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81

Adult Learning and Education within the Framework of Lifelong Learning

Anke Grotlüschen / Alisa Belzer / Markus Ertner / Keiko Yasukawa

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The reports, studies and materials published in this series aim to further the development of theory and practice in adult learning and education (ALE). We hope that by providing access to information and a channel for communication and exchange, the series will serve to increase knowledge, deepen insights and improve cooperation in ALE at international level.

DVV International is the Institute for International Cooperation of the Deutscher Volkshochschul-Verband e. V. (DVV), the German Adult Education Association. As the leading professional organisation in the field of adult education and learning (ALE) and development cooperation, DVV International provides worldwide support for the establishment and development of sustainable structures for adult education and learning.

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Content

Foreword

This study was undertaken through the initiative and funding of DVV-International in 2022. Not only was it eye opening for us to work together across our very distinct adult learning and education (ALE) contexts, but after nearly three years of travel restrictions due to COVID, it felt reinvigorating and relieving to widen our perspectives on Adult Learning and Education to the 8 focus countries described in this report. The interviews showed us how many advocates for ALE are working with all their energy to implement this highly relevant sector into educational policies and to advocate for adequate funding and other supports.

We are grateful for the time and thoughts our informants shared with us during the virtual focus groups in which they generously participated, for their trust and openness, and for their collective resilience. We hope that they find their perspectives and experiences well reflected in our comparative and country specific analysis. We would also like to express our thanks to DVV International for sending us on this digital round-the-world trip and especially Uwe Garteschlaeger for his and his team's encouraging support and feedback while the study was underway.

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Summary of the study, the findings and recommendations

Lifelong learning is a concept that has a long history back to the 1920s (Lindeman, 1926; Yeaxlee, 1929), but wider attention came with the UNESCO publication *Learning to be: The world of education today and tomorrow* (Faure et al., 1972) better known as the *Faure report*. In it, the role of adult learning and education is very clear:

> Education from now on can no longer be defined in relation to a fixed content which has to be assimilated, but must be conceived of as a process in the human being, who thereby learns to express himself *(sic)* to communicate and to question the world, through his *(sic)* various experiences, and increasingly—all the time—to fulfil himself *(sic)*. It has strong roots, not only in economics and sociology, but also in findings from psychological research which indicate that man *(sic)* is an unfinished being and can only fulfil himself *(sic)* through constant learning. If this is so, then *education takes place at all ages of life*, in all situations and circumstances of existence. It returns to its true nature, which is to be total and lifelong, and transcends the limits of institutions, programmes and methods imposed on it down the centuries. (Faure et al., 1972, p. 143, emphasis added).

As a principle, the promotion of lifelong learning is not something that anyone would oppose; however, since the earlier discussions at the time of the publication of the *Faure report,* the discourse of lifelong learning which had been centred around *the right to learn* has shifted to a narrower economistic discourse of *the duty to learn* to become an economically productive citizen (Biesta, 2021; Walker, 2009). However, the establishment of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and SDG 4 in particular:

> *Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all*

has created the potential to reset the agenda for adult learning and education (ALE) within wider discourses about lifelong learning.

The aim of this report is to examine the positioning of ALE within the framework of lifelong learning 50 years after the publication of the *Faure report.* First, a literature review was applied with a focus on *representative and longitudinal studies* because such studies can enable inferences about causal relations (for example, impact of ALE) and generalization of the findings to different populations to be made. Findings of this review clearly indicate the labor market impact as well as several wider benefits of learning due to adults' participation in ALE activities. ALE activities may have a duration of only a few days or up to several months. If such a short time can show economic benefits such as in earnings, upward mobility and employment; better health and wellbeing; subjective feelings of meaningfulness and/or cognitive benefits such as speed in understanding and problem solving and concentration, then ALE is definitely an educational sector that is worth investing in. The longitudinal research studies that were reviewed clearly establish multifaceted benefits of adult learning and education. Research on participation rates shows that participation in ALE is increasing, but less so among people with the greatest needs.

This research was designed to examine the state of ALE in eight selected countries: Australia, Brazil, India, Jordan, South Africa, Kyrgyzstan, Thailand and Ukraine through interviews with expert informants in each of these countries. The main questions it sought to answer were:

1. What strategies for implementing ALE as part of lifelong learning are reported as effective in focal countries and regions? What supports, including social, political and economic, have been needed to sustain them in order to attain economic and social outcomes for ALE participants?

2. What challenges hinder the implementation of ALE with regard to Sustainable Development Goal 4 (Education)?

A grounded theory approach (Strauss & Corbin, 1996) was used to develop a model that could explain how variables at different societal levels listed below interacted to support or hinder ALE initiatives:

- Mega level: supra-national crisis and general national policies (e.g. climate crisis and the pandemic as well as nationalism and populism)
- Macro level: educational policy level (e.g. law, decrees, funding programs)

- Meso level: organisational level (e.g. networks, coordination, train-the-trainer programs, implementation of certificates, development of course material, curriculum development)
- Micro level: ALE activities (e.g. education and training programs and projects, courses and workshops, diagnostics, recognition of prior learning, and exams).

The expert and focus group interviews were analysed using a comparative approach across countries. Findings that only apply for a single country are labelled as 'Country Specifics'.

Mega level comparisons show that overarching issues such as war and conflict, historical and systemic discrimination, disease and extreme poverty as well as political authoritarianism act both as an impetus and as barriers to ALE activities. Lockdowns and border shutdowns, because of the pandemic and the Russian aggression against the Ukraine, respectively, heavily affected ALE. Authoritarian regimes defund ALE or alternatively, appropriate the funds for their own purposes.

Comparative analysis shows that at the macro level, with a few exceptions, ALE features as a 'stepchild' or 'poor cousin' to the school education sector. Within ALE, formal credentialled programs attract more policy interest and support while non-credentialed, informal and non-formal learning initiatives struggle to receive more than lip service. This makes the sustainability of ALE initiatives other than the credentialled programs highly vulnerable.

The meso level categories include the activities of formal and informal groups such as professional ALE associations, community networks, business organisations, non-government organisations (NGOs) and international donor organisations, and interactions between them. Their activities are found to provide support to the micro level actors through advocacy, advice and brokering alliances. The meso level is where the key driving force for the implementation of ALE in the policy arena is found. Advice to government from democratically structured associations with elected chairs have greater gravitas than advice from less formally constituted groupings. However, their effectiveness can be limited by factors such as lack of resources, funding and professional expertise.

At the micro level, informal and nonformal ALE activities are provided by companies as in-service training, by commercial providers, governmental organisations or civil society organisations that run training centers. Activities on the micro level are highly flexible. This is complemented by grassroots activists mobilising community members in response to local issues and needs. ALE on the micro-level includes responding to the localised impact of severe weather events, improving the quality of life for

the elderly, and challenging the prevalence of sexual harassment as acceptable behaviour. The strength of the providers and initiatives emerging at the micro level is the flexibility to respond in culturally appropriate ways to local issues without top-down regulatory constraints that apply to more formalized programs. However, their lack of visibility in the policy arena makes the informal programs highly precarious. This is where interactions with the meso level actors can leverage their position in some way.

The comparison led to a model that is visualized as Figure 1 (see section 'Conclusion'). The model of the roles of the macro, meso and micro actors in ALE indicate, firstly, the critical role of the meso level actors in the legitimation and sustainability of the micro level provision of ALE. It also points to what could be done to strengthen the role of the macro actors in supporting the meso and micro level initiatives. Secondly, the model points to the high flexibility of ALE – especially non-formal activities – to enable responsiveness to crisis situations and to contribute to sustainable development. The third message of the model is that there is a dilemma concerning funding and autonomy: the more autonomous a program wants to be, the more precarious its funding will be, and vice versa. Funding comes with control and formalisation of programs.

In terms of what kind of a policy is needed for ALE, the jury is still out. Some argue for an integrated lifelong learning policy that encompasses all sectors of education. Others caution against this, fearing that it would further marginalise, if not invisiblise, ALE. An overarching ALE policy, should that be an option, must also be considered with caution so as not to limit the ability of local activists and groups to mobilise flexibly and quickly to attend to emerging local issues.

Despite the fractured landscape of ALE that emerges from this study, the range of ALE initiatives reflect the original vision of lifelong learning in the *Faure report*: building solidarity, democracy, fulfilment and lifelong education (Biesta, 2021) in a changing, sometimes crisis environment. The insights from the study led to recommendations about ways in which ALE could be strengthened within the framework of lifelong learning. The recommendations are:

- Build and support sustainable networks and associations
- Build coordination across stakeholders and within sectors that engage with ALE.
- Recognize and encourage grassroots efforts that support adult learning in ALE and other sectors
- Support the collection and use of high quality (quantitative and qualitative) data on ALE at both the national and cross-country

Mega Level Crises

Such as: Hunger, Diseases, War plus Nationalism, Populism, Discrimination

Macro Level Educational Policies
(Regulation and funding)

Such as:
Responsibility for ALE in Ministries

Making Use of CONFINTEA, GRALE, Learning Cities

Bills, Laws, Strategy Papers and Concepts on Education or ALE

Sources of funding (Ministry of Education, Development Aid, Private Funding by Participant, CSR, Company Funding, Unemployment Office)

Caption regarding boxes
Blue: ALE reacting to crises
Orange: regular policy making process

By overcoming hindrances – Influence on:

Macro Level Hindrances
(Lip service to ALE in LLL)
Such as: SDGs as Confirmation of Formal Education, Lifelong Learning as Empty Signifier

Meso Level Hindrances
(Staff and quality)
Such as: Lack of Professional ALE Staff, Quality, Accreditation and Licenses for Training Centers

Micro Level Hindrances
(Inclusive LLL for all)
Such as: Inequality and Access, „Butts on Seats"

Strategies utilized to overcome hindrances:

Meso Level Strategies
(Co-ordination and advocacy)

Such as: Networking & Partnerships; Conferences, Forums and Committees; Research, Reporting and Statistics; Implement Learner Pathways; Bring Systems together but Ending in a Straitjacket?

