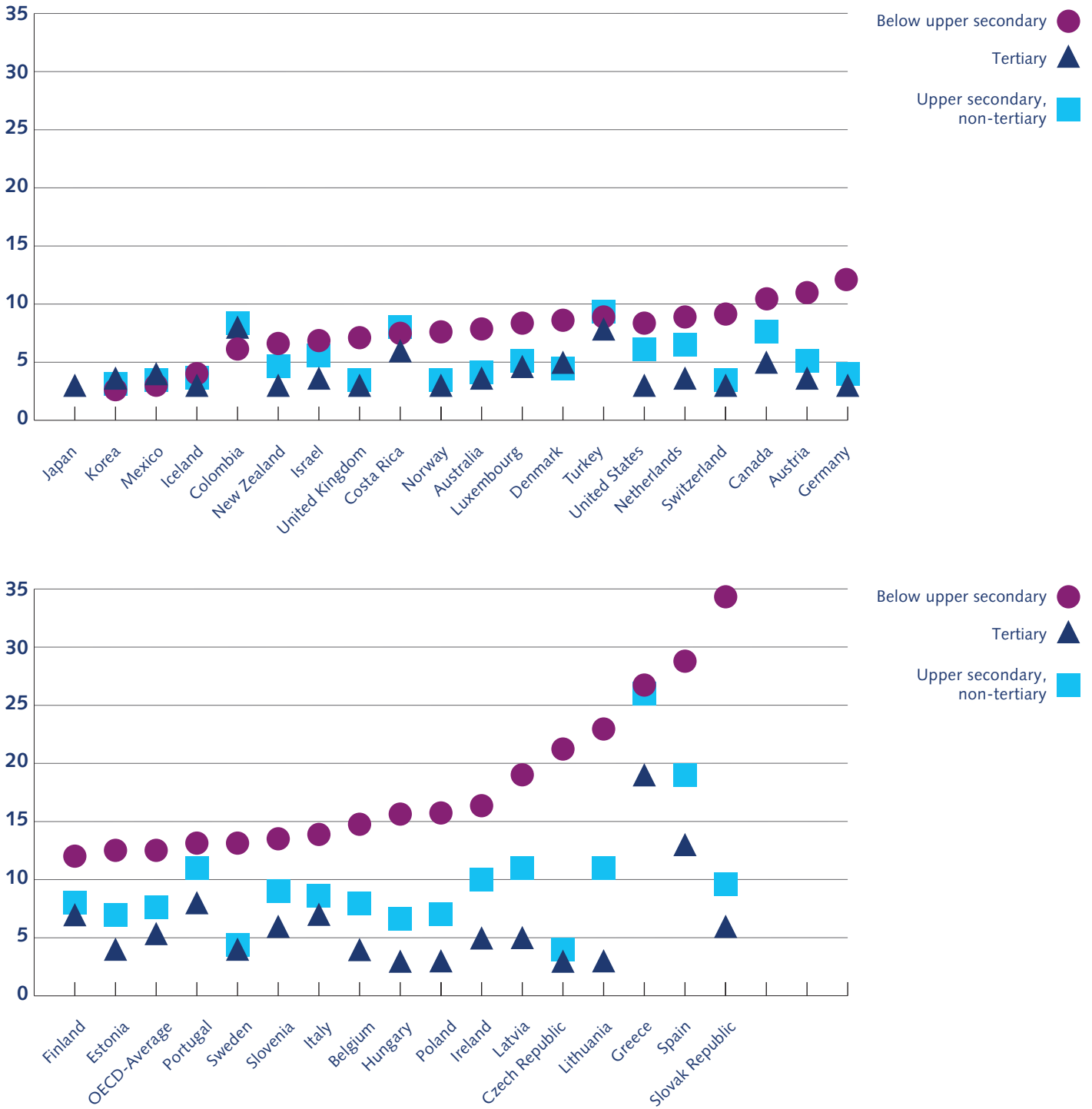
44 http://health.gov.ie/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/reference_document.pdf [Accessed 6 July 2017].

45 <http://www.irohla.eu/activities/publications/> [Accessed on 6 July 2017].

international data, such as those regularly collected and monitored by the European Commission and OECD.

