

CONFINTEA VII
Declaration of the Civil Society Forum
Marrakech, 14 June 2022

*Adult Learning and Education - Because the
future cannot wait*

We the representatives of CSOs, members and partners of the International Council for Adult Education (ICAE), gathered in Marrakech, Morocco on 14 June 2022, as part of our sustained engagement in the Seventh International Conference on Adult Education (CONFINTEA VII) would like to offer this Statement as our contribution to this important global policy process for adult learning and education (ALE), and in particular, the Marrakech Framework for Action (MFA).

Adult Learning and Education (ALE) is a fundamental human right of all young people, adults and older adults. It is more than about enabling us to respond to crises: it is about laying the foundation for a common understanding of life in harmony with other people and forms of life in our common habitat, the planet earth. This involves understanding and then tackling systemic issues, including poverty, structural inequalities, global problems and power issues, on a permanent basis. At present, the world community is struggling with a complex spectrum of human created crises including the COVID-19 pandemic, climate change, negative impact of digitalization, artificial intelligence and other new technologies, the nuclear threat, the weakening of democracy and the use of violence in place of negotiation and dialogue. Hence the need, in the words of the UNESCO Futures of Education report, for A New Social Contract for Education. In this context, a new ALE needs to create and embrace long-term, sustainable solutions based upon the transformative power of adult learning and education rather than insist on its adaptive and responsive role. Peace is a precondition for planetary harmony which should be nurtured in the minds of women and men. The return on investments in education, literacy, critical thinking, learning to live together is much deeper, wider and longer lasting than that of investments in military hardware. ALE has a huge capacity to

contribute to our personal and collective emancipation in both the life and work contexts, to gender equality and wider inclusion.

For these reasons, we - as members of ICAE - reaffirm our commitment to the following principles:

- I. First and foremost, **ALE is a fundamental human right** of all youth, adults and older adults – both women and men - **a public endeavour and a global common good**, of which the state is the main duty bearer. This implies recognizing its twin vocation: as a right in itself and as an enabling contributor to poverty reduction, gender equality, and sustainable development.
- II. **ALE is beneficial** both for personal life-wide and life-deep development and selfrealization, for communities and society as a whole and for the economy. ALE contributes to the creation of more just, equal, innovative, inclusive and sustainable societies, with new decent employment opportunities and citizen participation.
- III. **ALE is holistic and intersectorial**: it includes all types of ALE (formal, non-formal and informal), and diverse types of learning in fields such as health, work, culture, citizenship and environment.
- IV. **Diversity is at the heart of ALE**: it embraces diverse groups of learners giving particular attention to the vulnerable, displaced and those suffering all forms of discrimination.
- V. **Adult learning and education is a core component of lifelong learning** and embraces educational activities in three key domains: literacy and basic competencies; knowledge, competencies and skills in continuing education and vocational training; knowledge, competencies and skills in liberal, popular and community education and active citizenship. We believe that **ALE is an essential component of SDG4 and in getting it back on track, and it is necessary for the achievement of all the SDGs.**

Therefore, we propose and promote the following premises and actions:

1. **Transformative ALE** nurtures autonomy, emancipation, freedom and democracy, increases the agency of learners and embraces cultural, ethnic, epistemological and linguistic diversity. However, this requires the **achievement of literacy for all**, which is the most significant foundation upon which to build comprehensive, inclusive and integrated lifelong and life-wide learning for all young people, adults and older adults.

2. In consonance with **ALE's aim to support inclusion and participation**, ALE should promote learner-centred, interactive and empowering pedagogical approaches, organized around the principles of participation, cooperation and collaboration, with learners and educators' voices central to ALE policy-making and practices. ALE is for people, for learners, and their voice must be heard.
3. **ALE requires strong financing aligned with regional and international benchmarks.** If we really want ALE to be transformative, states should commit to increasing public funding and resource mobilization for ALE by widening the tax base, progressively increasing the percentage of domestic budget for ALE across all government departments and preventing regression in existing budget allocations. States should also coordinate and regulate the participation of other actors in education, and ensure development partners fulfil their existing commitments related to official development assistance (ODA).
4. The quality of ALE provision will depend on investment, policies and strategies that recognise the urgent need to further **professionalise ALE** in both the formal and nonformal sectors. This also means ensuring that reliable indicators and data are available to monitor progress. Further, strengthening support for ALE teachers, educators and facilitators is central to improving the quality of ALE.
5. **Gender equality remains one of the main goals of ALE.** It requires enabling the balanced participation of men and women, the use of gender-sensitive pedagogy and feminist epistemology, as well as ALE policies with a special focus on women (above all in literacy initiatives, since there are still 770 million illiterate adult people in the world of whom 3/5 are women) and addressing systemic issues of power relations and oppressive cultures for women in various curricula and educational settings.
6. **Vocational education and training (VET)** is a key component of ALE, crucial for decent life, autonomy and dignity. Therefore, VET should enable **employment, decent jobs**, comprehensive continuing education, professional development and career options, as well as preventing precarious work and helping those affected by pandemics, climate change, armed conflicts and other crises.
7. Technology can be a driver of progress in education and its capacity to increase the outreach of ALE should be further explored. However, it can also create new barriers to access, make social or collective learning more challenging, widen existing social divides and create new ones. **The problems of our world are not solely technological**

but pedagogical! Therefore, the challenges faced by the education sector cannot be solved mainly by digital tools, e-learning platforms and artificial intelligence. There is a need to deliver and support context-responsive, learner-centered and non-digital pedagogies of learning in ALE and also promote open education resources.

8. **Civil society plays a fundamental role in ALE.** CSOs should be recognized as a partner in policy formulation and implementation, planning, monitoring and evaluation. It should also be part of genuine partnership with the relevant government agencies and other actors to contribute in strengthening the governance of ALE.

As members and partners of ICAE, we remain committed and united for ALE as a fundamental human right and a precondition for social and ecological justice, wellbeing, change and transformation, because the future cannot wait.