Micro Level Strategies
(Esp. responding to crises)

Such as: Basic Adult Education and Literacy; Professional Development & Retraining; Citizenship Education & Grassroots Activities

„When the going gets tough, the tough get going"

Figure 1: When the going gets tough… How Micro Level Strategies around ALE Contribute to Surviving Macro Level Crises. Source: own. See also Chapter "Conclusions"

levels to both advocate for and strengthen provision at the local, state, and national levels

- Highlight and strengthen the role of ALE within LLL by reinforcing the importance of a lifelong and lifewide approach to learning
- Leverage the flexibility and responsiveness of ALE to build on its strengths
- Ensure that ALE meets the wide range of educational, training, and civic needs that learners, employers, and governments have for learning in adulthood
- Provide meaningful support for ALE at the micro, meso, and macro levels

The problem: A certain shift?

The early process of replacing the term 'adult education' with the more recent, flexible, inclusive term 'lifelong learning' can likely be attributed to the initiatives of adult educators, advocates, policy makers and scholars around the world. In 2006, the name of the UNESCO Institute for Education (UIE) in Hamburg was replaced with the current name UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL) (Stanistreet, 2022, p. 505). This represented a commitment to adults, to their formal education, and to their informal and non-formal learning processes, following the *Faure report* (1972).

Early critics argued that Livingstone's emphasis on *informal* adult learning (Livingstone 2001) could be misunderstood and used by governments to ignore or withdraw their funding responsibilities in adult education. Similar concerns evolved around *digital* learning in that promoting digital learning could be seen as a means to decrease funding. Some also pointed to the inclusion of *childrens' education* in the definition of lifelong learning and saw the danger that governments could then use the term to shift their focus away from adult learners. None of these fears were fully realised in the 1970s when they were first raised. However, there are signs now that, notwithstanding the obvious importance of children's education, that a focus on adult learning and education (ALE) has faded in the lifelong learning policy discourses and that the time has come to highlight and refocus its importance for individuals, local communities, the state, and global interdependence.

Through case studies in eight countries, the report shows that, with few exceptions, ALE, particularly informal and non-formal community-based ALE, has been rendered mostly invisible or, when visible, without adequate support in public policy. Undeterred by this, however, the report shows that ALE continues to play a critical role in supporting vulnerable individuals and local communities through a range of crises including climate crisis, war, social isolation, hunger, and historical and systemic injustices. Together they provide compelling evidence of the public value, and indeed necessity, of sustained and adequate public funding support for ALE within national lifelong learning policy. Only then will 'lifelong learning' live up to its full meaning, and only then can the Sustainable Development Goal 4,

which expresses global commitment to equitable lifelong learning for all, be met.

The report begins with a review of international frameworks and other key documents which indicate a shifting emphasis in the meaning of Lifelong learning and, we argue, a decline in the prominence of ALE in the global education discourse. Next, we provide a literature review that summarises the existing knowledge with regard to the benefits of robust ALE programming. Following a brief description of the research design, the body of the report traces the cross country comparisons[1] organised by themes. We conclude with recommendations.

The Marrakech Framework for Action (2022) – ALE as key component of LLL

Although the early use of the term lifelong learning served to give visibility to the education and learning of adults, ALE policy researchers and practitioners have more recently noticed a decline in investment in ALE, particularly in non-credentialed programs. In response, the CONFINTEA VII in Marrakech 2022 launched the Marrakech Framework for Action (MFA), a consensus statement that was agreed upon by 142 member states of UNESCO and civil society organisations, social partners, United Nations agencies, intergovernmental agencies, youth and the private sector. The MFA focuses on the importance of adult education and learning as follows: "We reaffirm that ALE is a key component of lifelong learning" (UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning, 2022b, p. 3). It leverages the statement in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) to strengthen its claim: "SDG 4 provides a unique opportunity to position ALE as a key component of lifelong learning, contributing to sustainable development and to the promise of peace that lies in UNESCO's constitution" (ibid.).

The Faure report – when 'lifelong learning' was understood as adult learning

The very start of the discussion on lifelong learning within international bodies dates back to the *Faure report* in 1972 (cf. Faure et al. 1972). With the title L*earning to be: The world for education today and tomorrow*, the

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1/ We also offer brief, country-specific sketches to illustrate unique contextual characteristics of ALE and its relationship to lifelong learning.

international commission on the development of education, led by Edgar Faure, published a groundbreaking report. This was re-launched in 2013, with a foreword by Irina Bokova, Director-General of UNESCO Paris, who recommended it be re-read these 50 years later. It proposed lifelong education, as Bokova quotes, "as the master concept for educational policies in the years to come for both developed and developing countries" (UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning, 2022 b, p.4 & p.218). The report makes many recommendations. The first recommendation reads "Every individual must be in a position to keep learning throughout his *(sic)* life. The idea of lifelong education is the keystone of the learning society" (p. 181). However, adult education in the report is understood as compensatory,

> a substitute for basic education, [but] it follows that adult education can no longer be a fringe sector … and must be given its own proper place in educational policies and budgets. This means that school and out-of-school education must be linked firmly together (p. 241).

It argues that primary, secondary and technical schools should be used for adult education activities. It calls for the creation of special adult-education institutions and for the encouragement of self-education. New technologies are mentioned in several ways, self-organised learning is recommended, and teacher training for the implementation of digitally supported self-learning is recommended. These three directions obviously need to be backed by financial support from government and companies. While the report clearly supports the need to prepare people for ongoing learning, it, unfortunately, does not recommend a distinct fourth sector for adult education within the existing system of primary, secondary and tertiary education.

The report has a strong humanistic and democratic approach, which has been noted in many citations over decades (e.g. Biesta 2021, Zeuner, 2008). It clearly emphasises the democratic and civic aspects of lifelong learning instead of merely advancing a human capital argument (Biesta, 2021). The Faure Commission advocates for lifelong education as a human right and not for lifelong learning as an individual responsibility or duty (Biesta, 2021). Since the 1970s, it has been read as a mandate for *adult* learning and education (Schreiber-Barsch & Zeuner 2007), most likely due to its novelty in drawing attention to this hitherto invisible area of learning.

The influential EU Memorandum of Lifelong Learning (Commission of the European Communities 2000) reflects a changing society and calls EU members to continuously learn in order to cope with change (see below). Thus, the discussion that started in 1972 has had a significant impact that

changed the understanding of the term lifelong learning towards a stronger emphasis on learning in adult life.

EU and OECD – 'employability' enters the game

The publication of the *Memorandum of Lifelong Learning* (2000), launched by the European Union, is generally discussed as the moment when the economic argument entered into the discourse on lifelong learning. Employability was an aim of the Memorandum, which was composed at a time of worsening unemployment and the need for an economic shift from an economy reliant on fossil fuel and industrial work towards green and digital technologies (Commission of the European Communities 2000).

The Memorandum called upon all EU member states to deliberate on lifelong learning. The working definition of lifelong learning in this Memorandum follows the definition of the Commission and the member states within the European Employment Strategy. While placing lifelong learning within an employment strategy clearly indicates employment as the problem to be addressed by ALE policy, social change and active participation in civil society still inform their statement.

> [Lifelong learning includes] all purposeful learning activity undertaken on an ongoing basis with the aim of improving knowledge, skills and competence. Lifelong learning must become the guiding principle for provision and participation across the full continuum of learning contexts. All people living in Europe, without exception, should have equal opportunities to adjust to the demands of social and economic change and to participate actively in the shaping of Europe's future. The term 'lifelong' learning draws attention to time: learning throughout life, either continuously or periodically. The newly coined term 'life-wide' learning enriches the picture by drawing attention to the spread of learning, which can take place across the full range of our lives at any stage in our lives. The 'life-wide' dimension brings the complementarity of formal, non-formal and informal learning into sharper focus. (Commission of the European Communities, 2000)

The document's call for people to "adjust to the demands of social and economic change" is aimed at adults, not at school-age children, as does the reference to "life-wide learning" in formal, non-formal, and informal learning settings. Effectively, therefore, reference to non-formal learning in the definition acknowledges the existence of ALE as a fourth sector, and

the Memorandum's economic agenda is reflected in its calls for "more investment in human resources" (Commission of the European Communities, 2000).

In practical terms, the Memorandum initiated discussion of the European and National Qualifications Frameworks, of the Recognition of Prior Learning as well as an emphasis on career guidance and counselling. While these activities have all led to a more institutionalised fourth sector, the introduction and promotion of employability as a key rationale have led to the narrowing of the scope of ALE, particularly for government funded activities, to workforce development and skills training (Appleby & Bathmaker, 2006; Rubenson, 2019). This has shifted the lifelong learning discourse from one based on human rights to one based on human capital (Elfert, 2019).

The European Commission's effort to promote lifelong learning coincided with a similar effort by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), thus extending the impact of the economic focus of lifelong learning beyond Europe. Since the 1980s, the OECD (1989, 2001, 2002, 2003, 2005) has published a number of papers emphasising the importance of learning in adulthood. Like the European Commission, the OECD recognises the lifelong as well as the lifewide dimensions of learning: "formal education contributes to learning as do the non-formal and informal settings of home, the workplace, the community and society at large" (OECD 1996, p.2). However, the OECD statements are all strongly laced with a strong human capital focus. While they do give recognition to the importance of lifelong learning for social inclusion and active citizenship in the guise of "inclusive liberalism", their strong human capital discourse constructs who is and who is not a "worthy citizen" (Walker, 2009), in terms of the individual's contribution to productivity and economic growth.