Figure 14 shows unemployment levels according to educational attainment in OECD countries, as of 2015. The gaps between unemployment levels according to educational level are particularly striking in the Slovak Republic, Lithuania and Czechia.

Figure 14: Unemployment rate (%) by educational level, 2015



Source: OECD, <https://data.oecd.org/unemp/unemployment-rates-by-education-level.htm>

Investing in ALE brings significant benefits to employers. With employees who are more satisfied and committed to their work, the employer benefits from a stable workforce. It has also been shown that ALE positively impacts on technological innovation. A study by CEDEFOP (2012) found that formal, non-formal and informal learning in enterprises 'correlates positively with innovation performance'. At the same time, innovation and a motivated workforce increase productivity and profitability of the enterprise (European Commission, 2015b).

Finally, ALE impacts society and economy in terms of productivity. Increased economic activity rates, higher tax revenues and entrepreneurship levels are just a few of the benefits that make a strong case for investment in ALE. Some studies have also drawn a parallel between high rates of participation in learning and high levels of GDP.

Economic returns of ALE have not gone unnoticed at the policy level. The financial and economic crisis that hit Europe and North America in 2008 also contributed to an increase in economic understanding of ALE. At the EU level, the shift was consistently shown in a series of policy documents published since then, such as the *Agenda for New Skills and Jobs: A European Contribution for Full Employment* (European Commission, 2010b) and *Rethinking Education: Investing for Better Socio-Economic Outcomes* (European Commission, 2012a).

Such tendencies are also visible at national level. As was seen above, the great majority of ALE policies in Europe and North America target individuals seeking to update work-relevant knowledge and skills; long-term unemployed; young adults not in employment, education or training; and workers in low-skill, low-wage or precarious positions. *GRALE III* also shows that, since 2009, 57 per cent of the countries in Central and Eastern Europe and 41 per cent in North America and Western Europe have assessed the outcomes of ALE policies for employment and the labour market through surveys or studies. Only 2 per cent of countries in Central and Eastern Europe and 2 per cent of those in Western Europe and North America did not perceive any effects of ALE on employability (UIL, 2016, pp. 94–97).

Policies in Europe and North America that highlight the impact of ALE on employment

Ireland recently adopted the Further Education and Training Strategy 2014–2019, published by SOLAS Further Education and Training Authority. Among its five strategic goals is 'skills for the economy' (SOLAS, 2014). Investment priorities are published by SOLAS annually and reflect the strategic goals. The first investment priority for 2016 was 'provision of FET [future and emerging technologies] programmes to skill, reskill, or up-skill unemployed persons as well as other job seekers to find a job and/or progress to higher/further education and training that will equip them to compete in the labour market' (SOLAS, 2016).

In the province of **Quebec** in **Canada**, different labour partners – unions, employers' organizations, the education system and community groups – that offer training are brought together in an official, state-based mechanism. The *Commission des partenaires du marché du travail* – Commission of labour market partners – manages certain laws, programmes and public money and defines priorities' (COLLO, 2016, p. 7). The underlying aim is to increase the efficiency of public employment services and encourage professional development of the workforce.

THE IMPACT OF ALE ON SOCIAL, CIVIC AND COMMUNITY LIFE

GRALE III details the benefits of ALE that concern the individual and those that are ultimately felt by communities or societies. On a personal level, an adult learner advances in literacy and numeracy, practical skills, life skills and cultural learning; at the societal level, ALE leads to more social cohesion, integration and inclusion, an increase in social capital, and increased participation in social, civic and community activities. It also creates learning communities, which, in turn, bring ethical economies, ecological awareness and environmental sustainability.

Regrettably, the impact of ALE on social, civic and community life has received less research attention than its impact on health or the labour market; nevertheless, it has been discussed in several studies undertaken since 2009, with different target groups or areas of focus.

An OECD publication from 2010, *Improving Health and Social Cohesion through Education*, looks at the correlations between education and civic and social engagement. While the data analysed do not include ALE, it does show a significant correlation between years of schooling and civic engagement, political engagement and trust and tolerance.

The BeLL study, conducted in 2013, focused on non-formal ALE. Examining 10 European countries, it collected comparative quantitative and qualitative data from almost 9,000 questionnaires and 82 qualitative interviews. The data show that most respondents became more active in their community after taking up learning, with 86 per cent of them reporting positive changes in their social engagement thanks to ALE.

