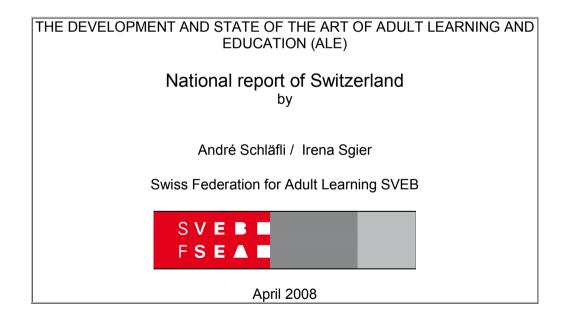
6<sup>th</sup> International Conference on Adult Education (CONFINTEA VI): National Report on the Development and State of the Art of Adult Learning and Education (ALE)





### **General Overview**

Switzerland is a landlocked country of roughly 7.5 million people in Western Europe with an area of 41,285 km2. Switzerland is a federal republic consisting of 26 states called cantons. It is multilingual and has four national languages: German, French, Italian and Romansh. Resident foreigners and temporary foreign workers make up about 21% of the population.

Each year, the Swiss Federal Statistical Office (BFS) releases a report that provides information from a demographical and labour market standpoint. Every 3 years the BFS provides additional information about ALE on the basis of a more extensive periodical survey. This survey includes a wide range of figures and statistical information on the use of ALE provision. The most recent data is collected in 2006 and is available on the BFS website www.admin.bfs.ch. (section Weiterbildung / Indikatoren)

## 1. Policy, Legislation and Financing

## 1.1 Legislative, policy, and administrative frameworks of ALE

### 1.1.1 Legislative and policy environment

#### National level:

Switzerland still does not have an overall national legislation on ALE. Nonetheless, since 1997 the situation has improved in some areas, especially regarding vocational continuing education. With the new Vocational Education Law and the Vocational Education Decree, both of which were implemented in 2004, all areas of vocational education and training have been placed on a uniform legal foundation.

This law takes into account the growing number of educational "patchwork" careers and introduces new qualification procedures, which contributes to the openness of the educational system. The federal structure of Switzerland in educational matters entails that the vocational law is only a framework providing guidelines. This means that each canton has to create its own cantonal law on the basis of the national guidelines. As some cantons need more time than others to get results, the process of implementing new cantonal laws on vocational education is still in course.

While the new vocational law provides some unification in the area of vocational continuing education in the field of general education, we will have to wait for a national law until about 2011 (see below).

#### Cantonal laws on adult education

Because of the federal structures and the lack of national competences in the field of adult education, some cantons have legislation in areas of adult education.

#### **Current developments**

The overall policy situation in the field of ALE is now set to change as a result of the new amendment of the **constitutional articles** governing education approved by Swiss voters in May 2006. Adult learning is now mentioned specifically in the Swiss constitution for the first time. The corresponding law, which will determine "areas and criteria" according to the constitutional article, must now be drafted. However, it is still unclear whether the new law will be based on a broad or narrow (career-oriented) definition. A recently published governmental report predicts that the drafted **law on continuing education** will be discussed by the national parliament in 2010.

The revised Vocational Education Law (in effect since January 2004) provides new and improved ways of promoting vocational education. It takes into account the growing number of educational "patchwork" careers and introduces new qualification procedures, which contribute to openness of the educational system. In addition, there is more funding available from the Confederation for continuing education. The proportion provided by the Confederation will be raised in increments of less than one-fifth to one quarter.

Apart from this, several **political initiatives** have been undertaken to incite new measures in favour of specific target groups such as low qualified people, women planning re-entry into the job market, or people with low literacy and basic skills. In some of these areas, new measures have been planned or implemented. However, most of these initiatives have not yet led to a real improvement of the situation. As far as the issue of basic skills is concerned, there is some evidence of a growing political consciousness. Several project proposals have been submitted to the government departments responsible for education and training or employment. By the end of 2007, the Federal Office for Professional Education and Technology (BBT) has established a task group that is supposed to clarify the need of specific measures aimed at low skilled people. We are still awaiting the results of the consultation process.

Other measures undertaken since 1997 concern new approaches to **financing mechanisms** in the field of ALE. The discussions focus mainly on vouchers, tax deduction, and other instruments of demand-oriented financing (see 1.2 below).