The discourse following the initial idea of lifelong education has been taken up by both the EU and OECD with a focus on learning in adult life. The EU and OECD signal a shift from the discourse of education to that of learning, and from citizenship to workplaces. Several critics state the term is used by governments under a neo-liberal perspective in order to shift the responsibility for education to the individual and label it lifelong learning (cf. Klingovsky, 2013; Rothe, 2009).

However, until lifelong learning became part of the discussion around the SDGs, lifelong learning was primarily understood as a policy or principle that motivated and supported adults to continue learning after initial schooling.

Sustainable Development Goals – 'lifelong learning' becomes 'all age groups'

Fifteen years after the Memorandum was released, the United Nation launched their Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) (UN 2015) as a successor of the Millenium Development Goals (UN 2000). The SDG initiative is aimed at all countries because, with regard to sustainability, all countries will need to take action. SDG 4 seeks to "ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all" (UN 2015). It has seven subsections (see appendix).

Some scholars see the Millenium Development Goals (MDGs) and SDGs as "a sign that humanitarian and citizenship goals are still relevant in the face of war, global financing, corruption and poverty. Many of the SDGs have direct relevance to our work in adult education" (English, 2022, p. 20). This is no doubt true, and may encourage some optimism after the millennium years when the focus of ALE was limited to employment outcomes. Leona English continues:

> the SDGs … make it clear that quality education for all (Goal 4) including adult education, has a key role in achieving the international benchmarks. Thus, the role of adult education has never been clearer… We might say that, globally, adult education is alive and well on the ground and in the formal, non-formal and informal spheres…It is true that adult education is not named in the SDGs. Yet, adult education remains the 'invisible friend' of sustainable development. (ibid.)

This invisibility leads representatives of civil society organisations to argue that:

> lifelong learning is adopted as the frame, concept, and learning philosophy, but adult education, within the field of practice and as an inherent part of the implementation of this concept, is highly neglected. (Orlović Lovren & Popović, 2018), p. 1).

Moreover, the authors have searched recent policy documents for explicit mention of adult education in the discussions about lifelong learning and have observed that adult learning and education have all but disappeared (ibid.).

Orlović et al. (2018) also identify areas within SDG 4 that are related to ALE even though ALE is not explicitly mentioned:

As is pointed out by authors of the Global Report on Adult Learning and Education (GRALE) and of the seven targets under Sustainable Development Goal 4, the following are directly related to adults: 4.3 (to ensure access to technical, vocational and tertiary education); 4.4 (to provide more people with the skills they need to find decent jobs); 4.5 (to eliminate gender disparities in education); 4.6 (to ensure that 'all youth and a substantial proportion of adults' achieve literacy and numeracy); and 4.7 (education for sustainable development, human rights, gender equality, peace, and global citizenship) (UIL 2016a, b). It is also emphasized that SDG targets capture all the relevant fields of learning (literacy, continuing training, professional development, and active citizenship) recognized by the Adult Learning and Education Recommendation (UNESCO and UIL 2016a). It is therefore estimated that the Agenda for Sustainable Development 2030 has a stronger focus on ALE than the MDGs (UIL 2016a, b). (ibid)

Those who participated in the consultation process tell a story of a stepwise marginalisation of ALE in the global policy documents that led to the SDG 4 (Benavot et al., 2022; ICAE, 2020). Constant advocacy and counselling is also reflected in the contributions made by the International Council of Adult Education (ICAE) to the discussion on many levels (ICAE, 2020; Orlović Lovren & Popović, 2018; Popović, 2020, 2021). With the SDGs, the term lifelong learning has shifted back to what the Faure Commission discussed – it is now applied to all educational sectors (primary, secondary, tertiary and ALE). The understanding of lifelong learning as learning in adult life, which was promoted for fifteen years by the EU Memorandum for Lifelong Learning, has now changed again. For decades, the most innovative part of the *Faure report* was the understanding of education as a life-wide and life-long enterprise, and for 50 years, most of the discussion on lifelong learning addressed access and motivation to learn throughout adult life.

The SDGs can be understood as initiating a turning point: lifelong learning does not primarily mean ALE anymore. Two discussions that have taken place under the leadership of the UNESCO Institute for (UIL) indicate the need to strengthen understanding of ALE as a key component of lifelong learning and to assert its place within a holistic understanding of lifelong learning. This is discussed next.

The UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL) – Making lifelong learning a reality (2022)

The UIL organizes the CONFINTEA conferences, prepares the consultation for the Framework for Action, and collects the data for the GRALE reports. In Marrakech 2022, the member states agreed on *ALE as the key component of lifelong learning* (see above). This happened under the auspices of the Adult Learning and Education programme department within the UIL.

At the same time, UIL initiated a discussion on lifelong learning. It involved an extensive international consultation process which is documented in a handbook: *Making lifelong learning a reality*. This handbook gives recommendations on how to implement lifelong learning policies in a country. And here, the definitions do not afford ALE a distinctive role; rather, their emphasis is on addressing "all age groups":

> Lifelong learning is rooted in the integration of learning and living, covering learning activities for people of all ages, in all life-wide contexts and through a variety of modalities that, together, meet a range of learning needs and demands. This is the holistic understanding of LLL that frames the guidance contained within this handbook (UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning 2022b, p. 15).

In other words, "Lifelong learning is a process that starts at birth and extends across the whole lifespan" (p. 17). The second essential element is that it relates to "all levels of education" and this "includes early childhood care and education (ECCE), primary and secondary school education, higher education, adult and non-formal education, and technical and vocational education and training (TVET)" (ibid).

As a conclusion, the authors of the *Handbook* note that the "term 'lifelong learning (LLL) policy' is used to refer to any kind of policy designed and implemented by governments and other stakeholders to create learning opportunities for all ages (children, young people, adults and older people, girls and boys, women and men), in all life-wide contexts (family, school, community, workplace and so on) and through a variety of modalities (formal, non-formal and informal)" (ibid.).

This notion of lifelong learning is certainly holistic, but it does not necessarily mirror the idea of the Marrakech framework for action that claims to understand ALE as a key component of lifelong learning. Moreover, policies that try to advocate for ALE are seen as neglecting the holistic value of lifelong learning. The handbook authors clarify:

> While international development frameworks in most countries recognize the importance of LLL, its full implementation remains an aspiration. In many regions, LLL remains at the margins of national policies, and many countries still confine the term to adult education, non-formal education or continuing education. This tendency neglects the holistic value of LLL (UIL, 2022b, p. 35).

Thus, the report appears to demand for *more* than *only* adult education and learning to be included in a lifelong learning policy. In this handbook, ALE is seen as taking up more space in the discourse of lifelong learning than it should: it needs to be put back in its place.

The question arises how to position and maintain ALE as a prominent aspect of lifelong learning policies and discourse against this backdrop of a call for ALE to be understood as just one part of the lifelong learning continuum and when the SDGs require reporting on a lifelong learning policy that addresses all age groups and education sectors. For this report, the authors gathered case descriptions from eight countries in order to provide examples of ALE in a range of diverse contexts, and how their current uncertain positioning does not do justice to its critical function, including their contribution to one or more of the SDGs, in their local communities.

Literature Review: Impact of Adult Learning and Education

A significant number of studies claim the relevance and impact of ALE. This literature review aimed to identify studies describing causal relationships between participation in ALE and positive economic or social outcomes and whose findings had generalisability. Therefore a literature review that focused on longitudinal surveys about learning over the lifespan was conducted.

Longitudinal population surveys are rare because they are costly. However, they provide a view of causal relationships between adult learning and education at a certain time in a life-course and its impact at a later time in the same life-course. The sociodemographic aspects that can influence the causal relation (age, gender, migration status, formal qualification, employment status) are usually controlled for in longitudinal analyses.

The impact of adult learning and education is usually specified as 'outcome' under a human capital approach and as 'benefit' from an emancipatory perspective. The majority of studies focus on outcomes of formal education (schools, VET, universities). In order to find research on adult learning and education, the term 'adult' was always applied in the searches.

The following search terms were used to identify the literature:

- longitudinal studies adult learning
- longitudinal adult education benefit
- longitudinal adult education outcome
- longitudinal "adult education" benefit

Findings from the German National Educational Panel Study (NEPS) and the German and Canadian longitudinal extensions of the Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC-L) were also included.

Longitudinal studies – impact on employment and earnings

Relationships between participation in adult learning and education and impact on labor market outcomes has been the subject of a range of longitudinal studies. Evidence on the wage and employability effects of learning is reasonably plentiful. It is also international in character, although most of the published work has covered advanced nations like Canada, Sweden, Britain, and the US, with much less evidence for southern Europe, and very little for the newly industrialised or low and middle-income countries. It is also limited in scope, as most of the literature concerns work-related training and higher education.

Country comparisons show an equalizing effect of adult education in very different countries and economies: Kilpi-Jakonen et al. (2015) followed participants of formal adult education. Their study relied on a longitudinal analysis of data from the United Kingdom, Spain, Sweden and Russia and found that "educational upgrading at mature ages has the potential for reducing social inequalities in all the countries analyzed" (p.1).

In UK studies, findings on the economic benefits of adult education and training for participants is limited, according to Vignoles et al. (2004). An interesting finding, however, is the difference between what has been found about the economic impact of *education* vs workplace *training*. There are findings that suggest work related *training* has a positive effect on wages and employment (ibid. p. 269, p. 278). Vignoles et al.'s (2004) analysis of the National Child Development Study (NCDS), a "longitudinal survey of people living in Great Britain who were born between 3 and 9 March, 1958" (ibid., p. 272), at age 33 (survey wave in 1991) and age 42 (survey wave in 2000), found that "work related training undertaken in a person's thirties and early forties appears to have a positive and significant impact on wage growth of around 5%" (pp. 273–274). This is a result that the authors claim is consistent with other literature about the impact of training. However, a closer look is needed about who is chosen to participate in training. They find that "work related training boosts the productivity and wages of those selected by firms to receive it" (p. 276), suggesting that this may be due to the firms providing the most training to the employees they want to promote into higher wage levels. Thus, firms "cherry pick" (p. 278) their employees for training opportunities: "the poorly skilled workers [are left] even further behind" (p. 278).