A few recent national studies have also shed some light on how ALE can influence communities and societies.

National research on the impact of ALE on social, civic and community life

In 2009, the Department of Education and Skills of **Ireland** commissioned AONTAS, the National Adult Learning Organisation, to conduct research on the outcomes and impact of publicly funded community education. The study explored a number of issues directly related to community life. It found that 64 per cent of learners feel more accepting and understanding of different beliefs, 60 per cent are more accepting and understanding of other cultures, while 53 per cent have an increased awareness of the fact that their activities locally affect people globally (AONTAS, 2010).

A great many empirical data have been collected and analysed in **Sweden**, where the government subsidizes popular education to encourage people's 'engagement in societal development and cultural life' (Andersson and Laginder, 2013, p. 99). Several

studies have focused on study circles, whose participation levels are traditionally high – in 1995, an estimated 75 per cent of the Swedish population had participated in a study circle at least once. A recent study looked at three investigations of participants in study circles conducted since 1996 from the societal perspective; it found that study circles 'contribute to democracy indirectly, which means that the participants develop abilities and skills that are necessary for active participation in society'. Study circle participants are more likely to become members of an association or action group, and they acquire 'democratic abilities, irrespective of the subject focused on' – although it needs to be noted that the content of study circles frequently concerns societal issues, such as the environment, human rights or peace (Andersson and Laginder, 2013, p. 111).

In 2012, the Educational Testing Service published *Fault Lines in Our Democracy. Civic Knowledge, Voting Behaviour and Civic Engagement in the United States*. The report, which looks at Civic Engagement Index (CEI) scores in the United States in light of educational attainment, found that 'for each of the CEI measures, participation rose steadily and strongly with increases in educational attainment'. Well-educated adults are more likely to vote in presidential, congressional and state elections, and to volunteer for non-profit and governmental organizations. While a large part of the report focuses on the K-12 curriculum, it also includes recommendations for adult education systems. The authors call on 'all national, state, and local adult-education agencies' to 'assume responsibility to incorporate civics education and civic involvement into the curriculum, help learners become familiar with voting registration procedures, and encourage volunteerism. All adult learners should be asked to give back to their communities' (Coley and Sum, 2012).

While ALE policies in Europe and North America tend to prioritize ALE for the labour market, in the past few years more attention has been paid to the humanistic dimension of education. The Renewed European Agenda for Adult Learning and the *New Skills Agenda for Europe*

highlight the contribution of ALE to active citizenship and social inclusion.

The declaration on promoting citizenship and the common values of freedom, tolerance and non-discrimination through education, adopted in Paris in March 2015 (following the *Charlie Hebdo* terrorist attacks in Paris), marks an important shift towards citizenship and social and civic competences, rejecting a strictly economic view on learning and education. National developments following the declaration have been monitored by the European Commission; however, the report published one year on does not mention ALE (compare European Commission, EACEA and Eurydice, 2016).

The Citizens' Curriculum in the United Kingdom

Between 2014 and 2016, the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills in the **United Kingdom** supported the Learning and Work Institute (then the National Institute for Adult Continuing Education) to pilot the 'Citizens' Curriculum'. The model promotes learner-centred ALE and locally led, interlinking basic skills with digital, financial and health capabilities. Importantly, the curriculum also encompasses civic capability, defined as both 'formal citizenship learning and active community participation' as well as 'less formal participation as an "active spectator"'. Learners who participated in the piloting are reported to have experienced 'a range of positive outcomes related to social and civil engagement'. Fifty-nine per cent said they felt that their social life improved thanks to the programme, while 16 per cent decided to join a community group as a result. The Citizens' Curriculum is also reported to be effective in helping learners engage with public services (Stevenson, Robey and Downes, 2016).

4. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In view of the challenges that persist and are presented in this report, there is clearly scope for improvement. As the Pan-European Statement on Adult Learning for Equity and Inclusion in the Context of Mobility and Competition, developed in the framework of the CONFINTEA VI Preparatory Conference (2008), underlines, there is a need for a more integrated ALE approach that addresses economic development, social cohesion, equity and diversity, democratic citizenship, sustainable development, and community and personal development (UIL, 2008, p. 2).