#### 1.1.2 Goals for ALE in Switzerland

The first priority is the new national law on continuing education (see above). Its goals are to determine areas and criteria as well as the preconditions for promoting and funding continuing education. This includes defining the field of continuing education, which can lead to a broad definition in the terms of lifelong learning or a narrower one that would focus on vocational continuing education.

Other goals of high strategic importance are the implementation of a closer connection between ALE, other sectors of the Swiss education and training system, and the economic and social system. Recent official reports and policy papers on ALE are more extensive than they were in the previous decades. Some examples of this development can be seen in the report on economic growth (published by the State Secretariat for Economic Affairs SECO in April 2008) as well as in the guidelines for promotion of education, research and technology (ERI) 2008 – 2011 (written by the Federal Office for Professional Education and Technology BBT). Both official reports contain specific chapters on continuing education, which was not the case for previous reports.

### 1.1.3 How is ALE organized within the government?

The government is responsible for vocational continuing education. Thus far, non-vocational continuing education has been the responsibility of the cantons. However, this will change during the course of next few years due to a new amendment of the constitutional articles approved by Swiss voters in May 2006 (see above):

Switzerland does not have a Ministry of Education. Therefore, the responsibilities are sometimes split and not optimally coordinated. This results in various ministries being responsible for different parts of academic continuing education, alphabetisation, unemployment education, and continuing education for the disabled. This distribution of competencies makes the furthering of ALE difficult.

For decades, the Confederation maintained a certain distance from adult learning with the federal structure of Switzerland in educational matters. ALE is a highly decentralised and heterogeneous field, which is regulated by several ministries on the national and cantonal levels. The Federal Office for Professional Education and Technology (BBT) is in charge of vocational continuing education in the major professional, except for

continuing education at the university level, which is the responsibility of the State Secretariat for Education and Research (SBF). The Federal Office for Culture (BAK) is in charge of literacy policies. The State Secretariat for Economic Affairs (SECO) mandates continuing education for unemployed persons. Other Federal Offices are in charge of specific ALE segments, such as the education of the disabled, migrants, and elderly persons. This structure corresponds more or less to the structure of the 26 cantons.

Due to various degrees of responsibilities, effective representation of adult learning in the Swiss federal parliament requires consistent, joined-up efforts of adult learning resources. The national advisory **Commission for Science**, **Education and Culture** (**WBK**) plays a central role at the national level.

In organizational matters, this situation has remained basically unchanged since 1997, except for the efforts regarding the coordination and strategic planning of ALE measures:

In 1997, the WBK submitted a position paper titled "Report on the situation, development, requirements for support and measures in the general and cultural adult learning from a federal viewpoint: the division of duties with the cantons is to be clarified and the content, structural and financial links to vocational education are to be highlighted " to the Federal Council. The outcome of this submission has been available since 1998 in the report "Adult learning in Switzerland: situation and recommendation" (Gonon/Schläfli 1998). The first concrete result was the foundation of the **Swiss Forum for Adult Learning** (Forum Weiterbildung Schweiz) in the summer of 2000. The Forum is a stage for debate concerning the development of a coherent policy on adult learning in Switzerland. It is an **advisory board** composed of representatives from federal offices (education and training, employment, culture), cantons, and ALE providers. In 2005 the government established a second committee, the **Swiss Coordination Conference for Adult Learning** (SKW). This advisory board coordinates the consideration of ALE related matters between the Confederation and the cantons, while monitoring the preparation and implementation of regulations in the area of adult learning. The SKW aims for close cooperation between administration, research, providers, and social partner organisations. The Forum supports the SKW through its recommendations. The common aim of the Forum and the SKW is the structural foundation of adult learning.

### 1.1.4 How are the policy and implementation strategies aligned?

Some Policies are aligned with the economic sector and the sector of vocational education, such as measures aimed at unemployed and low skilled people. Other policies are aligned with migration policies. There have been attempts to discuss the issue of compulsory language courses for migrants, but thus far no such measures have been implemented.

Gender equality is also an issue. During the last 10 years there have been some measures and programmes with the objective of enhancing women's participation and skills in areas such as higher education or technical sciences. Gender equality has been mentioned in a variety of policy papers concerning higher education and research as an important goal.

Most current, official reports on economic growth or social change state that ALE has to be a strategically important concern. Therefore, we can say that ALE related issues have managed to gain a certain degree of public and political attention, but in most cases this does not entail increasing investments.