Elias et al. (2002) has also concluded from his two British Birth Cohort studies (1958 and 1970) based on data over an 8-year period that "the incidence of training has clear economic benefits" (p. 45). They argue that while the effects may appear small compared with the effects of partic-

ipation in three to four year further and higher education courses, most training events recorded in these surveys were of relatively short duration.

Somewhat contrary to the UK findings about the economic impact of education are the findings from a study based on the National Education Longitudinal Survey in the USA by Marcotte et al. (2005). Their study found "substantial evidence that a community college education has positive effects on earnings among young workers" (p. 1). Moreover, this effect was found to be larger for annual earnings than for hourly wages, and the benefits in earnings were experienced both by those who earned a credential as well as those who failed to do so. The findings were confirmed by a statewide longitudinal tracking study in Community Colleges. Further evidence of the positive economic impact of community college education is found by Prince and Jenkins (2005) who followed adults who enrolled in adult basic skills programs as well as adults who participated in college-credit courses. They found evidence to support that "attending college for at least one year and earning a credential provides a substantial boost in earnings for adults with a high school diploma or less who enter higher education through a community college" (ibid. p. 21).

A Swedish 50-year Malmö cohort has also found effects on occupational mobility and success in the 1980s (Tuijnman et al., 1988; Tuijnman 1986). In a later study, Albrecht et al. (2005) studied a Swedish adult education program, the Knowledge Lift program, in the 1990s targeting low-skilled workers. The Knowledge Lift program was implemented from 1997–2000 and aimed at raising the skill levels of all low-skilled workers. More than 10 percent of the Swedish labor force enrolled in the program. The authors call it "unprecedented" in size and scope. (p.1). The authors found that the program showed labor market effects as follows:

> Insofar as the economy is able to adjust, our model predicts that the upgrading of the skills of a large fraction of the low-skill work force eventually (in steady-state equilibrium) leads to an economy with more medium-skill jobs and fewer low-skill jobs and with wage increases for those who make the skill upgrade. (p. 39).

In this case, the authors argue that training substantial proportions of adults has an influence on the labor market, because economies adjust to their surroundings. Conversely, the program brings people back to work who lost their jobs in the recession in the early 1990s and the

> econometric analysis provides evidence of a positive employment effect for young men. This is remarkable in the sense that (i) training programs have usually been found to be ineffective in

raising the employment probability, and (ii) if a program works, then typically it works for women but not for men. (p. 39–40).

The findings are confirmed by similar studies some years later. Stenberg (2011) notes that Swedish longitudinal sibling studies reveal an average return of 4.4percent in annual earnings for low skilled adults who undertake a year of education.

The German unemployment agencies' research institute (IAB) has recently pointed to several studies that underpin the labor market impact of longer credentialed vocational programs for unemployed adults. They point out that unemployed persons' participation in such programs can increase chances of getting employed (Kruppe & Lang 2015, p. 7).

The effects of adult education for prime-aged mothers has been investigated based on Swedish matched longitudinal register data. The authors focus on low-skilled mothers and search to understand enrollment decisions regarding the Swedish adult education program (Bergemann & van den Berg, 2008). "Among women who are without work after child-birth, participation in adult education has a significant positive causal effect on their labor market prospects. Both the wage rate and the employment rate are on average higher than in the counterfactual situation in which the mother does not follow adult education" (p.38).

The positive effects of adult education have not led to a massive inflow into the program. To develop a quantified model, the authors used data on employment, unemployment, parental leave, and participation in adult education, as well as data on child care, and "the estimated effects of adult education" (p. 39). They found that, "for an average individual, the short-run costs (lock-in time in education; child care while participating in education) are by far out-weighted by the long-run advantages in terms of income" (ibid.). The researchers argue that the reasons for non-participation by young mothers are non-pecuniary: "young mothers are willing to give up monetary advantages in return for being able to take full-time care of the infant after it has reached the age of one" (p. 39). A replication in the 2020s could perhaps reveal different patterns, as early childcare has become more widespread and normalised.

Longitudinal studies – wider benefits of learning

In recent years, we have seen a remarkable upsurge of interest in measuring the outcomes of adult learning. Although most commentators focus only on one type of benefit, usually economic in

nature, the more recent research has covered both the economic and the wider social or personal benefits of learning…Overwhelmingly, the findings of this work have confirmed claims that adult learning has wide-ranging and far-reaching positive benefits. (Field, 2011, p. 283).

Field explains that the persuasiveness of the findings is based on the impressive sizes of the two famous British Birth Cohort studies – both consisting of more than 17.000 participants – and quotes a range of wider benefits of learning (see below). However, Swedish research suggest that these benefits have been known since the 1980s from such studies as Albert Tuijnman's study of the 50-year Malmö cohort – limited unfortunately to men. This study found that men who undertook courses of study found their lives "more meaningful and worthwhile than those who did not" (Tuijnman, 1998 as cited in Field 2011, p. 286). Field identifies positive associations between participation in learning and subjective well-being and mental health summarises his view regarding the British Birth Cohort studies, and suggests that while the effects may not appear to be relatively small, they ought to give reasons for policy makers to consider adult education and learning as one way to influence mental health well-being outcomes in the communities (Field, 2011).

Working also from the British Birth Cohort studies, Hammond and Feinstein (2006) explored the benefits of adult education by investigating if those who flourished at school are healthier adults and what the role is for adult education. They examined relationships in the longitudinal data between participation in adult learning and trajectories in health and well-being for adults who did and did not succeed in school. Their findings is that adult education seems to provide "real opportunities for transformation of poor health and well-being amongst adults, whether or not they flourished at school" (Hammond & Feinstein 2006, p. 1)

Benefits to adults' cognitive ability was also investigated. Hatch et al. (2007), examining the British Birth Cohort studies for the 1946 cohort, concluded that "the continued effect of education was apparent in the associations between adult education and higher verbal ability, verbal memory, and verbal fluency in late midlife" (p. 1). However, they found no association between adult education and mental speed and concentration.

Some disappointing findings were recently added to the literature, however, on social wellbeing, happiness and life satisfaction. Based on the longitudinal German National Educational Panel, Granderath et al. (2021) found that ALE participation has no significant effect on life satisfaction – and this does not differ for immigrants in the receiving society. The time between the first and last survey wave is not reported in the study, but the

authors suggest that "whether greater time lags (e.g., over several years or decades) show significant effects cannot be answered based on our data and research design." (p. 3059).

The protective effects of literacy, numeracy, and digital practices for the development and protection of skills and competencies is a well-known effect demonstrated by PIAAC-L and NEPS data: literacy, numeracy and digital skills development is associated with engagement in their use in social practices (Reder, 2020; Wicht et al., 2021). Practice engagement theory (Reder et al., 2020) is one theorisation of this phenomenon. The socio-affective dimensions of ALE often lead to empowerment and higher self-esteem (Bilger & Rosenbladt 2011) and thus supports skill uses among adults; thus, ALE may contribute to skill development more broadly in adult age.

Predictors for participation in ALE (cross-sectional findings)

All large-scale and cross-sectional surveys confirm the effects of formal qualifications on ALE participation. This ranges from findings based on the World Bank's STEP study (Liu et al., 2019) or the 2012–2016 PIAAC rounds in high-income countries (OECD, 2016). Those with the lowest formal qualifications and those with the lowest literacy or numeracy competences participate much less in adult learning and education (Grotlüschen et al., 2016; Grotlüschen & Buddeberg, 2020). The most recent GRALE 5 showed that ALE participation is broadly on the rise, but provision does not appear to be reaching, or being taken up by, those who need it most (UNESCO 2022a).

The subjective feelings of well-being at school vary substantially across countries. This is confirmed by the findings from OECD reports (2017). The Netherlands are reported to have mostly happy students with South Korean students as their unhappy peers. The German LEO study asked participants about their feelings of their school experiences, and it was found that the reported school experiences do not differ between people with low literacy skills and people with high literacy skills (Grotlüschen & Sondag, 2012).

If the negative experiences in school were a relevant predictive factor for participation in adult education and learning, the highest participation rates would be found in Europe and the lowest in East Asia. But the participation rates vary across Europe (AES, Desjardins 2017); thus, the picture remains unclear. Instead, stronger predictors are found to be formal qualifications and labor market participation (AES 2020). In high-income countries, this effect is explained as a mainstream strategy for investment into education, and this is not only reflected in educational policies but

also by family decisions. Effects of parental education or skills (known as "the long arm of parental education") also prove to be consistent across countries and decades (LEO 2010, eg. Grotlüschen & Riekmann 2010). Data from the pilot wave of a Longitudinal Aging Study in India confirm this pattern: "We find paternal education benefits both sons and daughters, while maternal education contributes to daughters' educational attainment" (Lee & Smith, 2014), p.1). Thus, family influences remain strong and they are embedded in a culture of learning and education.

Some trends in participation rates in formal, non-formal and informal adult education have been made visible since the International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS) was conducted in the mid-1990s. ALE participation rates in the participating countries has risen substantially within the 20 years after the first IALS. The participation of people with medium or lower literacy skills also show significant improvements, even though gaps between the socio-economically marginalised and privileged groups remain (Desjardins 2017). Although ALE does not reach those who need it most (GRALE 5, UIL 2022a), this gap is reported to have decreased substantially (Desjardins 2017, p. 249). Desjardins compares participation rates of people with level I or level II literacy skills. He lists countries that participated in both IALS and PIAAC. The findings show how much the participation rates grew within 20 years and how strongly the participation differs across countries. The two post-soviet countries (Poland and Czech Republic) show impressive leaps forward, probably driven by a post-crisis (and systems change) need for retraining. Meanwhile, the anglophone countries nearly doubled the participation rates and the northern countries show continuous improvement in reaching out to those at level II and below.