POLICY

- **Make real lifelong learning systems a reality**

Europe and North America need lifelong learning systems that include exchange and equality at policy level between formal, non-formal and informal education and learning. ALE has a vital role to play in overcoming significant societal challenges, and therefore needs to be a key part of all lifelong learning strategies at regional and national level. Holistic policy-making is required, linking all levels from regional to national contexts, including local and regional grassroots development.

By integrating adult education into existing initiatives, strategies and policies, learning is mainstreamed and, consequently, so are social inclusion strategies for disadvantaged groups. Stronger structural support is needed for non-formal adult education (providers) through legislation, institutional development and continuous financing.

- **Recognize the importance of non-formal adult learning**

In times of crisis and/or instability, employability has become the focus of most countries' interest in adult education; hence, some policy-makers tend to underestimate the possibilities of non-formal adult learning. However, recent European political developments show that a renewed emphasis on learning for active citizenship, democracy, sustainable development and European cohesion is necessary. It is essential to recognize the importance of non-formal adult education in strengthening democratic society and promoting and sustaining active citizenship, as well as the wider benefits of adult education and lifelong learning.

Nevertheless, the borderline between general ALE and vocational education and training (VET), between employability and social and civic ALE may be artificially drawn and a cause of barriers. Separate pieces have to be brought together in a lifelong perspective with supporting strategies (see European Commission and UIL, 2013).

GOVERNANCE

Bottom-up discourses on adult education with all key stakeholders should be developed, and partnerships and networks should be strengthened, vertically and horizontally, at all levels (including within governments).

- **Create a cross-sectoral governance structure**

At present, responsibility for adult education policy development rests chiefly with ministries of education (in a few cases, a ministry of culture or labour), while other governmental bodies are involved to a varying extent. While the overwhelming majority of countries in Europe and North America that responded to *GRALE III* reported more trans-sectoral policies since 2009, only a few have provided examples that show comprehensive strategies involving different ministries. It is necessary to bring forward inclusive strategies on adult education that include a number of ministries.

- **Increase dialogue with stakeholders**

Close partnerships and mutual learning between governmental organizations, and in particular close cooperation with civil society organizations, including learners, are needed to raise awareness and develop appropriate measures and synergies. Bottom-up discourses on ALE should be initiated in order to involve key stakeholders in the process of policy planning and to build trust between the public and civil society sectors. Although a great majority of *GRALE* respondents have consulted various stakeholders on ALE policies, such consultations still seem to be limited in scope and held primarily at the early stages of the policy cycle. New forms of inter- and cross-ministerial cooperation that bring all stakeholders together must be developed.

- **Support civil society**

Regional and national umbrella organizations ensure the advocacy, representation and consultative ability of ALE stakeholders. Structured dialogue between ALE stakeholders is needed, as this fosters cooperation between ALE providers, decision-makers and community groups. It also facilitates the consultation process with the public sector through a common point of view and combined forces.

FINANCING

- **Prioritize and increase investment in adult learning**

Public investment in ALE is crucial: many ALE stakeholders raise financial issues. With ALE spending below 0.4 per cent of public education budgets in several countries in Europe and North America, many ALE providers are underfunded; consequently, learners are left behind. Increasing investment in ALE is paramount, especially for those who left initial education without any qualifications and those who are living in disadvantaged conditions.

- **Collect comprehensive data on ALE spending**

Worryingly, the *GRALE III* report shows that several countries in Europe and North America are unable to estimate the percentage of public education spending that is attributed to ALE. Without improved data-collection systems within the ministries responsible for implementing ALE policies, the BFA commitment to 'increased investment in adult learning and education' cannot be achieved.

PARTICIPATION, INCLUSION AND EQUITY

Countries should promote access to ALE. Low levels of participation in ALE, particularly among socio-economic groups that would benefit most from further learning, remains a concern. Equitable access to, and participation in, ALE need to be promoted and supported through concrete measures, such as adult learners' weeks and learning festivals, targeted especially at those adults who are otherwise least likely to participate. This involves strengthening the full range and quality of ALE provision, the development of lifelong guidance systems, and the promotion of key competences needed to address individual, social and economic change and gender and social inequalities, and to contribute to social justice and a

dynamic civil society. Also, a consensus will be needed on the equivalency of diverse types of education experience. Accordingly, the tools to collect this information have to be standardized to improve cross-national comparability of results.

