

EAEA STATEMENT

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PAN-EUROPEAN
CONFINTEA VI
PREPARATORY
CONFERENCE



EAEA

EUROPEAN ASSOCIATION FOR THE EDUCATION OF ADULTS

The Sixth International Conference on Adult Education (CONFINTEA VI) to be held in Brazil in 2009, gives an opportunity to take an overview of developments – issues, achievements, successes and failures of more than a decade of adult education since the last CONFINTEA, and to look ahead and set some new goals and new guidelines for adult education and learning in/for the new globalised world.

The EAEA as the largest European NGO and network working in the field of adult learning and education, places policy advocacy for lifelong learning as one of its main tasks and therefore has a special role and interest in the Preparatory Conference in Budapest and in the recommendations and messages that this conference will deliver to the other regions of the world. The EAEA is the European regional arm of ICAE, which is an accredited partner of UNESCO.

The new CONFINTEA period should be marked by necessary *rebuilding of adult education's* mission as the starting point. Wide, pluralist and humanist interpretations and practices are needed in the name of adult education's mission to reduce social differences and injustice and in supporting human dignity. On the background of new economic and technological challenges, we want to emphasize that adult learning and education still has a primarily social and community mission. One of the main challenges of the future will be to find new, functional ways to combine the role of adult education and learning as an instrument for improvement in numerous areas of human life on one hand and as a way for individual, social and economic development on the other.

Within Europe, adult education and learning faces the challenges of unequal economic development and financial recession, demographic changes and labour shortages, high numbers of early school leavers, poverty and social exclusion among marginalized groups, new migration patterns, low levels of participation, especially after the age of 34 amongst other problems.¹ The EAEA has already contributed to the studies and initiatives of the European Commission to consider the impact of these challenges by, for example producing a report on "Trends and Issues in Adult Education in Europe."² The EAEA is also concerned with the messages and goals defined in EFA, MDG, UNLD and LIFE.

A Civil Society Organization message to the CONFINTEA VI

Among the most important issues are those, which emerge from the structure and character of our organization. These messages are related to the role of the civil society in the consultation and preparation process for CONFINTEA VI:

- The representatives of *NGOs and CSOs* should be offered the opportunity to make their contribution and to influence the outcome of CONFITEA VI. CONFINTEA V started this process by gathering numerous representatives of CSO and giving them the space to express their needs and to make a contribution based upon their specific and enriching achievements and expertise. Preparatory conferences should create forums for CSO and pave the way for their participation at the main conference in Brazil. There are strong reasons for the involvement of NGOs. They represent the pluralistic character of adult education provision; the autonomy and self-engagement of adult learner and the needs of the learners; and they have made an undeniable contribution to the rich and diverse practice of adult education;
- The EAEA gives a high priority to widening participation in formal and non-formal learning and increasing access to learning opportunities. One of the ways to achieve this is to facilitate forums during preparatory process to capture the *voice of adult learners*, to acknowledge the importance of their involvement and commitment, and the necessity of listening to the views of people for whom adult learning is designed. This is particularly important for the 'hard to reach', including various marginalized groups, whose real needs and requirements cannot be fully appreciated when filtered through several layers.

The *vulnerable groups* and those not having access to education provision should not be ignored because of the efforts to contribute to a more competitive economy via adult education. New ways to develop inclusive approaches need to be found, not just in the terms of policy and strategy, but

¹ Action Plan on Adult learning: It is always a good time to learn
[Uhttp://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2007:0558:FIN:EN:PDFU](http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2007:0558:FIN:EN:PDFU)
 See also: Lisbon Strategy: [Uhttp://ec.europa.eu/growthandjobs/pdf/COM2005_024_en.pdfU](http://ec.europa.eu/growthandjobs/pdf/COM2005_024_en.pdfU)

² Adult education trends and issues in Europe (2006): [Uhttp://www.eaea.org/index.php?k=10263U](http://www.eaea.org/index.php?k=10263U)

also in terms of financing and support; marginalized groups could and should contribute to and benefit from economic development (to mention some of them: elderly people, woman during life-span, minorities, disabled). Their voice should be heard in the preparation process as well

- Civil society demands the opportunity for *policy dialogue and advocacy* on adult education and learning and CONFINTEA VI should send an advocacy message, supported by renewed commitments at national, regional and international levels to involve both learners and NGOs, in order to extend range of advocacy and lobbying initiatives for lifelong learning and adult education (such as adult learners weeks/festival and other innovative approaches and actions).

EAEA - main adult education and learning issues and topics for the CONFINTEA VI

The EAEA fully supports the four global goals identified by ICAE. These relate to poverty and growing economic and cultural inequality; the right to education and learning of migrant women and men; the priority of adult education as part of EFA; and the need for policy and legislation to ensure the right to learn for all. These goals are as relevant to Europe as they are for the rest of the world. In Europe we have also had the opportunity to shape the priorities through the Lisbon goals and the Action Plan for Adult Learning, which are seen as significant to European countries outside the EU in addition to the Member States.