Conclusion: Findings from longitudinal studies confirm the impact of ALE

The findings reported above show that participation in adult learning and education is on the rise, across countries and across levels of formal qualification or competences. Governments still need to invest in those who need it most, but educational bodies on all levels also should accept that ALE participation rates grow. Importantly, investment in ALE pays back, both on economic and social levels. The longitudinal data show that a stable body of knowledge confirms the impact of ALE.

Limitations in drawing conclusions from longitudinal studies to illustrate the benefits of ALE lie in their cost. As a result, this research draws only from high-income countries, e.g. the British birth cohort studies. A

certain peak in the publication of longitudinal findings took place in the millennial years, when quite some scholars with a focus on longitudinal surveys were concerned with ALE (e.g. Feinstein, Green, K. Evans). The next wave of surveys were the competency surveys like PIAAC, STEP and LEO, which have been mostly underexploited (Grotlüschen & Heilmann, 2021) and often reduced to league tables with discriminating effects (Grotlüschen & Buddeberg, 2021a, 2021b).

However, acknowledging the limitation that findings emerge from high-income countries only, the surveys reveal that there is both a positive economic impact as well as positive social benefits from participation in ALE. In some studies, the impact is small (but statistically significant), however, given that the duration of most ALE programs is much shorter than the usual measure of 'years of schooling' the positive impact and benefits of ALE must be considered substantial.

Research Questions, collection of data and methods

The discussion of theoretical concepts shows that the term lifelong learning has shifted away from adult learning and education. But the review of longitudinal survey results clearly indicates economic and social benefits of adult learning and education. This leads to the question of the study regarding the place of ALE within lifelong learning. The study addressed two research questions:

RQ1: What strategies for implementing ALE as part of LLL are reported as effective in focal countries and regions? What supports, including social, political and economic, have been needed to sustain them in order to attain positive economic and social outcomes from Adult Learning and Education (ALE) participation?

RQ2: What challenges hinder the implementation of Adult Learning and Education (ALE) with regard to Sustainable Development Goal 4 (Education)?

The research design to address these questions was comprised of the following steps:

- carry out focus group interviews with experts (scholars, practitioners, and policy makers) from selected countries in order to understand country specifics
- compare country cases and understand overarching strategies and hindrances to ALE provision
- point to challenges and express recommendations

An interview protocol that elaborated on the research questions was prepared. Data were collected from different continents and areas in the world. Countries with DVV-International's offices were chosen with the help of DVV-International's staff. This also proved effective in building focus groups.

Countries without DVV-Internationals' presence were added to widen the perspective.

Eight countries were taken into consideration: Australia, Brazil, India, Jordan, Kyrgyzstan, South Africa, Thailand, and Ukraine. The data were collected and recorded as video interviews between August and November 2022. In five cases, it was possible to organise group interviews while in three cases, individual interviews were conducted. Data analysis used the constant comparison method following the style of the Grounded Theory research approach (Strauss & Corbin, 1996). For the first step, which is deductive, we followed the interview protocol which asks about effective and hindering aspects on the macro and meso levels of ALE. However, the interview process also revealed that micro level activities often address macro and mega level challenges. Therefore, the micro perspective was examined inductively.

Analytic categories were built and refined with the qualitative data analysis software MaxQDA for a general overview of what is comparable across countries. Still there are substantial issues that are country specific. This is condensed and presented in a later subsection.

Last but not least, the initial approach was flipped: The findings start with hindrances and then are followed by the strategies applied by the ALE community to address these hindrances.

Major hindrances are found to be rooted in overarching (geo-)political conflicts, war, exploitation, climate injustice, gender-based violence and extreme poverty. All countries in this study have been substantially affected by the pandemic. Therefore, we find that the macro level not only contains macro level activities with regard to *educational and labor market policies*. All the educational activities are carried out and affected by the overarching crises. We therefore coded the macro level from these wider hindrances downward to narrow perspectives on educational policies.

International policies like the SDGs, the CONFINTEA VII and GRALE 5, as well as the development aid bodies are relevant for the ALE activities or struggles on the macro and meso levels. This is also true for international ALE associations and institutions (e.g., ASPBAE, ICAE). However, the interviews did not focus on the international discourse; they focused on the perspectives of the ALE community within the countries. Therefore, the international discourses are coded and reported from the perspective of the interviewees as challenges or supports for the implementation of ALE in their country.

Another inductive decision made was to add a mega level (Egetenmeyer et al. 2017). Mega-level activities in the sense of Egetenmeyer et al. would comprise educational policies at the supra-national level (like the SDG 4). This is covered by the macro-level categories in our case. Still, the

need for a mega level category arose because informants often pointed to overarching crises that are larger than even the supra-national educational policies, and these crises affect the provision of ALE. Examples that the informants talked about are the pandemic, war, climate injustice on the one hand as well as nationalism and discrimination on the other hand; all of them are of a supra-national scale and have consequences for ALE.

The comparative analysis follows the categories and systematisation that emerged empirically by coding and validating the categories. It presents a causal theory that is grounded in the empirical data. The task is to reveal the underlying causalities and dependencies. This kind of research does not present any representative findings like percentages or shares. It aims at presenting thick descriptions and causal relationships.

The quotation citations follow the following convention: *(Name of country of the expert informant, position of quoted paragraph in the transcript)*. The positions stem from the coding process within the software MaxQDA.

Mega level[2] crisis

The analysis of all eight country cases shows extraordinary challenges on the macro levels regarding both national and supra-national policies. The level of crisis not only affects adult learning and education, but in many ways mirrors what a Brazilian partner said: We are back on the hunger map (see Subsection a in this chapter). In some countries, well-being is on the decline as a result. Two of the countries under consideration report on authoritarian and populist regimes that have nothing to offer except xenophobia and patriarchy (see subsection b in this chapter). It will become evident that in extreme cases, populations do not wait until the policy-making process offers a solution. They get together, get organised, learn what they have to learn and make a living despite disaster, hunger, war and the pandemic; adult education plays an important role in these efforts.

The macro level situation frames macro level education policies, where ALE can at best be described as an underfunded stepchild. Last but not least the international discourse that changed from *education* to *learning*, from *adults* to *all age groups*, does not prove helpful for implementing ALE on systems level.

Hunger, diseases, war: Crisis and disaster as a frame for adult educational policies

The Israeli scholar Yuval Harari (2016) defined hunger, disease and war as the overarching problems of humankind. War is present in many regions

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2/ Mega-, macro-, meso and micro levels with regard to ALE: Mega level: Supra-national policy level as well as nation-wide aspects that do not necessarily belong to the education sector (e.g. the pandemic, war, climate injustice, the type of regime and structural injustice); Macro level: Educational Policy level (e.g. law, decrees, funding programs), Meso level: organizational level (e.g. networks, coordinating bodies, train-the-trainer programs, development of course material, curriculum development), Micro level: ALE activities (e.g. education and training programs and projects, courses and workshops, diagnostics, recognition of prior learning, and exams).

in the world and the current Russian aggression not only affects Ukraine, but places the whole world under pressure regarding food security and the threat of nuclear warfare. This is taking place in 2022, two years after the devastating outbreak of the COVID 19 pandemic that caused unemployment and hunger, which in some cases were answered by riots and looting. The ongoing use of fossil fuel energy in industrialised countries continues to create climate injustice, water crises, wildfires and extreme weather events.

Our research questions were aimed at understanding hindrances regarding *educational* governance. However, instead of educational policies, much larger crises and disasters, poverty and crime were reported as hindrances.

- The country is back on the hunger map these last six years and the economic model and the EJA[3] curricula are unsustainable (Brazil, Pos. 19).

And even for those who have jobs and food, injustice and exploitation can prevail:

- The first challenge is the level of poverty and exploitation of the majority of the Brazilian population, over 15 years old, of the precariousness of life with the disrespect for basic human and social rights, denial of the right to life and workers' education (Brazil Case Description, Pos. 18).

Climate injustice is reported from Brazil in terms of deforestation of the Amazon and the use of pesticides (Pos. 18). Ecological exploitation also affects water and energy supply in South Africa. In Thailand, farmers in rural or agricultural areas who have not had a successful year due to natural disasters or other problems would look to other sources of income to make up for lost income. (Thailand interview 1, Pos. 29)

The COVID pandemic affected all countries. But the problem was not only the pandemic, it was the lockdown policy in wealthy countries and the readiness to send everyone home who could not continue as a migrant worker. Migrant workers were sent back from several countries to Kyrgyzstan (Pos. 90). Elsewhere, ALE was closed down and never really rebuilt, e.g. basic adult education provided for factory workers:

3/   Education para Jovenes y Adultos, Education for Youth and Adults

- We have seen this particular [NQF1] sector taking a huge knock. When it came to the Covid… … factories decided to shut down. We had [Adult Basic Education and Training for] workers literally stopping (South Africa, Pos. 17).

The lockdowns and the closing down of educational provision as well as business and services (not the pandemic itself) led to poverty, hunger, protest, riots, vandalism, theft and looting and "struggles of people being unemployed" (South Africa, Pos. 50, 58). However, informal adult education has been organised around questions like how to deal with the water shortage or peacemaking attempts (Pos 50–58):

- Learning [is] emerging as part of autonomous spaces where people are now beginning to act, starting to do lifemaking things [like] community gardens all over the country [and] how to deal with [the] water issue and peacemaking attempts where groups of people deal with xenophobia, gender-based violence, and and other forms of violence (South Africa, Pos. 50–58)

The loss of every life perspective and the struggle for survival that came with the lockdown and which has led to food insecurity for large parts of the inhabitants of informal settlements, has made people susceptible to discriminatory narratives, xenophobia, sexism, racism and criminality: "South Africa could turn nasty very quickly. [For example, there was,] a year ago, all the looting, struggles of people being unemployed" (Pos. 58). But people sought learning opportunities that could support a constructive response within the crisis, like knowledge around agriculture, energy, water (South Africa, Pos. 50).