- **Reach out to and empower disadvantaged and under-represented groups**

The diverse nature of modern societies needs to be acknowledged: populations are composed of people with diverse backgrounds, social living conditions, legal statuses and educational opportunities. Stronger ALE policies which effectively remove, or at least reduce, existing barriers are badly needed. There is a justifiable urge to analyse the functioning of legal and financial frameworks in terms of their promoting – or hindering – the participation of disadvantaged groups.

- **RVA is a key tool in order to promote lifelong learning**

The integration of informal and non-formal learning in European and national qualification frameworks is a crucial development. An integrated system needs to have an emphasis on recognition of prior learning, validation of all kinds of learning, and a coherent approach that allows for smaller steps and achievements at lower levels to ensure more flexible learning pathways, to encourage learners and build their self-confidence, as well as to create a more comprehensive understanding of competences. Therefore, it is important to introduce more visibility to RVA, in particular targeting people from disadvantaged groups who might need validation the most. This report includes several inspiring examples, such as RVA systems for learners with disabilities recently established in Portugal, that show the beneficial role that RVA can play in social inclusion.

- **Improve monitoring of ALE**

The available monitoring tools are not even close to capturing the increasing diversity of ALE, as they generally tend to focus on formal learning and education. Additionally, not all countries from the regions regularly collect nationwide data on participation in ALE. The most recent data on North American participation dates from 2010 or even earlier. National systems to monitor ALE are crucial, while diversity in contexts and variations in national capacity for collecting and analysing data must

be accounted for. Mechanisms that track adult education and learning opportunities, including those geared to the sustainable development agenda, are essential and will help countries collect and compare information.

QUALITY

Policies, structures and measures to assure the quality of learning should be developed. Quality in adult learning can only be addressed through an approach covering all sectors of education and training, and more systematic evidence-based evaluations of ALE quality approaches and tools. Existing resources need to be complemented, developed and integrated into a consistent framework (European Commission, 2013b, pp. 6–7).

- **ALE needs the best trainers and staff**

There is a universal demand for the development of staff capacities through high-quality education and in-service training. Employment conditions for ALE staff, in spite of the commitments made in the BFA, remain precarious in many countries, with educators working part-time, as volunteers or freelancers, sometimes without access to social security. Training and professional development to ensure high-quality learning are crucial, in particular for those working with disadvantaged groups. However, the majority of countries in Europe and North America report 'inadequate' access to in-service training.

- **Need for further research**

One of the main challenges to research and evaluation in the adult education sector is the huge complexity and diversity of educational provision. Therefore, if the sector wants to show its benefits more widely, research, data-collection and analysis must all be improved. It is recommended to develop standardized, valid and reliable instruments representing the entire range of educational activities in adulthood. More coherent studies and modules for understanding the effects and causes of ALE in greater details are needed.

- **Need for peer learning and review**

GRALE III concluded that efforts to improve data 'need to set careful priorities and ensure that their ambitions

are in line with available resources in different countries and contexts' (UIL, 2016), and that promotion of peer review and peer learning was essential. Groups of countries with comparable profiles should establish networks within existing organizations to generate and exchange information on the quality of adult education.

The European Commission working groups are centred on peer-learning activities that encourage Member States to exchange their experiences and learn from each other's initiatives and policies.

On the level of civil society, the European Association for the Education of Adults has created an online peer-learning platform⁴⁶ that encourages adult education staff from across Europe to learn from presented examples and to contribute their own experiences.

- **Invest in ICT and OER for flexible and accessible learning**

Information and communication technology (ICT) as well as open educational resources (OER) are important tools in providing quality learning, as endorsed in *RALE*. Their flexibility, affordability and accessibility provide a huge potential in reaching out to disadvantaged learners as well as supporting ALE staff in their professionalization. More investment in ICT and OER is needed to exploit their value for quality ALE, coupled with increased efforts to improve digital skills of all learners and ensure that digital tools represent a learning opportunity, not a barrier.