### 1.1.5 Main development challenges

One major challenge is demographic ageing. Until now there has not been a national strategy to cope with the consequences of this process in the field of ALE. However, public campaigns, such as Adult Learner's Weeks, point at the issue and try to draw more public attention to it.

Another challenge is the internationalization of education and training. While the Bologna and Copenhagen processes are under way, Switzerland participates in European research programmes and networks. However, ALE is not a major issue in these initiatives. The Government supports ALE projects in the context of Grundtvig and Leonardo. There has been an increase of efforts and projects in this field so that a certain continuity of international cooperation has been established.

In the economic sector, development challenges focus on competitiveness and innovation; ALE goals are part of these strategies. The goals are usually defined with reference to economic growth. Until now they have focused on strictly work-related ALE, but there are also attempts to widen the perspective and consider basic skills or key competences as useful contributions to competitiveness.

The main challenge concerning adult education policies for the next few years will be the creation of a national law on continuing education. The legislation process, which began at the end of 2006, will take about 4 to 5 years. This law will be the first national law on adult education ever implemented in Switzerland. However, it is still unclear whether a single national AL law will come into effect. However, it is possible that instead of a new law, the existing federal laws, which contain clauses on AL, will be elaborated upon (ex. vocational training law, cultural promotion law, a law about unemployment insurance, etc.)

## 1.2 Financing of ALE

In matters of financing, there are no substantial developments to be elaborated upon. Some areas of ALE are still in a difficult financial situation. This is especially true for the domain of ALE aimed at low-qualified or disadvantaged people. Organisations that provide ALE for these target groups need financial support. However, public funding in this field is very low, if at all. The discussions on new approaches to financing ALE have a special urgency when it comes to issues such as the enhancement of basic skills levels in the population.

The only new development since 1997 in this realm is the fact that the government commissioned a report on the current situation including financing mechanisms in the field of continuing education. This report shall be ready by the end of 2008. It is meant to be one of the basic documents required for the government to decide what kind of national legislation regarding continuing education is to be implemented.

Various initiatives have been launched to develop and test demand-oriented financing instruments in ALE. The respective activities focus mainly on vouchers. For instance, there is an extensive pilot project aimed at finding out if and under what preconditions vouchers are an effective instrument to enhance ALE participation rates for specific target groups. The Federal Office has commissioned this pilot project for Professional Education and Technology (BBT), whose results will be available by the end of 2008.

Given the fact that the major part of ALE courses are provided by private schools, financing of ALE has not been a major concern for the government until now. However, it is difficult to gain insight into the financial situation of ALE. This will not change as long as public authorities do not provide transparency regarding their ALE investments.

There is still a scarcity of information regarding investments in ALE. Based on a rough estimate, we assume that about 2.5 to 3 billion Euros are expended for ALE courses every year; the major part of this sum is paid for by individuals or employers.

There is no statistical information available on the public funding of ALE. We know that the total amount of funding regarding education and training amounts to 16 billion Euros per year. A survey that was carried out in 1998 showed that the cantons spent about 90 million Euros, while the federal government spent about 120 million Euros on continuing education. This corresponds to 1.4 % of public expenditures on education and training. As far as we know, the situation has undergone no substantial change since 1998.

In other education-related sectors, there have been some changes. Based on a governmental decision, the federal funding of education, research and innovation (ERI) in the period 2008-2011 will increase by 6 % compared to the previous period. This is an important achievement, though ALE will hardly benefit from the increased funding. Either way, the ERI period 2008-2011 is the first one to include ALE as a specific issue. This means that there are chances that the next ERI period will also provide funding for ALE.

Furthermore, ALE is supported in the context of active labour market policies. According to the State Secretariat for Economic Affairs (SECO), the federal government spends about 360 million Euros on such policies, one half of which (i.e. 180 millions) are allotted to continuing education. During the last few years there has been some evidence that ALE measures are losing ground in labour market policies.

Another important funding body is the State Secretariat for Education and Research. In the field of ALE, the SER (SBF) supports Swiss organisations participating as silent partners in Grundtvig and Leonardo projects.

As the Swiss Federal Statistical Office (BFS) reports, 63% of vocational continuing education is financed by employers, 20% is financed by participants, while the rest is financed by different sources. In the field of non-vocational continuing education, exact information is not disclosed.