Hunger, disease, and war are unfortunately ever present in the 2020s around the world. From a northern perspective, war has come close in terms of the Russian aggression towards Ukraine. But the effects of these crises are also felt in several other countries. In Jordan, for example, there are reports of a dramatic influx of refugees from the Syrian war (Pos. 24). Kyrgyzstan has border conflicts with Tchadchikizstan (Pos. 119). The closeness of war heavily affects Ukrainian adult education and sends it into crisis (Ukraine, Pos. 83). This is, therefore, not only a problem of funding and infrastructure (Pos. 67–68).

- It's [also the loss of] human potential and … specialists in this area … many experts died. Some have left Ukraine, and we are not sure if they [will] come back. Some are taking part in the army. (Ukraine, Pos. 67–68)

ALE centres in Ukraine have shifted to providing training for the skills that are of immediate relevance:

- I live in the war region close to the border. Because of this war, learning is not relevant right now. Of course we have some psychological assistance and that was the main focus ... people know how to shoot, how to hide themselves to protect themselves, how to fight. (Ukraine, Pos. 84–85)

The Ukrainian expert informants foresee a financial problem for ALE after the war (Pos. 68), but there will also be an intense need for retraining and upskilling in order to build a sustainable economy according to the EU membership rules. At the same time, the interviewees already report how residential facilities and training centres organise help and extend training for internal refugees.

- We have four residences for students and now refugees ... they are protecting themselves and their families from war and ... live in this complicated condition. Of course they are welcome to attend our training classes (Ukraine, Pos. 9)

The will to overcome is impressive as is the readiness to contribute with creativity and to envision a better future in peacetime with the common task of deploying ALE to help rebuild the country.

- Of course war interferes a lot, but… we [ALE] still have this opportunity to meet necessities to project, to face challenges; we still can follow the same direction (Ukraine, Pos. 93)

From outside Ukraine, this commitment to keeping life going and to deliver what is needed in a very contingent structure is surprising at first sight. For maintaining morale and solidarity this approach of doing 'business as usual' under extreme circumstances, as well as adapting to the needs of the moment, is perhaps a psychological source of energy.

Nationalism, populism, discrimination: Defunding ALE

Nationalism and populism are political mechanisms that use discrimination of vulnerable parts of the population to steer the discourse away from the real problems (like financial crisis, economic downturn and unemployment). By doing so, governments whose power is reliant on nationalist and pop-

ulist discourses are attempting (and often succeeding) to distract people's attention from governmental mismanagement, environmental catastrophes, inequality, corruption, and other national and global crises.

Widespread problems associated with patriarchy and religious discrimination, sexual harassment and rape, stabbing and vandalism featured prominently in two focus group interviews. Strong religious discrimination, Hindu-nationalism and Islamophobia is a dangerous trend in India. Riots and lynch mobbing against the Islamic population was reported to be supported or even initiated by the current government.

The destruction of forests and indigenous land, prosecution of critics and the nearly complete destruction of adult learning and education are likely attributable both to the Bolsonaro regime in Brazil as well as to the instability of international financial markets (cf. Global witness 2021).

The South African lockdown in turn was an ineffectual response to the Covid crisis. Not only did it do little to stem the transmission of the virus, it left townships dealing with severe food insecurity.

We never had it so bad

Brazil's adult education history is a compelling example of how ALE provision and access are at the mercy of political and economic conditions. Around 2016, a recession hit and the president was impeached. Since Bolsonaro replaced the president, the ALE budget shrank to almost a hundredth of what it was (from 1.6 billion to 26 million dollar) which led to what the informant described as a "complete disintegration" of the system (Brazil, Pos. 4)

In fact, Bolsonaro swore, when running for election, that he would abolish the adult education Secretariat which he considered subversive due to its cultural and historical connection to popular education and Paulo Freire. When he came to office, the Secretariat was abolished, and adult education was moved to a much lower level of the Ministry with only a few staff. Thus, although programs remain, ALE exists in name only: there is no budget and no staff. Even in the formal ALE sector, enrolments have significantly dropped.

Religious propaganda – this is where government money goes

India suffers from a populist shift similar to what Brazil experienced when Bolsonaro came in to office, but its characteristics lie in the Hindu-nationalist ideology. Informants comment: "ALE is not only defunded. The small

remaining funds are allocated towards religious propaganda. This is where government money goes" (India, Pos. 40; Pos. 12–13, 41, 133):

- After the new government came in 2014, everything changed… Now they allocate very, very little to adult education because the focus is on nationalism. … A lot of funding [is used to] translate everything from English to Hindu and to Vernaculars… to avoid 'slavery of education [by having to] study in English (India, Pos. 40)

The impact of the strong nationalist drive has been felt across the whole educational system: the Hindu religion is infused into the life in schools and colleges and in their textbooks (India, Pos. 47). For example, stories of freedom fighters who are not sympathetic to Hindu nationalism are removed from textbooks (India, Pos. 47–48). Criticising the government's stance is strongly prosecuted and has become risky. People who publish critical views and people who question the government are incarcerated or even shot dead (India, Pos. 153). At times the government would provoke Hindu nationalists to attack the critics.

- [The government] provokes the population for riots, not only attacking Muslims but also the people who are trying to support Muslims. Maybe you heard about, journalists, leaders have been put in jail because of supporting [them]; it's all systematic (India, Pos. 135–136)

The current Indian government provokes physical violence against Muslim people and their houses and encourages mob lynchings, riots and economic and social boycott (India, 134–153). The interviewees understand this as a distraction from the real social and economic problems and extremely damaging.

- When the national government came in, they used propaganda, Islamophobia … for their political benefit, deviating people from actual issues. At that time, unemployment [was] at its rise [and] people were dying of poverty (India, Pos. 153)

Gender related violence

Physical and sexual violence against women was reported as a core hindrance for progress in terms of adult learning. It takes place on all levels of many, if not all, societies. But some interviewees were working directly with

women affected by crime and this led to more intense discussions in the focus groups. They reported that sometimes, even schools and centres that provide training, are not necessarily safe for women:

- What's happening in our schools [is] young women are being raped … at the space that's supposed to be safe (South Africa, Pos. 88)

Violence in India is normalized, as if it is acceptable for a husband to beat his wife. Shifting such a view appears to be difficult. The male dominance is not rooted in their economic power as female domestic workers often earn more than their husbands; their husbands take the salaries earned by their wives from them as if it is their right to do so. The physical, emotional and economic abuse are not questioned (India, Pos. 92–94). Abuse of women's rights occur in the workplace as well, especially in the informal labor market in India (India, Pos. 95–96). Women do not complain unless empowered by self-help groups to develop a more critical consciousness about their situation. One informant gave an example of this:

- There was one woman employed in a doctors' family. She was very young, 22 years at that time. The female employer was out travel-ling, and the male employer was there, and he raped, technically raped, that women. The story does not end here. The woman got pregnant, and the female employer came and [snatched] the child [from her]. Then after two, three years, she made that woman take care of the child…This is the extreme, but nobody talks about it. Nobody talks about it (India, Pos. 97–99)

The experts agree that this abuse is not due to alcohol abuse, although they were clear that drunkenness should not excuse these abuses: "vio-lence cannot be hidden in the name of alcoholism" (India, Pos. 111–112). In some Indian states, alcohol is banned, but through smuggling and a black market, the effect of any ban is rendered irrelevant (India, Pos. 115.117). Informants also clarified that sexual harassment and abuse is not specific to any one social class; it is rampant at all levels of society. An example is given with regard to universities:

- A supervisor had a condition that [a student] should sleep with him if [she wants to be able] to submit [her] thesis (India, Pos. 118)

The student refused and complained but encountered even more sexism from the committee to which she appealed:

- They all came to [the conclusion that [the] report was frivolous [and] in order to punish [her] and stop others of doing this and teach [her] a lesson (India, Pos. 121)

The lesson they taught her was that a complaint could lead to her exclusion from the course.

Hunger, disease and war are understandably difficult for a government to control. However, promoting populism, religious persecution, xenophobia, racism and sexism is a strategy used by authoritarian leaders. They view ALE as a threat and ensure that resources are maintained by the powerful and wealthy, using a 'divide and rule' tactic to prevent groups from rebelling or causing uprisings. This is a man-made disaster, implemented by unscrupulous power players and their right-wing populist or extremist political parties. The various strategies applied to overcome these kinds of disastrous hindrances by policies are explained in the micro level descriptions.

Macro level challenges: Educational policies

SDG 4 reads: "Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all". On the macro level, the core hindrance that has to be overcome is captured in the phrase "lifelong learning opportunities for all".

The question for this level is whether lifelong learning is targeting "all age groups". This is not about questioning the relevance of primary school education for all, but about whether the funds that had existed earlier and were allocated to ALE are now decreasing because the new UNESCO terminology allows member states to prioritise and report their formal education expenses and activities instead of reporting on ALE. The findings indicate that decreasing funds are part of an overall decrease (e.g. in India) in funding the educational sector – or in some cases a deliberate political suppression of ALE activities because of its socially progressive ideals (e.g. in Brazil). None of the informants pointed to evidence that former ALE funding has now been re-appropriated to activities in other educational sectors and nor did they attribute the decline in ALE funding to the SDGs' inclusiveness of lifelong learning for all age groups. Still, the shift in embracing all age groups in the understanding of lifelong learning will likely impact on pressures that will need to be brought to bear in order for ALE activities to be implemented with adequate resources (see recommendations).

