

Lifelong Learning in Europe: Moving towards EFA Goals and the CONFINTEA V Agenda

Sofia Conference on Adult Education

Call to Action

9th November 2002

Preamble

Two hundred delegates from Europe, North America and Central Asia participated in an international conference on ***Lifelong Learning in Europe: Moving towards EFA Goals and the CONFINTEA V Agenda*** in Sofia, Bulgaria, 6th – 9th November 2002. Participants included Government Ministers, parliamentarians, officials from government and multi-lateral organizations, representatives of non-governmental organizations, researchers and adult education practitioners. The Conference was supported by the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Bulgaria, UNESCO and its Institute for Education (UIE), the European Commission Directorate General Education and Culture, the European Association for the Education of Adults (EAEA) and the Institute for International Cooperation of the German Adult Education Association (IIZ/DVV).

The Conference fully supported the Dakar Framework for Action on Education for All (EFA), the CONFINTEA V Agenda (The resolutions of the Fifth World Conference on Adult Education held in Hamburg in 1997), the CONFINTEA V Follow-up Report, and the Lifelong Learning and Education policies of the European Commission. Support was also expressed for the Lifelong Learning policies adopted by the European Commission designed to encourage gender equality and intercultural learning, to combat racism and xenophobia, to promote social inclusion and the inclusion of older learners and people with disabilities.

A Call to Action

The Sofia Conference “Call to Action” is being issued to express support for the excellent work done to date on EFA, CONFINTEA V and Lifelong Learning and to stress the need for continued progress on the implementation of EFA, CONFINTEA V and Lifelong Learning policies. While applauding efforts to reach out to the school-aged population within EFA and Lifelong Learning policies and practice we want to highlight the inadequate attention being given to the learning needs of adults in many countries. We believe that access to literacy and learning are human rights that must be extended to all, regardless of age as forcefully stipulated in the Action Plan of the United Nations Literacy Decade (UNLD). We think that there is a danger that EFA could come to mean education for all *except for adults*. We are convinced that the learning needs of adults in the developing nations of the world should not be left unattended because raising the general education levels of parents is a key factor in the achievement of educational goals for the young and in the achievement of overall development goals.

The Issues Identified by the Conference

1. There is a need for greater coherence between and among the various education policies developed by multilateral organizations active in the field.
2. The education of adults has low priority in the implementation of Education for All policies in many countries.
3. Similarly, although Lifelong Learning policies include an emphasis on Adult Education, insufficient attention is being given to the role of Adult Education in Lifelong Learning in many countries.
4. The CONFINTEA V Agenda calls for concerted national and international action involving a wide range of stakeholders. However, many nations need to increase efforts to meet the commitments they made in Hamburg, and to better co-ordinate the actions taken by stakeholders within their borders to implement the Agenda.
5. Many countries do not have the policies, frameworks and structures required to advance Adult Education. Requirements include new legislation, adequate financial support, appropriate institutional structures, effective administrative systems, quality frameworks and the conditions required to support effective partnerships and lobbying.
6. The Conference noted that neither non-formal nor informal Adult Education have parity of status with formal Adult Education. It also noted that the allocation of resources in most countries favours adult learning for the work place at the expense of adult learning for active citizenship and self-fulfillment.
7. While the gender balance at the Sofia Conference was recognized as an example of good practice, the general absence of gender sensitive monitoring of policies and provision in Adult Education in many countries was noted.
8. The Conference was concerned with the increasingly narrow approach being taken to adult basic skills education as demonstrated by the reduction in funding for learning for cultural, health, democratic participation and sustainable development objectives.
9. The Conference was concerned that both learner-centred approaches and the active participation of learners in the learning process are not always present in Adult Education policy and provision.
10. The Conference expressed concern at the slow progress being made toward the recognition and accreditation of non-formal and informal adult learning.
11. Some participants experienced difficulty in gathering information to report to the Conference on their country's performance in meeting the various policy targets set for EFA, CONFINTEA V and Lifelong Learning. There is consensus on the need for regular and consistent reports on progress towards established objectives.
12. There are too few opportunities for international exchange of research, methodologies, curricula, models, frameworks and practices.