#### Civil society

The Federal Office of Culture (BAK) supports 7 umbrella organisations in the field of ALE with a total amount of 900'000 Euros per year. During the last few years, there have been attempts to cut back this funding. Until now the seven organisations have been able to fight the cutback with the help of the national parliament. However, the funding can be challenged at any time, so that the perspectives of the umbrella organisations are rather precarious. The Swiss Federation for Adult Learning (SVEB) is one of the 7 organisations that are supported by the BAK.

## 2. Quality of ALE: Provision, Participation, Achievement

### 2.1 Provision

There is a wide range of private providers. There is no comprehensive statistical data on the institutions. However, periodical participant surveys show that only 20% of course lessons fall under public providers, another 20% are provided by employers, while the remaining 60% of the course lessons fall upon either private schools or private non-profit organisations.

This situation has not changed since 1997. There have been some smaller non-profit organisations that were forced to close down because of financial reasons. In return, some private schools have expanded and enlarged their offerings. But in terms of variety or structure, the ALE market has not undergone substantial changes in the course of the last decade.

The ALE market is considered to be informal. However, there is a considerable amount of confusion regarding the definition of ALE. According to the Federal Statistical Office, continuing education comprises almost exclusively offers that do not lead to formal certificates. In other contexts, a portion of the certificate courses are seen as belonging to the field of continuing education. The issue of defining ALE is now being discussed anew. A clarification may be expected in connection with the new law on continuing education.

### A new quality label:

EduQua is a designation for minimum quality standards for adult learning institutions. Through eduQua, the first Swiss quality label geared towards adult continuing education was established in 2000. EduQua is made up of over 800 schools, institutions, and academies throughout Switzerland. The certification has proved to be an advantage when dealing with authorities: in increasingly more cantons, the certification is a requirement for public funding. The Swiss Conference of the Cantonal Educating Directors (EDK) recommends that the cantons check "the quality of the providers in the education sector in all of Switzerland based on the same criteria, making national subsidies dependent on a proof of quality (eduQua)."

### 2.2 Participation

Participation rates in ALE activities have turned out to be quite stable, with a slightly decreasing tendency. During the last 10 years the rate has been in the range of 40%. This rate includes only non-formal activities (courses, congresses, workshops). In 2007 the rate was at 47%. If we only count continuing education courses, the rate amounts to 33%.

The survey shows that 79% of the population take part in formal, non-formal, or informal ALE activities. Compared to other countries, this seems to be a very high rate. However, the result is disputable, because the statistical methods and definitions differ from country to country.

There are some differences between target groups. Access to ALE depends clearly on qualification levels, gender, age, and nationality. In this respect, Switzerland shows more or less the same patterns as other middle European countries.

Specific changes regarding participation are under way for some target groups, especially women re-entering the labour market, low qualified persons, and persons with low basic and literacy skills. However, during the last years there have only been sporadic measures to promote access to education. The new law on continuing education will presumably implement specific measures to support disadvantaged target groups.

In 1996, SVEB organised one of the first Adult Learners Weeks (ALW) in Europe, following the UK's lead. Since 1996, five Adult Learner's Weeks (ALW) have been organised in the country. In June of 1999, the second Swiss ALW took place, titled "One hour a day for learning." The following events were in 2002 and 2005. The fifth ALW will be held in September of 2008.

The Swiss federal government regularly processes and publishes data and figures on adult learning in Switzerland. A rudimentary participation poll is made every year. Since 1996, a comprehensive survey on AL has been conducted. The most recent publication on the findings has been in the year 2007, based on the poll of 2006.

These figures show that the number of people in adult learning is stagnating. Since 1996, the AL participation rate has been fluctuating between 35% and 39% (ca. 2.5 million persons). The participation of Switzerland's residents between the ages of 25 and 64 has been recorded.