SDGs as confirmation of formal education

Against the backdrop of climate injustice as well as widespread hunger, wars, political extremism, and systemic discrimination, realisation of the SDGs within the stated timeframe (2030) is at best aspirational. South African scholars even claim that they have been designed to keep a system

in place that causes climate injustice and overexploitation of the planet, instead of fundamentally replacing it (von Kotze & Walters 2023).

Scholarly Statements on SDG 4 imply that adult learning and education does not have space there and can easily become an even poorer stepchild of educational policies than it has been before (Benavot et al. 2022). But the reference to lifelong learning by the focus group members did not reflect the shift from ALE to all age groups. This is understandable as all focus group members have been chosen because of their connection to ALE. Their understanding of lifelong learning varied, but the core commonality was their commitment to and expertise in adult learning and education.

However, when it comes to their governments' activities, there is a tendency of either paying lip service to the SDGs and their notion of lifelong learning or investing wholly in formal education, be it compensatory schooling or be it vocational education under national qualifications frameworks. This was obviously the case everywhere before 2015, but the SDGs legitimized this situation. The problem is not that countries invest in formal education. The new problem is that countries claim that they would invest in *lifelong learning* for all age groups while in practice, they mean *formal qualifications* for children and youth (who clearly belong to 'all age groups'). This is the consequence for ALE of adopting an equivocal definition of lifelong learning.

As the examples of ALE activities discussed in this study show, informal and non-formal ALE initiatives have the potential to contribute to achieving the SDGs; however, SDG 4 fails to acknowledge informal and non-formal ALE as legitimate and in many cases, the most effective forms of education and learning to help communities with challenges they face. As the micro-level data from this study show, neglecting the role of the full range of ALE activities, most notably informal and non-formal ALE activities can be argued to be counter-productive to the achievement of the SDGs.

Lip service to SDGs, talk at meetings and events, just ticking boxes

The SDGs have become a standard and a norm that represent an umbrella set of goals that are difficult to refute; however, they are not necessarily facilitated by policy in any kind of substantial ways. The Australian expert informant's observation expresses SDG's normative power that is devoid of actual on-the-ground meaning:

- You'd be hard pressed to find a minister or a senior policy person who'd, ... advocate for anything inconsistent with [SDG 4], but whether they're actively promoting that in relation to adults, is another thing entirely." (Australia, Pos. 37)

Government bodies are involved in meetings with international associations to deliberate on progress on the SDGs: they understand what is expected of them and they talk in gatherings and meetings (Jordan, Pos. 44) about the relevance of the sustainability of education systems and programs. The SDGs do feature in some sectors (e.g. University extension program and government documents),

- But I think it's very much just a ticking of boxes, not a real desire to contribute to achieving the agenda (Brazil, Pos. 11)

Even if the term lifelong learning is assume to mean adult education, given that the ALE sector is severely underfunded in many countries, it is an "empty signifier" (India, Pos. 52–53). On the other hand, partners within education ministries are invited to international conferences about the SDGs and those who are in charge of ALE feel obliged to try to translate the global policies into practice, even though this seems difficult. An informant from an educational authority asks whether the high relevance of UNESCO policy is translated properly:

- [Yes, we are a] member state of UNESCO, yes [UNESCO] policy is always taken into account, but are we translating those in terms of our learning and teaching activities? (South Africa, Pos. 60)

However, the question also expresses the pressure that partners in the ministries are under, and the co-operation with meso level partners enables ministry officials to leverage the pressure from the partners to include measures to improve the implementation of ALE into national policies.

SDG indicators reenforce formal education systems

Two new directions in educational funding emerged in the recent decades: adult learning and education as indicated by the Faure-Report and early childhood education as indicated by World Bank who asserted that "investing in the early years is one of the smartest things a country can do to eliminate extreme poverty" (World Bank 2016, p. 2).In some countries

early childhood education funding became obligatory or is treated as such, however, the same cannot be said about ALE:

> Yes, we have a lot of discussion in 2020 Kyrgyzstan Report on SDG 4. And you know SDG 4 (is) the focus for the ministry of education, but they pay more attention for school education, for pre-school education because it is obligatory for the ministry of education. (Kyrgyzstan, Pos. 19)

This discussion might have been a result of an observation made by UNICEF in 2016 about an ongoing lack of preschool and kindergarten in many places. This could explain Kyrgyzstan government's decision to put a focus on the topic since then (cf. UNICEF 2016).

Additionally, formal qualifications are usually government funded with some variations; this also applies to formal adult education including compensatory schooling. Yet, a broader commitment to ALE is often lacking. For example, in Thailand, the Act expounds lifelong education for all – a vision of all segments of society participating in education and an ideal of continuous knowledge building and learning – it was noted that there has been less emphasis placed on the promotion of a full range of lifelong learning activities because formal education has dominated adult education despite the stated commitment to non-formal and informal education (Thailand, Pos. 14). Thailand is not alone:

> When countries are asked to report their progress towards SDG 4 regarding adult education, "they only look at the formal [adult] education" (Kyrgyzstan, Pos. 20).

There were similar reports from other case study countries. However, in Thailand, the Sustainable Development Goals were reported to be part of the fabric of the education policies (the National Social and Economic Development Plan, 2018 to 2022 and the National Social and Economic Development Plan, which will start in 2023). An expert informant noted that the Thai government takes a holistic view of SDG 4, that is, to address education of people across their lifespan from the very young to the elderly. They called it a very strong policy, and one that was implemented with reference to a SDG quality implementation policy developed by each government department. They identified *inclusiveness* and *access* as key focus of their SDG 4 implementation. Similarly, the terms *quality* and *inclusiveness* were discussed as a common task for all educational sectors "through the whole life" in Kyrgyzstan (Pos. 112, 167–170). In contrast, Jordan informants reported that international donors intensely invest in formal vocational edu-

cation and training but would not fund adult learning and education under the SDG 4 approach on lifelong learning (Jordan, Pos 48).

The responses from the expert informants suggest that at best, countries express a commitment to informal and non-formal ALE as part fo the SDG 4, however, more often than not, the implementation focuses on formal educational provision.

ALE supersedes the UN launch of lifelong learning

The informants agree that in some countries lifelong learning is an "imported concept" (Brazil, Pos.11), because it just replaces what earlier has been called adult education (e.g. in India). Thailand, for example, has a long and well-established history of adult education policies dating back nearly 100 years. Earlier programs were focused on developing people's functional literacy in response to the Thai government's view that less than universal basic literacy in the population was not acceptable (Thailand, Pos. 8). These responses suggest that the introduction of the new language of lifelong learning by transnational organisations such as UNESCO has the potential to colonise local knowledges; as language is never neutral, new terminology can inject new ideologies into local contexts. The Indian tradition of Mahatma Gandhi and Rabindranath Tagore does not necessarily represent 'indigenous' knowledges, however their influence is being diluted .

- The precise Idea of we should learn all our life, that's always been there! It is not reflected in the [imported] policy discourse. [Gandhi, Tagore: peaceful learning from your heart and soul] (India, Pos. 169)

The informants agree that the statement from Gandhi and Tagore reflected Indian thinking that predates the UNESCO terminology of lifelong learning. As a consequence, the Indian policy discourse on lifelong learning does not connect with the earlier Indian approach anymore. This may be similar to the experience regarding the idea of popular education espoused by Paulo Freire in Brazil and his influence around the world. Freirean literacy education is still underway in many parts of the world including in South Africa, Timor Leste, and Australia, but it is no doubt undermined in some ways by the prevailing discourses and policies.

The underfunded stepchild: LLL as an empty signifier

Around the world and throughout history, education has been funded in a hierarchical manner. Primary education comes first, followed by secondary education (but not always provided to all). Vocational education for youth and adults often receives international funding (e.g. in Jordan) or government funding (e.g. in South Africa). Development aid may be the source of funding for programs to retrain unemployed people which may be taken further by labor or educational ministries (e.g. in Kyrgyzstan). Universities more often than not are partially funded by tuition fees and public funding for ALE is often targeted only at compensatory formal adult education (e.g. in Brazil).

ALE, as specified in the Marrakech Framework for Action (basic education, professional development, and civic education) which is lifelong and life-wide, provided in formal, non-formal and informal ways, is generally the last link in the funding chain. This makes it the weakest link in the funding chain. Additional resources needed to deliver programs are often supplemented by corporate social responsibility (CSR) programs, private investment of learners, private investment of companies as well as low-budget and no-budget grassroots movements. These ad hoc funding approaches make ALE vulnerable. Populist governments often have antipathy toward workers' and freedom movements that may partner with or have roots in ALE and constrain their activities (see above). Development aid and international donors are sometimes mentioned as helpful, but create dependencies and constraints. For example, powerful donors like the World Bank force countries to apply their views on what to fund – and this inevitably leads to a major focus on children and youth and nearly always neglect of ALE, except possibly formal technical education. Most of all, even though the contributions of ALE as a part of LLL are often highly regarded by policy makers, there is little or no budget allocated to it. This makes it an "empty signifier" (e.g. in India).

State has no funds or doesn't want to fund (the whole educational system)

When focus groups reported that ALE funding was cut back, the question is to where the lost funding has gone. In India the funding of schools did not increase, the core problem being that "[the] priority from education is moved away to populism" [India, Pos. 74, 75]. The overall economy is facing a crisis and the government is prioritising their Hindu-nationalism campaign: "A lot of money is going to propaganda" (India,, Pos. 80). Cuts

in ALE funding usually do not go towards increased funding for formal schooling because of an overall financial crisis (Brazil, India) or the effects of war (Ukraine) or because of lockdowns (South Africa). However, when pre-school and early childhood education increases, this does represent a priority in the ALE budget.