The Call to Action Recommendations

The Sofia Conference Call to Action is addressed to "whom it may concern", namely those with the mandate and the power to take action on the specific recommendations made below. These key players in education policy and/or provision include: UNESCO, European Commission, European Parliament, Nordic Council of Ministers, Council of Europe, OECD, local, regional and national parliaments and governments, social partners and NGOs.

1. We recommend that high priority be given to the efforts being undertaken by UNESCO and the European Commission to achieve greater coherence between and among EFA, CONFINTEA V and Lifelong Learning goals. As this work progresses we believe that the specific policy goals established for Adult

Education under each of these initiatives require greater visibility if they are to be attained.

2. We encourage equal emphasis on the delivery of learning opportunities in formal, non-formal and informal settings. Partnerships between statutory, non-governmental, and social partners must be fostered to address these different adult learning needs worldwide.
3. The funding of formal, informal and non-formal Adult Education needs to be increased in countries that have not met their Adult Education commitments.
4. Governments at all levels need to ensure that Adult Education remains an explicit and integrated element in their Lifelong Learning policies and practices. The creation of the local, regional and national frameworks and structures that are required for the development, co-ordination, quality management, evaluation and funding of Adult Education needs to be given high priority by the level(s) of government responsible for education under each nation's constitutional arrangements.
5. In addition to reading, writing, numeracy and ICT skills, we recommend that basic education provision should include the skills and knowledge necessary to advance each person's ability to participate fully in the social, cultural, political and economic life of their communities. As well, additional resources need to be allocated to support adult learning for active citizenship and self-fulfillment.
6. Priority should be given to the development of learner-centred policies and practices and to the encouragement of the active participation of learners in every phase of the learning process from planning to evaluation.
7. Comprehensive local, regional and national statistical data collection systems for Adult Education are required. Data are needed to establish benchmarks, to undertake needs analyses, to plan, to monitor, to report on and to evaluate performance, and to undertake international comparative studies. Employment statistics should contain a section on employment in Adult Education in the state-financed, commercial, non-governmental and self-employed sectors.
8. We believe that regular reports on progress to reach policy targets are a necessity. This applies equally to the EFA Framework and to the CONFINTEA V Agenda. Therefore we recommend that annual national reports on progress should be made to stakeholders and to UNESCO.
9. The need for these annual reports should be stressed in the CONFINTEA V + VI mid-term Review. In addition, *The Right To Learn Throughout Life*, the so-called "Shadow Report" on progress to date on CONFINTEA V priorities being prepared by NGOs under the auspices of the International Council for Adult Education (ICAE), should form an important element of the 2003 review.
10. Benchmarks and indicators, as well as adequate monitoring and reporting procedures must be developed to ensure that annual reports are comprehensive and complete. UIE should play a key role in the development of these tools and the establishment and functioning of an EFA Observatory in the European region in cooperation with UIS (UNESCO Institute for Statistics).
11. Quantitative and qualitative instruments to monitor the application of gender sensitive policies in the provision of Adult Education must be further developed and used.
12. Comprehensive systems for the certification and recognition of formal, non-formal and informal adult learning must be developed. A key ingredient must be a system for accrediting prior learning.
13. International co-operation and intercultural learning opportunities need to be expanded in order to enrich policy and practice in Adult Education and to contribute to peace and reconciliation, especially in the Balkan, Caucasus and Mediterranean regions.
14. We recommend that a Europe-Africa EFA partnership initiative be established based on the findings of the *2002 Monitoring Report on Education for All: Meeting*

our Collective Commitments and on the fact that many of the countries represented at the Sofia Conference are donors to developing countries. Those African countries, which at the present rate of progress will not be able to halve their rate of adult illiteracy by 2015, should be provided with funding under the proposed partnership to enable them to achieve that goal in the context of the UN Literacy Decade 2003 – 2012.