- **Quality systems need to take the specificities of the sector into account**

The working groups on quality in adult education had long discussions about the recommendations and systems that had been established in the higher education and VET sectors in Europe, where the ALE sector has a number of characteristics not mirrored in other sectors. These include fragmentation, numerous small grassroots organizations, etc. Any quality system, therefore, needs to take into account the scale, scope and appropriateness of quality measures.

46 <http://www.ae-pro.eu/> [Accessed on 7 July 2017].

INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION

Despite being referenced in SDG 4, the critical role of ALE has been overlooked in the other SDG targets. For the SDG changes to take place in such a short period of time, campaigns with an active education component will be necessary. This is where the intersectoral nature of the new agenda will come into full force, but also where various facets of adult education and learning opportunities will need to be explored and monitored.

- **Involvement of civil society**

Increased cooperation between local authorities and civil society is a starting point for strengthening the voice of citizens and encouraging their national governments to implement the SDGs. We cannot overestimate the role of civil society in raising general public awareness on the SDGs and in pushing their implementation. Civil society organizations ought to monitor the implementation process and encourage authorities to use citizen-generated data.

- **Provision of information and cooperation**

Active citizens are paramount for achieving the SDGs, and ALE can ensure that no one is left behind in the process. Provision of information and engaging in coalitions expands ALE's space for manoeuvre.

This report clearly demonstrates that there is an urgent need to prioritize, promote and invest in ALE for all. There is still a demand for a holistic attitude towards the benefits of education, beyond qualifications, certifications and economic benefits, acknowledging that education often impacts at the individual level, and in workplaces and communities. We need a 'learning world' where everyone can and wants to participate in learning.

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ANNEX 1: EXPERTS AND RESPONDENTS TO THE QUESTIONNAIRE

- Emir Avdagic, DVV International – the Institute for International Cooperation of the German Adult Education Association, Bosnia and Herzegovina, www.dvv-international.de
- Maja Avramovska, DVV International – the Institute for International Cooperation of the German Adult Education Association, Caucasus, Turkey, South East Europe, www.dvv-international.de
- Arūnas Bėkšta, Lithuanian Association of Adult Education, www.lssa.smm.lt
- Sturla Bjerker, adult education expert, Norway
- Marcie Boucouvalas, Commission for International Adult Education (CIAE) at the American Association for Adult and Continuing Education (AAACE), www.aaace.org
- Antra Carlsen, Nordic Network for Adult Learning, www.nvl.org
- Uwe Gartenschlaeger, DVV International – the Institute for International Cooperation of the German Adult Education Association, www.dvv-international.de
- Tiina Jäger, Estonian Non-formal Adult Education Association, www.vabaharidus.ee
- Biljana Mojsavska, Lifelong Learning Center, Skopje, Macedonia
- Linda Morris, Coalition of Lifelong Learning Organizations, info@thecollo.org
- Susana Oliveira, Kerigma, Portugal, <http://kerigma.pt>
- Sarmite Pilate, Latvian Adult Education Association, www.laea.lv
- Alija Ramadan, DVV International – the Institute for International Cooperation of the German Adult Education Association, Kosovo, www.dvv-international.de
- Pirkko Ruuskanen-Parrukoski, The Finnish Lifelong Learning Foundation, www.kansanvalistusseura.fi
- Lali Santeladze, DVV International – The Institute for International Cooperation of the German Adult Education Association, Georgia, www.dvv-international.de
- Stefan Vater, Association of Austrian Adult Education Centres, <http://www.vhs.or.at>

ANNEX 2: EXPERT QUESTIONNAIRE

STAKEHOLDER QUESTIONNAIRE FOR THE PAN-EUROPEAN REGIONAL REPORT ON CONFINTEA VI RECOMMENDATIONS

1. BACKGROUND FOR THE QUESTIONNAIRE

The Belém Framework for Action (BFA, 2009) provided a set of recommendations for further developing adult learning and education (ALE) in UNESCO Member States from a global perspective. In Vilnius (2013), a European regional CONFINTEA follow-up conference was organized to prepare a regional action plan, which identified priority actions to implement the BFA in Europe against the background of regional specificities. In 2015, the UNESCO Recommendation on ALE (*RALE*) was adopted; it complements the BFA in view of the Education 2030 agenda.

