

Global Campaign for Education

Briefing paper on key priority areas informed by the Strategic Plan 2023-2027

Adult Learning and Education

1. Background

Education is a universal human right, as stated by the international human rights law, and this means that no condition should restrict its enjoyment. All people are entitled to this human right from birth to death.

Despite the clarity of this principle, a restrictive interpretation of the right to education has been historically promoted, for ideological, economic, and political reasons, limiting state obligations to the demands of only certain populations and age groups. The result of this improper and illegal interpretation is, among others, that there are roughly 773 million adults¹ worldwide who cannot read or write even a simple sentence, nearly two-thirds of them are female. Further three billion people struggling to read and write at a basic level².

Life-long and life-wide learning³ are the pedagogical principles that reflect the full meaning of the right to education, embracing the entire continuum of learning and reinforcing the idea that all people are entitled to the right to education and learning throughout the life cycle and in all aspects that contribute to their holistic development. Life-wide learning encompasses the diverse realms where individuals exist, from work and education to family, community, hobbies, and personal well-being. It integrates learning opportunities seamlessly into the fabric of everyday life and work.

The right to education normative framework provides the legal and programmatic basis for the provision and protection of learning, especially of the young and adult population, as established in article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), article 13 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1966), article 10 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (1979), article 24 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006), and the principles contained in the Convention against Discrimination in Education (1960).

The Marrakech Framework for Action adopted by the VII UNESCO International Conference on Adult Education reinforces the need to promote lifelong learning, as exemplified by SDG 4 'to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all'. Also, the report of the International Commission on the Futures of Education, improved

¹ <https://www.unesco.org/en/literacy/need-know>

² World Literacy Foundation. (2018). The economic & social cost of illiteracy. A white paper by the World Literacy Foundation. <https://worldliteracyfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/TheEconomicSocialCostofIlliteracy-2.pdf>

³ <https://uil.unesco.org/lifelong-learning/self-construction-and-social-transformation-lifelong-lifewide-and-life-deep>

global ALE monitoring through the five GRALEs, as well as the Global Education Monitoring (GEM) Report and other initiatives, including the Global Alliance for Literacy within the Framework of Lifelong Learning (GAL) strengthen the integration of ALE (Adult Learning and Education) in the global education agenda and architecture. The Transforming Education Summit Action Track 2 on Learning and skills for life, work, and sustainable development, stress that adult learning and education has a critical role to play in the development of relevant knowledge, skills, attitudes and values throughout the life course, including through online personalized learning and inter-generational learning within families and communities.

The aforementioned Marrakech Framework for Action is of particular importance for the work of the GCE, calling on states and the international community to increase participation in adult learning and education (ALE) and acknowledge the need for increased financial investment to make this happen. The imperative for this becomes all the more apparent when we consider the urgency of the situation. As the world grapples with lagging progress on SDGs and the acceleration of various crises, including climate and peace, it becomes evident that addressing these challenges cannot solely rely on waiting for generational transitions. Rather, investing in adult education now is essential for effectively navigating these pressing issues and ensuring a sustainable future.

By setting out the key areas for actions required to achieve the human right of adult learning and education, the Marrakech Framework for Action is an instrument of enormous relevance for the universalization of the right to education in general and for the full inclusion of the adult population, including older people.

GCE supports adult learning and education as both a human right, a public endeavour and a global common good, and at the same time considers that it is instrumental for the realization of other human rights and achievement of many other goals, an enabling contributor to poverty reduction, gender equality, and sustainable development. The dual nature of adult learning and education holds paramount importance: it serves as both a fundamental human right, underscored by its emancipatory essence, as emphasized in the report of the International Commission on the Futures of Education, and as a strategic instrument for achieving the majority of other Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in a sustainable and qualitative manner.

The Global Campaign for Education reaffirms that education is a universal and indivisible human right, on whose realisation the success of the Sustainable Development Agenda depends, and therefore it must be ensured to young children, youth, adults and older people, whereby some groups appear even more excluded from the enjoyment of this fundamental right, especially girls and women, those who live in poverty and are also part of marginalised populations.

