

2ND ASIA-PACIFIC REGIONAL EDUCATION MINISTER'S CONFERENCE (APREMC II)



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Adult Learning and Education in Asia-Pacific

Introduction

Asia and the Pacific are home to one-third of the world's population. There has been a continuous improvement in the progress of adult literacy in East Asia and Southeast Asia, where adult literacy rates were more than 96 per cent, and in Central Asia, which achieved near-universal literacy. South Asia reached 74.31 per cent of the adult literacy rate in 2020, but the subregion has the lowest youth and adult literacy rates in Asia and the Pacific, remaining below the global average.

Key issues and challenges in the Asia-Pacific region

The region has made remarkable progress in Adult Learning Education (ALE); however, the [third Global Report on Adult Learning and Education](#) (GRALE III), states that Asia and the Pacific is home to 456 million illiterate adults, most of whom are women. Moreover, ALE remains underfunded as 47 per cent of countries in the region devote less than one per cent of their national education budgets to the ALE sector. In the Pacific, ALE is a core component of education in most countries, but has not yet been widely recognised. Current concerns focus on:

- **Disruption of programmes:** Following the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, many ALE programmes hosted by learning centres across the

region were disrupted, resulting in a reduced number of adult learners, for example, by 11 per cent in Thailand and by 50 per cent in the Philippines.

- **Gender technology gap:** Women in South Asia have little access to digital technology, thus intensifying gender inequalities in literacy and ALE.
- **Quality of digital content:** Low availability of quality digital content has severely affected access to and quality of learning, especially in local languages in Central Asia.
- **Exclusion of adults with disabilities:** A significant number of adult populations with disabilities still have no access to quality education in East Asia.
- **Limited focus on lifelong learning:** ALE – poorly linked with the formal education system – remains outside the mainstream of educational endeavour unless it is integrated into an over-arching vision of lifelong learning.

Regional priorities for learning recovery

With the support of the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL) and UNESCO Field Offices, the Regional Conference for Asia and the Pacific in preparation of the Seventh International Conference on Adult Education (CONFINTEA VII), took place virtually on 22 September 2021 after five sub-regional consultations. Key priorities in ALE were identified for learning recovery post-COVID, including the following aspects:

- **Increased financing and political will for the continued delivery of ALE,** especially for disadvantaged youth and adults who are affected most by the pandemic – According to the CONFINTEA VII preliminary draft Marrakech Framework for Action developed by UIL, countries should increase public spending on education in accordance with country contexts to meet the international benchmarks of allocating 4–6% of GDP and/or 15–20% of total public expenditure to education, including at least 4% for ALE.
- **Digitalising ALE and developing digital skills across all subregions** - It is critical for the governments and ALE stakeholders to develop online content, especially in local and mother-tongue languages, while equipping youth and adults with necessary ICT devices, access to the internet and essential digital competencies needed in response to an ever-increasing need for upskilling and reskilling in post-pandemic eras.

Regional priorities for transforming education systems

- **Institutionalising ALE and developing ALE policies that address gender barriers** with clear roles of NGOs and recognising the increasing diversity of ALE providers - Establishing mechanisms and allocating financial and human resources to support structures for ALE and to regulate, incentivise, stimulate, coordinate and monitor ALE as a public and common good.

- **Harmonisation of formal, non-formal and informal education through National Qualification Frameworks (NQFs) and Recognition, Validation and Accreditation (RVA) system** – Implementing the RVA of non-formal and informal learning wherever appropriate and relevant to integrate broader sections of the population into an open and flexible education and training system, and to allow flexible learning pathways for learners to choose their learning trajectories. Linkages with Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET), and micro-credentials should be promoted.
- **Strengthening data monitoring system** for ALE, integrating data collection on ALE programmes, learners and facilitators into the national EMIS processes. Monitoring ALE learning outcomes is an essential means of the harmonization mentioned above.
- **Capacity development of ALE facilitators** is an urgent priority, with the development of professional training courses and certified qualifications aligned with the status of teachers at equivalent levels in the formal system.
- **Regional cooperation** in the exchange of experience will foster clearer and stronger ALE policies and strategies, and raise the visibility of vulnerable and marginalized groups in the region for whom ALE is the best chance of pursuing their full potential through education.