Currently, the European Association for the Education of Adults (EAEA) is developing a regional report on outcomes and results of the recommendations, i.e., the implementation of the Belém Framework for Action in the Europe, and outcomes of the regional action plan as resulting from the Regional CONFINTEA Follow-Up Conference in Vilnius. This report will provide significant information for the CONFINTEA VI Mid-Term Review in 2017, which will take stock of developments since 2009 and adopt a strategy for further implementation of the BFA until CONFINTEA VII (2021) as well as complement findings of *GRALE III* (third Global Report on Adult Learning and Education, September 2015).

We thank you very much for your outstanding support! Your help is a valuable contribution to the CONFINTEA process and therefore to global adult learning and education!

2. WE WOULD LIKE TO ASK YOU TO GIVE ACCOUNT OF YOUR EXPERIENCES AND YOUR KNOWLEDGE REGARDING THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE FIVE BFA ACTION AREAS:

a) Policy: towards lifelong learning

The BFA committed to:

- a) **implementing integrated fully-costed policies, well-targeted plans and legislation** for addressing adult literacy, education for young people and adults, and lifelong learning;
 - b) **designing specific and concrete action plans** for adult learning and education, which are integrated with EFA, UNLD, MDG as well as other national and regional development plans, and with LIFE activities where those exist;
 - c) ensuring that adult learning and education are included in the 'ONE United Nations' initiative, 'Delivering as One';
 - d) establishing appropriate coordination mechanisms, such as **monitoring committees involving all stakeholders** active in adult learning and education;
 - e) developing or improving structures and mechanisms for the **recognition, validation and accreditation of all forms of learning, by establishing equivalency frameworks.**
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Please give account of the current developments and implementation status of this action area in your region (also in the light of the changing environment). This can possibly include national (practice) examples, achievements, limitations, lessons learned, gaps, enabling factors and barriers, challenges, etc.

b) Governance

The BFA committed to:

- a) **creating and maintaining mechanisms for the involvement of public authorities** at all administrative levels, civil society organizations, social partners, the private sector, community and adult learners' organizations in the development, implementation and evaluation of adult learning and education policies and programmes;
 - b) **undertaking capacity-building measures** to support the constructive and informed involvement of civil society organizations, community and adult learners' organizations in policy and programme development, implementation and evaluation;
 - c) promoting and supporting **intersectoral and inter-ministerial cooperation**;
 - d) fostering **transnational cooperation** through projects and networks for sharing know-how and innovative practice.
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Please give account of the current developments and implementation status of this action area in your region (also in the light of the changing environment). This can possibly include national (practise) examples, achievements, limitations, lessons learned, gaps, enabling factors and barriers, challenges, etc.

c) Financing

The BFA committed to:

- a) accelerating progress towards achieving the CONFINTEA V recommendations to seek investment of **at least 6 per cent of GNP** in education, and working towards increased investment in adult learning and education;
 - b) **expanding existing educational resources and budgets** across all government departments to meet the objectives of an integrated adult learning and education strategy;
 - c) considering new, and opening up existing, **transnational funding programmes** for literacy and adult education, along the lines of the actions taken under the EU Lifelong Learning Programme;
 - d) creating incentives to promote **new sources of funding**, such as from the private sector, NGOs, communities and individuals, without prejudicing the principles of equity and inclusion;
 - e) prioritising investment in lifelong learning for **women, rural populations and people with disabilities**.
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Please give account of the current developments and implementation status of this action area in your region (also in the light of the changing environment). This can possibly include national (practise) examples, achievements, limitations, lessons learned, gaps, enabling factors and barriers, challenges, etc.

d) Participation, inclusion and equity

The BFA committed to:

- a) promoting and supporting more equitable access to, and participation in, adult learning and education by **enhancing a culture of learning** and by **eliminating barriers to participation**;
 - b) promoting and supporting more equitable access to, and participation in, adult learning
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- and education through **well-designed and targeted guidance and information**, as well as activities and programmes such as **Adult Learners' Weeks and learning festivals**;
- c) anticipating and responding to identifiable groups entering **trajectories of multiple disadvantage**, in particular in early adulthood;
 - d) 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 the gender-specific life course;
 - e) supporting the development of writing and literacy in the various **indigenous languages** by developing relevant programmes, methods and materials that recognize and value the indigenous cultures, knowledge and methodologies, while adequately developing the teaching of the second language of wider communication;
 - f) supporting **financially a systematic focus on disadvantaged groups** (for example indigenous peoples, migrants, people with special needs and those living in rural areas) in all educational policies and approaches, which may include programmes that are provided free of charge or subsidised by our governments, with incentives for learning such as bursaries, fee remission and paid study leave;
 - g) providing **adult education in prison** at all appropriate levels;
-