Embedded in the need to redefine adult learning and its mission, the EAEA believes that there are some issues that need to be highlighted and acknowledged for their importance and contribution to the mission for adult education on the global level:

- *Non-formal and informal learning* at all levels and in all areas, especially in the context of migration. The numbers of adults engaged in non-formal and informal adult learning should be increased; the process of recognition and validation of learning outcomes achieved in formal, informal and non-formal learning should be taken forward at a faster pace; stronger commitment and financial support by decision makers should be ensured; adult education in more formal contexts should be co-ordinated with informal everyday learning and non-formal learning opportunities, enabling the full implementation of both lifelong and life-wide learning, from which individuals, communities and societies could benefit;
- *Non-vocational learning*, (including training not directly related to employment) and liberal education seem to be losing out in the context of labour market needs, commercial constraints and pure instrumental approaches. A better balance between the two approaches could support the holistic vision of adult education and learning - ensuring a real world reference and relevance for the participants, but also providing a broader perspective and the potential for development at the same time;
- Similarly, *learning for citizenship, peace and interculturalism* can go hand in hand with gaining competencies, but new ways need to be found to improve learning in these areas. They are often overlooked by policy and decision makers and the contribution to this field by adult education is more often rhetorically acknowledged than actually implemented;

The same applies to education that helps people to gain an awareness of *political changes*, to understand them better and to take an active role in political developments in local and global areas. Significant social, political and economic crisis around the world and in Europe can leave people feeling powerless and uninformed; Adult education and learning could re-new its role for/within the new political context;

Two equally important components of learning active citizenship could be supported in this way – a structural/political one and a cultural/personal one;

- Society must not lose sight of the fact that the *gender* issue is still very important, especially in the context of literacy and inclusive education. Equal access to education, gender related provision and methods should be kept as one of the main tasks for the post CONFINTEA VI period;
- Learning to learn and developing abilities for the learning through the life remains one of the crucial tasks for the full acceptance of the concept of lifelong learning, and adult learning has a crucial part to play by increasing motivation to learn among adults.

- ICT can provide new opportunities for adult learning and efforts should be made to develop comprehensive computer literacy courses and access to the internet for all adult groups

Adult education and learning in Europe and the global world

Europe is the region with many positive traditions in adult education and learning, - a region that set the trends, generates ideas and manages to establish relatively developed adult education systems. As such, it has a special responsibility in the global discussion on adult education and learning and for developing global partnerships and cooperation. Europe is very heterogeneous in terms of cultural diversity, economic development, social cohesion and democratic developments and complex in its sub-regional relationships and cooperation. Thus it has some comparable aspects with other regions, which enables constructive exchange and sharing during the preparatory process and after CONFINTEA VI. Europe as region has experiences to share, and the possibility to discuss many global and particular adult education phenomena with problem-solving potential and an evidence based-approach. At the same time, EAEA is concerned about the growing division of the European AE into an “EU - adult education” with a great variety for development and funding, and a “Non-EU adult education.”

The pace of change is quickening in the economic, social and cultural environments throughout the world. Especially in Europe, the EAEA envisages that adult education and learning can contribute to enabling individuals, communities, economies and societies to face these challenges and the various problems and opportunities of contemporary societies. The European region’s experience provides an opportunity for reflection on the common global problems, including the areas defined by ICAE as priorities for CONFINTEA VI. European experiences could also help to gain a deeper insight and understanding of adult education and learning; to offer best practice examples; and to contribute to the discussion on the following aspects:

- *Vocational education and training*, also in the context of functional literacy and the process of increasing levels of qualification, skills and key competencies;
- Adult learning as a mean to *overcoming barriers* and conflicts caused by diversity, injustice, inequality, discrimination and exclusion;
- Adult learning as a tool to *address differences* of age, gender, race, territory, language, culture and special learning needs.
- European *adult learning policy development* as a positive example of co-operation in a region, which is developing and extending in the form of open dialogues.

The decade between two CONFINTEA in Europe has seen important changes of paradigms and some new views on adult learning and education, moving from the enthusiastic, comprehensive, all-encompassing approach of CONFINTEA V to a more sharpened, focused and professionalized approach. It has become clear that moving from rhetoric to practice and achieving the ambitious goals attributed to adult education, requires commitments at all levels and very concrete steps and action plans in order to develop:

- *The structures* of adult education and learning - system of providers, networks and quality assurance (for trainers, institutions and programs). Structures of entitlement and opportunity need to be developed by governments in partnership with the range of stakeholders, if we want to ensure participation for everyone;
- Sustainable *state support* of whatever kind needed, aimed at the creation of a framework which would open the space for the whole variety of flexible, innovative forms of adult education;
- *A legislative base for adult education*, covering not exclusively learning and education issues, but also related aspects from work, labour, migration and employment legislation. The legislation should also consider cross-cutting character of adult education and learning and include within in the measures and legislation in the areas of health, agriculture, environment protection and so on;
- Stable and sustainable *financial resources* developed via social partnerships. The whole range of various partners and stakeholders in adult education should be included in the financial planning by developing diverse sources, mechanisms and models of financing adult education;

- Systems of *professional preparation of adult education staff* - both for full-time and part-time adult educators, their in-service and pre-service training, based upon research of the needs and quality assurance. Closely related to this is need to make better use of research (both fundamental and applied) into adult education and learning and to the improve the methods, teaching aids and creative approaches to adult learning for various groups
- The recognition of learning outcome, their harmonization through Europe via prior learning assessment and acknowledgment of competencies gained in non-formal learning are one of the most valuable experiences of European adult education and learning policy and practice;
- Permanent *discussion*, full *participation* and unlimited *mobility* as further important principles of adult education and learning at local, regional and global levels.

This paper from the EAEA includes in our view, the European “lessons learned” for CONFINTEA VI, that could be shared with the others during the preparatory process, and should also be considered for the outcomes and in the final documents.