Policy pointers

In achieving the SDG 4 Target 4.6 “By 2030, ensure that all youth and a substantial proportion of adults, both men and women, achieve literacy and numeracy”, the following policy options are recommended:

1. ALE policy and financing for the continuous delivery of ALE

Institutional support is essential so that ALE is a recognised subsector of the education system, within the over-arching framework of lifelong learning. The public education system should adequately and sustainably invest in non-formal and informal ways of delivering quality ALE programmes. The capacities of local governments should also be strengthened in order to ensure continuous delivery of ALE, including during emergency situations.

2. Equitable focus on vulnerable/disadvantaged youth and adults across countries

ALE budgets and programmes should be allocated equitably and target the most disadvantaged populations, e.g. women, migrants, refugees, older people, people with disabilities, those living in poverty, the unemployed, ethnic minorities and stateless people.

3. Integrated literacy learning

Literacy learning for youth and adults without the capacity to access written communication, on screen or on paper, should be fully integrated into the learner’s context and support their life goals, through mother-tongue based

programmes and by embedding literacy learning in the acquisition of relevant skills for life and livelihood.

4. Support for disadvantaged youth and adults through digital competency initiatives that mitigate the digital divide and complement existing low-tech and no-tech learning programmes.

Public and private ALE providers need to support disadvantaged populations both in obtaining hardware and internet connectivity and in acquiring skills for employability and lifelong learning, including digital competencies and related life skills (e.g. using and analysing media, digital citizenship, cyber security awareness). Governments should systematically combine the use of radio, TV, bulletins, CLCs, libraries and promote blended learning approaches.

5. Provision of content for learners with diverse needs through ICT and the changing role of ALE facilitators and providers

Adult learning facilitators are responsible for introducing learners to a variety of online content and blending them with the courses offered by their learning centres. Open educational resources (OERs) of relevance to ALE should be promoted across the region. Governments should assume responsibility for implementing regulatory safeguards to bridge digital gaps and develop training programmes for ALE facilitators.

6. Promotion of global citizenship education (GCED) and education for sustainable development (ESD) for youth and adults through ALE

ALE providers should design programmes to promote both GCED and ESD to increase learners' engagement with local and global issues such as climate change, public health, respect for diversity, gender equality, peace-building and sustained recovery.

7. Establishment of NQFs for RVA

ALE programmes should be fully aligned with NQFs, and both prior learning and partial qualifications should be recognised, using set standards so that learners can continue to study without interruption. Countries should establish a system to recognise the ALE programmes offered by various providers, including CSOs, integrate traditional knowledge into TVET and community learning programmes, and create a database of ALE learners' credits and certificates to ensure that the data remains transparent and valid.

8. Promotion of youth and adult participation in ALE programmes

CLCs should implement advocacy and communication measures and support an ecosystem (e.g. job placement facilities and daycare centres) in order to encourage all adults and youth to participate actively in learning according to their interests, passions and life goals.

9. Establishment of effective stakeholder partnerships and collaboration to promote ALE

ALE needs effective partnerships and institutionalised collaboration at both community and national levels. CLCs have proved to be successful when they are anchored in a national system with strong community-level participation that promotes ownership and sustainability of their ALE programmes.

10. Effective, evidence-based advocacy for the promotion of ALE

High-quality empirical data provide governments with the evidence they need to advocate for ALE. Impact studies and evaluations should be carried out, highlighting ALE's positive impact on society, the economy, individual well-being and social cohesion, and widely disseminated to policy-makers, stakeholders and learners through regional, subregional and national networks.

UNESCO – a global leader in education

Education is UNESCO's top priority because it is a basic human right and the foundation for peace and sustainable development. UNESCO is the United Nations' specialized agency for education, providing global and regional leadership to drive progress, strengthening the resilience and capacity of national systems to serve all learners. UNESCO also leads efforts to respond to contemporary global challenges through transformative learning, with special focus on gender equality and Africa across all actions.



The Global Education 2030 Agenda

UNESCO, as the United Nations' specialized agency for education, is entrusted to lead and coordinate the Education 2030 Agenda, which is part of a global movement to eradicate poverty through 17 Sustainable Development Goals by 2030. Education, essential to achieve all of these goals, has its own dedicated Goal 4, which aims to *"ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all."* The Education 2030 Framework for Action provides guidance for the implementation of this ambitious goal and commitments.



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