Please give account of the current developments and implementation status of this action area in your region (also in the light of the changing environment). This can possibly include national (practice) examples, achievements, limitations, lessons learned, gaps, enabling factors and barriers, challenges, etc.

e) Quality

The BFA committed to:

- a) **developing quality criteria for curricula, learning materials and teaching methodologies** in adult education programmes, taking account of outcomes and impact measures;
 - b) recognizing the **diversity and plurality of providers**;
 - c) **improving training, capacity-building, employment conditions and professionalization of adult educators**, e.g. through the establishment of partnerships with higher education institutions, teacher associations and civil society organisations;
 - d) elaborating criteria to **assess the learning outcomes** of adults at various levels;
 - e) putting in place precise **quality indicators**;
 - f) lending greater support to **systematic interdisciplinary research** in adult learning and education, complemented by knowledge management systems for collection, analysis and dissemination of data and good practice.
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Please give account of the current developments and implementation status of this action area in your region (also in the light of the changing environment). This can possibly include national (practice) examples, achievements, limitations, lessons learned, gaps, enabling factors and barriers, challenges, etc.

3. INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION

THE UNESCO Recommendation on Adult Learning and Education recommends

to promote the development and strengthening of adult learning and education, Member States should consider increasing **cooperation between all relevant stakeholders. Sustained international cooperation implies:**

- a) promoting and stimulating development within the countries concerned through **appropriate institutions and structures** adapted to the particular circumstances of those countries;
- b) **creating a climate favourable to international cooperation** with a view to **capacity-building** in developing countries in different areas of adult learning and education and encouraging **mutual cooperative assistance** between all countries regardless of their state of development, as well as making full use of the advantage presented by mechanisms of regional integration to facilitate and strengthen this process;
- c) ensuring that international cooperation **does not merely involve the transfer** of structures, curricula, methods and techniques that have originated elsewhere.

Member States, as part of the international community, should consider sharing their experiences, increasing and improving mutual cooperative assistance, **and help build each other's capacities in adult education**, taking into account their national priorities. This implies:

- a) fostering the **regular exchange of information**, documentation and materials on policies, concepts and practices and relevant research, as well as adult learning and education professionals at national, regional and international levels. The use and transfer of new information and communication technologies should be maximized and the **mobility of learners between** Member States should be facilitated;
 - b) enhancing **South-South, North-South and triangular cooperation**, giving priority to countries where the education deficits are the widest, by applying findings from international reports and research;
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Please give account of the current developments and implementation status of this action area in your region (also in the light of the changing environment). This can possibly include national (practice) examples, achievements, limitations, lessons learned, gaps, enabling factors and barriers, challenges, etc.

4. FINAL FURTHER RECOMMENDATIONS

Please include here any recommendations for further advancing ALE in Europe/North America.

The **Sixth International Conference on Adult Education** (CONFINTEA VI), held in Brazil in December 2009, closed with the adoption of the Belém Framework for Action, which recorded the commitments of Member States and presented a strategic guide for the global development of adult learning and education from a lifelong learning perspective. The third *Global Report on Adult Learning and Education (GRALE III)*, published in 2016, drew on survey data to evaluate progress made by countries in fulfilling the commitments made in Brazil, while also highlighting some of the contributions adult learning and education can make to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The CONFINTEA VI Mid-Term Review, in Suwon, Republic of Korea, in October 2017, takes stock of progress made by Member States in the past eight years, looking ahead to *GRALE IV* in 2019. This regional report, one of five produced for the Mid-Term Review in cooperation with the International Council for Adult Education (ICAE), examines progress in **Europe and North America**, exploring the contribution of key policy agreements and frameworks and offering recommendations in advance of CONFINTEA VII in 2021.