2. The GCE Strategic Plan (2023-2027)

The GCE Strategic Plan fully subscribes to the lifelong learning approach. We believe that every person, free from all discrimination, has the right to lifelong learning and education, which means

the right to benefit from formal, non-formal and informal learning opportunities from early childhood to late life, including diverse types of learning in fields such as health, work, culture, citizenship, and environment.⁴

Conjointly we claim this right at all levels, using international and regional human rights provisions as a lever. We demand that governments respect, protect, and fulfil adult's right to education and learning.

Civil society remains one of the primary providers of adult learning and education globally, deeply rooted in local contexts and closely connected with vulnerable groups. Consequently, governments must establish or enhance mechanisms for cooperation with civil society, facilitating its involvement across all stages of the process, from planning to monitoring and evaluation.

We ask that learning and education opportunities for adults meet the needs of learners in all their diversity and contributes to building more just, equitable and sustainable communities and societies. We acknowledge that international human rights law currently does not stipulate free education beyond the primary and fundamental stages, therefore we advocate for greater public engagement and coordinated investment in education for young people and adults.

While the plurality of financing for adult learning and education, including investment from the private sector, is inevitable, it is essential for states to maintain their primary responsibility for strategic development, defining rules and principles. Governments must regulate private investments effectively, ensuring that the quality of education and learning is upheld and that vulnerable and marginalized groups have access.

3. Critical challenges

The challenges faced by adult and youth population continue to be alarming: in 23% of the 159 countries that submitted data for GRALE 5, fewer than 1% of youth and adults aged 15 and above participate in education and learning programs – so, youth and adult education does not reach those who need it most⁵.

In response to this, CONFINTEA VII has made clear the importance of comprehensive, evidence-based, gender-transformative, cross-sectoral, and inclusive literacy policies and implementation strategies, especially in the post-pandemic context, for which new methods and strategies must be explored. Utilizing effective digital, hybrid, and blended teaching formats alongside traditional face-to-face methods is imperative, particularly emphasizing approaches that cater to vulnerable learners, individuals in remote areas, and those with disabilities.

The mission of GCE is to highlight the enabling and transformative power of education and its central role in protecting the health and well-being of adults and youth. To achieve this, there is a need to improve the initial education and training of teachers, as well as their status and

⁴<https://www.uil.unesco.org/sites/default/files/medias/fichiers/2022/06/Declaration%20of%20the%20Civil%20Society%20Forum%202022.pdf>

⁵ Unesco Institute for Lifelong Learning. Fifth Global Report on Adult Learning and Education, June 2022.

working conditions, particularly those dedicated to lifelong learning programs, through pre-service, in-service, and continuing education programs in partnership with universities, research institutes, and teacher training centres. This is the best way to ensure the quality of learning. Community Learning Centers (CLCs) are vital structures that have facilitated remarkable experiences and good practices. Therefore, it is essential to provide further support for these centres.

Both formal and non-formal education settings should strive to cultivate learning and literate environments that motivate youth and adult to become lifelong learners. These environments should integrate digital, technological and other resources, acknowledging their significance not only for enhancing employability but also for fostering the holistic development of individuals across diverse aspects of work and life.

The Global Campaign for Education agrees on the need to make all lifelong learning processes more learners and context – oriented and calls on States to provide them with libraries and materials culturally adapted to the diverse community needs. We believe that citizenship, intercultural, and peace education are essential not only for migrants, displaced communities, and rural area inhabitants, but also for individuals from diverse backgrounds. This means building coherent, systematic, and inclusive public policies, which would provide quality learning opportunities and outcomes for all.

4. Way forward

GCE is committed to support the definition and implementation of comprehensive and effective public policies aimed at the full realisation of the right to education by actively engage in the follow-up and monitoring process of compliance with the SDGs related to adult learning & education, articulating resources, coordinating global and local initiatives, and promoting synergies.

States are the main responsible to implement, strengthen, and scale up public policies, plans, and strategies that ensure the comprehensive development, well-being, and dignity of all people by supporting the adoption and implementation of the Marrakech Framework for Action, adopted in the Seventh International Conference on Adult Education (CONFINTEA VII).

GCE is aware about the importance of setting and improving partnership and cooperation between civil society organisations and governments looking for public policy implementation grounded in participatory decision making. GCE will integrate working groups on Adult Learning & Education as ways to strengthen our strategic work on those crucial matters and developing concrete actions for scaling-up advocacy capacities and policy and monitoring mechanisms to follow up Adult Learning & Education frameworks.