A few recent results (from the year 2006):

- 47% of people aged 25-64 take part in non-formal AL (general and career-oriented courses, congresses, workshops). If we consider only courses and exclude congresses and workshops, the rate is 34%.
- In total, 79% of those aged 25-64 participated in some kind of education/learning/training (formal, non-formal, and informal types).
- The highest completed level of education plays a factor in AL behaviour: in 2006, 19% of people that completed only the mandatory education, participated in non-formal AL; 70% of persons with tertiary education participated in non-formal AL.
- Participation rates are stable between the ages of 25 and 55. After age 55 they decrease. In the 25-54 age group, the participation rate in non-formal AL is about 50%, while in the 55-65 age group, the rate is 37%.
- The different language regions show significant differences in non-formal AL participation: 49% in the German-speaking region, 43% in the French-speaking, and 36% in the Italian-speaking.
- Degree of occupation: The highest participation rate did not come from full-time employees, rather from part-time employees who work between 70-89%.
- Companies: The larger the company, the more likely it is that its employees visit career-oriented courses. The higher the position in the company, the more AL is utilized.
- Both men and women were equally involved in AL. However, there are also gender-related differences. Men are significantly better served in company-supported education and training than women. The same is true for state-supported adult learning. Approximately 80% of those participating in education supported by the Vocational Education and Training law are men.

These results place Switzerland in the third most important international indicators in the top fourth of the rankings: the EU structure indicator for Lifelong Learning (27 countries), Eurostat indicator "Participation in Learning Activities" (29 countries) and OECD indicator (21 countries).

## 2.3 Monitoring

In 2006, the government published the first national monitoring report that dealt with the education system as a whole, including ALE. The report collects and comments on principal data and information concerning the educational system. It is the first comprehensive overview, which shows the connections and interrelations between the various sectors. The main goal of this monitoring approach is to provide useful knowledge for planning and regulating education and training at the national and cantonal levels.

Monitoring is a process that is based exclusively on existing information, meaning there are no new surveys undertaken. The next national monitoring report is been scheduled for 2010.

### 2.4 Adult educators

In Switzerland, there are approximately 60'000 educators and trainers involved in all aspects of adult learning. in addition to their specialist subject knowledge, around 14'000 people have acquired qualifications in adult learning.

Since 1997, the process of qualifying adult learning professionals in Switzerland has made substantial progress. Until 1995, the train-the-trainer provision was a highly heterogeneous and scattered market without a nationally accredited certification system. In 1995, the Swiss Federation of Adult Learning (SVEB) initiated a process that led to a complete restructuring of the train-the-trainer provision in the field of ALE.

The building-block system of the vocational education framework provides a basis for training and certifying qualified adult educators. In the meantime, a new modular train-the-trainer system has been developed and successfully implemented. The modular train-the-trainer system comprises 4 stages, each of which lead to a certificate or diploma. Until 2007, about 20'000 certificates or diplomas have been issued (15'000 of which are stage 1).

About 150 officially accredited institutions provide modules that belong to this system. Stage 4 of the modular system is an academic degree available from the University of Geneva. There are also master's degrees available at the Universities of Zurich and Berne.

A focus of current debates is on the permeability between course providers and the levels of education. In the last few years, diverse reforms in the education system have taken place, such as the establishment of universities of applied science and the Bologna process in universities. While it has provided new opportunities, it has also created barriers. Presently, there are processes under way to secure the transparency between national and international levels. The education of an adult trainer is not the focus, but will be affected by the development.

## 3. Research, Innovation and Good Practice

There is a very acute demand in the field of research and statistics. Only few Swiss universities do research in ALE. There is a lack of continuity due to the fact that research programmes often depend on the commitment of individual researchers. Except for Geneva, none of the Swiss universities have established a long-term focus on ALE research.

In recent years, individual research projects have focused on topics such as continuing education and training in SME, modular systems, and quality assurance. Some of them also provide examples of good practice.

In the last few years, the Swiss National Science Foundation (SNF) supported ALE research projects in connection with the National Research Programmes (NFP). Two NFP were particularly relevant regarding ALE: The Programme "Effectiveness of our Education Systems" (NFP 33, ended in 1999) and "Formation and Employment" (NFP 43, ended in 2004). Both programmes provided substantial results in the field of ALE. The results have been taken into account in the context of legislation processes as well as in connection with the development of ALE offers aimed at specific target groups.

Statistical data is provided by the Federal Office for Statistics (BFS), one of whose studies is the annual labour force survey. The BFS provides descriptive data on ALE participants, but does not survey ALE providers. Up until 2001, the Swiss Federation for Adult Learning (SVEB) collected data from its member organisations, where the majority of informal ALE providers were recorded. In the last few years, the survey was not carried out, but will be available anew in 2008.

Another important part of research is international studies such as ALL, IALS, and OECD studies. Switzerland participates in some of the most important studies. Yet, the Swiss government has decided not to take part in the preparatory phase of the next large international survey, PIAAC. However, Switzerland may decide to join the project at a later date.

