

## Key inputs and implications for country-level implementation

By Marcella Milana, University of Verona, Italy

Let me start by sharing three aspects we shall reaffirm to influence ALE implementation at country level. I will then explain the reasons, with reference to Italy, and Europe more widely.

- ⇒ First, we shall reaffirm the need for financial resources to be earmarked for ALE.
- ⇒ Second, we shall reaffirm that ALE contributes to achieve target 4.7 to ensure that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development.
- ⇒ Third we shall affirm (in this case) the need for more research on ALE and its benefits for the people, their immediate communities, single countries, and the world.

Since CONFINTEA VI, in response to the effects of the global financial crisis, neoliberalism thinking and austerity policies have influenced both national and regional developments in Europe, privileging technical and vocational skills for employment (or what covered by targets 4.3. and 4.4., under SDG4).

In **Italy**, two major strands of policy reform have impinged on ALE since.

The first strand relates to general adult education, focused on problem definitions related to its organization, delivery and target groups, and it involved decision-makers across all governmental levels.

The second strand relates to the labour market and focuses on work flexibility and protection, as well as social shock absorbers for unemployed people and youth not in education, employment or training. It involved the state, regions and local authorities, together with employer and employee associations.

As results of such efforts:

1. Public adult education centres (that were first established in the wake of CONFINTE V, and the Hamburg declaration) have been re-organized in **provincial centres for adult instruction**, now targeting migrants and school drop-outs, but at the expenses of broader sectors of the population.
2. Lifelong learning has been sanctioned by law (Law n. 92/2012) as: "...any activity people undertakes in formal, non-formal and informal contexts, at all life stages, with the scope of improving own knowledge, capacities and competencies, in a personal, civic, social and occupational perspective. (Law n. 92 of 28 June 2012, art. 4, par. 51; own translation). Accordingly all governmental levels agreed on the establishment of **territorial network systems** connecting all education, training and labour services, hence linking strategies for economic growth, youth employment,

welfare reform, active aging and active citizenship, also of immigrants.

But, no additional funds from the national budget for education, labour or welfare were allocated to support these reforms, which have been dependent on the resources received under European funds (ESF) and funding schemes (e.g. Youth Guarantee).

When we consider **Europe** more widely, as point out by the regional report presented yesterday, a Council Resolution in 2011 enforced a **renewed European agenda for adult learning**. This put into motion a complex process of mutual learning between and within European countries, at least in member and candidate states, also thanks to a number of actions coordinated by the European Commission. One was the setting up of a national network of coordinators for the implementation of the agenda, so each country has an appointed person (often a member of the national ministry of education) brokering knowledge between European and national levels. Another was the setting up of working groups on different areas of European education, among which is adult learning. These working groups were tasked with investigating priority areas, broker knowledge, and make recommendations. Although the European agenda is only partially related to the BFA, as also noted yesterday, it has contributed to raise visibility of ALE, and earmark funds feeding into target 4.3., 4.4, under SDG4., and 4.6 to the extent to which it covers also higher levels of functional literacy.

But Europe is a complex reality, and the national contexts for the implementation of the BFA, RALE and SDG4 differ across countries. In a Europe-wide research project I am involved at present, for example, by understanding participation from a bounded agency perspective, we put emphasises on the national infrastructure for ALE, that is to say what makes 'opportunities' real, and on the life course of people, that is what turns visible the reason (and the obstacles) to participate in ALE, but also the outcomes of ALE, in terms of whether and what difference it really makes in people's live.

Finally, I shall stress that in recent years what is characterising Italy, and Europe more broadly, is a mounting collective "fear of the other" - no matter how the "other" is depicted. Widespread constructions of the other include: the migrant, the refugee, the radicalised citizen, or the foreign fighter, but also Roma people or linguistic minorities, and so forth. In short the "other" is however is perceived as putting at risk jobs, properties, lives. Fuelling such fear are at times populist, nationalistic and even warfare tendencies among some sectors of society.

For all these reasons re-affirming the role that ALE can play to promote a culture of mutual understanding, peace and non-violence is paramount.