The results are of these studies are of strategic importance, especially in the field of literacy policies. The ALL study has shown that the proportion of the Swiss population with low literacy and basic skills is much higher than expected (16%). The results of the ALL study have been discussed broadly in political contexts and the media. They are clearly affecting current policies in the field of literacy and basic skills. For instance, the Federal Office for Professional Education and Technology (BBT) has created a task group aimed at defining a framework for national policies regarding basic skills.

The demand for more research and statistics has been present for decades. It is possible that the next few years, in connection with the new law on continuing education, will show some development of statistics. However, this dos not close the gaps in research.

# 4. Literacy

The issue of defining literacy is still under consideration in Switzerland. A task group that has been set up by the Federal Office for Professional Education and Technology (BBT) in the autumn of 2007 is in charge of proposing a definition of basic skills, which shall be mandatory in connection with public projects and funding. Presumably, they will opt for a rather narrow definition, that is, a definition which may result in limiting basic skills funding for literacy and numeracy programmes.

The results of the IALS Study in 1998, and more recently in the Adult Literacy and Lifeskills (ALL) Survey carried out in 2005, showed that, like many other European countries, Switzerland faces a major literacy problem. There are 800'000 people, i.e. 16 % of the adult resident population that have literacy skills at the most rudimentary level (level 1). Low literacy skills are not only a problem for immigrants. The ALL Survey revealed that 11 percent of Swiss natives have literacy problems. Research undertaken by SVEB in 2005 showed that only 3'000 learners attend literacy classes within the period of one year. The courses are provided by about 30 organisations, none of which are profit-oriented suppliers. Most providers that offer literacy courses are members of an umbrella organisation called "Schweizer Dachverband Lesen und Schreiben."

Several reports carried out by the Swiss Government and various stakeholders thoroughly analysed the problem of low basic skills over the past few years. Many measures were proposed to fight the problem. For example, a recent analysis based on ALL data (published by the Swiss Federal Statistical Office) showed that illiteracy costs the Swiss economy approximately 600'000 Euros every year. As a consequence, the need for a broad, learner-oriented supply in the field of basic skills tuition has become undisputed among most stakeholders in Switzerland.

However, unlike in other European countries, fighting illiteracy has never been made a priority on the national political agenda - even though the Federal Ministry of Culture was mandated by the Swiss government to constitute a network to fight illiteracy in 2004. On the national level there has never been the political will to develop (and fund) an overarching strategy to promote basic skills learning. There are still no commonly agreed national basic qualifications standard, no national target to promote participation, and no strategy to provide enough courses throughout the country.

As a consequence of the Swiss federal system and lack of a national strategy, the situation in the field of basic skills tuition varies substantially from one Swiss canton to another. While some cantons provide publicly funded courses in reading and writing (e.g. the Canton of Berne), other cantons offer no literacy courses at all.

National strategy in the field of professionalization of literacy teachers training:

As a result of a parliamentary intervention in 2001, the Swiss government commissioned a report on the issue of low literacy skills. The report, which was published in 2003, established the basis of a national network to fight illiteracy in 2005. The constitution of the network has remained

the only national initiative launched by the Swiss government in this field. The activities of the network are coordinated and funded by the Federal Office of Culture.

In 2004, the Swiss Federation for Adult Learning (SVEB) was mandated to develop a national train-the-trainer system in the field of literacy teacher training. The project was funded with a total amount of 120'000 Euros. A modular training course for literacy teachers was developed in 2005. It was aimed at adult educators who have professional experience and want to acquire additional competencies to work with low-skilled learners.

# 5. Expectations of CONFINTEA VI and future perspectives for ALE

Our expectations are that CONFINTEA VI will promote a pool of experience and exchange of ideas on the various aspects of the field of adult education. Considering the discussions that have been on the Swiss agenda in the last few years, we are especially interested in the following issues:

- Qualifying adult learning professionals, including literacy trainers
- Development of basic skills
- Strategies and programmes to improve basic skills levels
- Enabling ALE accessibility for all
- Impact of internationalisation processes (such as Bologna and Copenhagen) on ALE
- International networking
- Research and statistics on ALE (continuity and exchange)
- Impact of the demographic ageing on the educational field
- Strengthening the incentives and motivations for adults to learn (good practice)
- Recognition of prior learning
- Financing of ALE, including demand-oriented financing
- International benchmarks.

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