Formal Adult Education and a shift to learning

Long before UNESCO featured in ALE discussions, education became a constitutional right in Brazil and this included compensatory schooling for adults. It is protected by the constitution and is

- formally part of the regular educational system, it is not non-formal ... so we have primary [adult] education, secondary [adult] education which are the equivalence of primary and secondary education for children or young people ... the financial resources are guaranteed by a fund (…) that has been less affected (Brazil, Pos. 11).

The Bolsonaro regime was unable to cut this part of funding, while all non-formal education and learning was heavily affected. South Africa reports that they prioritise formal programs for adults wanting to access formal qualification after twelve years of schooling (South Africa, Pos. 37). Thus the strategies to claim funding for less formalised approaches to adult learning may open opportunities for the governments to withdraw public funding. This may be underway in Thailand where there is a new policy being implemented which shifts the focus from adult education to adult learning. However, the expert informant supporting the strengthening of the focus on learning gave a different rationale for this shift in focus:

- we understand that when we use the word education, it seems to be a lot of formal … organised education for people, but when you use the word learning, it starts from the person [and] what they want to learn (Thailand, Pos. 14).

The proposed policy in Thailand is intended to promote more flexible and inclusive demand-driven programs rather than formal education programs established by a provider for the community (Thailand, Pos. 41).

Regarding adults, the priority is skills and formal TVET

When adult learning and education is funded, the priority is often less on short-term courses and non-formal skills training, and always with regard to employment (Jordan, Pos. 38). South Africa is moving in a similar direction

- That's one package of qualifications that we offer; we've begun more ... introduction of skills programs but vocational in orientation. This is a process since 2019 with quality assurance, 14 short skills programs mainly to allow entry into vocational training: once short programs, then allow into TVET colleges with nationally recognized certificates. (South Africa, Pos. 39; confirmed in Pos. 77–79)

Focus group participants claimed that the "ideology that education is about formal labor market getting people into jobs [has] become so dominant (South African Focus Group, Pos. 119). This is described as a "kind of obsession that qualification would get you into work; everything else is ornamental" (South Africa, Pos. 129).

Adult learning and education is treated as the afterthought

The outcome of prioritising primary and secondary education and mainly making (some) investment in formal adult education and skills training is that non-formal adult learning and education is an afterthought (Belzer & Grotlüschen, 2022). Brazil exemplifies this in its change from a "reasonable investment in ALE" to a "complete disintegration" of the ALE budget. Their experience also represents how vulnerable ALE is to changing political winds. India reports a similar experience. Informants report that adult education had been a relatively strong sector, but since 2017 the program has been left without funding.

In Thailand the infrastructure, including technologies to enable ALE to be inclusive and accessible to everyone was a challenge. This is related to funding from the government, and the existing unevenness of the infrastructure and services between the urban and rural areas of the country (Thailand, Pos. 37). Jordan reports that the ministries talk about lifelong learning, but do not add any funding (Jordan, Pos. 32–33, Pos. 51–52). In some Australian discourses, adult and community education features as the fourth sector or the 'Cinderella sector' to signal that it is a 'poor cousin' to the other sectors (SSCE, 1991). Similarly in Kyrgyzstan:

- they agree with all forms of education, but... don't support ... our [work] .. we have no examples when the government says, okay I will support this centre for AE or I will support [that] centre. It doesn't happen in our country. (Kyrgyzstan, Pos. 50)

The focus group experts agree that the lack of funding for non-formal adult learning and education is problematic.

Companies, CSR, self-payment, international donors

Funding for ALE does not just come from the government. It also comes from international donors, individuals, and companies. These other sectors can fill a gap that governments cannot or do not, but their contributions are not unproblematic. For example, Jordan reports that the private sector is more flexible in its capacity to provide management training and professional development as needed (Jordan, Pos. 66). Yet, privatisation and outsourcing follows the particular agenda of the sponsor. Companies follow the shareholder value and profit regime.The ALE sector in Jordan includes some large organisations that offer expensive courses, e.g. language courses. These courses can increase social gaps by leaving those behind who are not well informed or lack access (Jordan, Pos. 84). Training centres often position themselves as private and as belonging to the private sector. This does not necessarily mean, however, that companies and individuals fully cover the cost, e.g for retraining unemployed people. In Kyrgyzstan, 70percent of the cost is covered by government funds and 30percent by the individual. This share of cost also applies for employees: companies pay 70percent, and the trainee covers the rest under this program (Kyrgyzstan, Pos. 90) or the individual can fully pay on his or her own. Not surprisingly, in the Global South, such arrangements leave many unable to participate. Yet, ensuring inclusivity should be assumed to be government responsibility. This also includes making sure that company taxation covers the cost for social, health and educational services.

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) programs are often branded as a social contribution towards overcoming poverty and as an investment by the company. However, in reality, donations lead to tax rebates making this possibly the main incentives for companies to invest in ALE. In India, 5 percent of the profit goes to community services (India, Pos. 36) and "that is why it is beneficial for them, [it] also gives the branding" (India, Pos. 36). CSR programs are thus co-funded by the government, but the agenda is handed over to the companies:

- When (organisations) give them (companies) a proposal– we want to offer LLL and give agency– it is abstract for them. They don't fund us; they want numbers like 20,000 women [will] know how to write. They don't want holistic things. This is one of the challenges. They might cancel or think that it is not conventional if you are an NGO working in the development sector. [They think] either you should work with children, or on ending poverty, or train women in stitching. (India, Pos. 64)

Moreover, according to the informants the company investment is only 5 percent of their profit – not their turnover – and the power of companies is not substantially challenged by social partners, employer's associations, or workers associations (India, Pos. 36).

While international donor support and partnerships with local civil society organisations, businesses and government agencies occur to some extent, in spite of the problems identified in other countries, a key informant argued that much more involvement from the private sector was needed for Thailand because government funding alone was insufficient. Cooperation from the private sector was identified as a success factor in the Chaing Rai learning city project. (Thummaphan & Sripa, 2022). International support was also helpful in Brazil (Brazil, Pos. 12). Jordan reports substantial funding for professional development from the international community:

- And as I told you, the response comes from the need and (...) effort of the government and the bullets of the government that they don't want uneducated people on the streets anymore. That's the major also for for the vocational training. The international community contributes a lot in terms of machines and equipment, and huge funding was what they are. They are quite successful in and with people who really want to be in vocational training. The number is not really high, but still they've been successful in reaching a lot of individuals. (Jordan, Pos. 73)

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) funded an idea that aimed at cooperation between employers, training centres and vocational schools in order to provide short-term skills development (Kyrgyzstan, Pos. 300)

Overall, the macro level challenges are mostly reported as a lack of funding on the one hand with broad lip service to the sustainable development goal on lifelong learning for all age groups on the other hand. Investment and funding is interpreted by Orlovic Lovren and Popovic as a reality check of policy making "and a budget reveals the real paradigm

behind rhetoric and real policy approaches behind the narratives" (Orlović Lovren & Popović, 2018, p.9). The paradigms in some countries are or until recently have been authoritarian. That leads to defunding ALE. On the other hand, countries that are facing major societal shifts tend to invest more easily in ALE and see the contribution of ALE for their economic development and democratization.

Macro level: Quasi successful implementation of ALE

On the macro level, the informants often have partners in the educational authorities; in several interviews, these partners were members of the focus group. These people often receive the international information from UNESCO, and they also partner with the meso-level institutions in order to advance the implementation of ALE via policies, strategies or laws. Two general strategies emerge: either developing an integrated approach to policy that covers all educational sectors and all age groups – or an approach to institute a policy that directly addresses ALE.

Responsibility in ministries

The focus group participants did point to policy making processes and the responsible person(s) or department within the ministry. When the process is functioning normally, this allows meso-level actors to be heard.

- Adult education has a recognised place in the Ministry of Education. Around 1979 the government set up an Adult Education Division within their Ministry. However, as the large demand for adult education became apparent, the Division was upgraded into a Department of Non-formal education. At present, adult education is overseen by the Office of Non-formal and Informal Education (ONIE). … The ONIE is set up as the government office for policy development, implementation and monitoring and implementation of non-formal and informal education activities. (Thailand, Pos.11 & 17)

The implementation process is ongoing in Ukraine, even under the current circumstances. Not only the ministry, but also the parliament and the education ministry have structures in place for organising ALE:

- Parliament has special committees dedicated to extracurricular activities and also lifelong learning, we have a special committee, and also in the ministry education science we have a special dept of higher education where there patronate education for adults (Ukraine, Pos. 23–24, similar in Jordan, Pos. 33)

Even in countries where there is no specific department for ALE, there are departments that are responsible for vocational or university education. For example in Kyrgyzstan,

- there is no department or sector in the ministry of education which works specifically on ALE, but there are some departments which work in the VET system and higher education. They additionally realize some activities of ALE but [there is] not [a] separate department which could work with non-formal education (Kyrgyzstan, Pos. 14–15)

Our informants felt that this lack of formal structure that specifically focuses on ALE weakens it. Lack of a formal structure as a deterrent to effective ALE is, however, not entirely self-evident as there is evidence of a successful implementation of ALE despite weak or non-existent structures in some of the eight countries under consideration. On the one hand, when it comes to improved data collection, monitoring, stronger funding or quality controls, this will always be conducted within departments in these ministries. On the other hand, the regular consultation between ALE associations and policy makers can create a pseudo-participative process. Thus, the influence of these associations may be limited. As reported from India, for example, experts had been involved in the development of an ALE policy concept, but after the first draft a completely new paper was written by government bodies themselves and the consultation proved useless. This illustrates Arnstein's ladder of participation (cf. Arnstein 1969) in which tokenistic, symbolic-like participation occurs without consequential participation that matters in the end (Arnstein 1969, p. 220 seq.).

Making use of the CONFINTEA, GRALE and Learning Cities

The international initiatives are taken up in some of the interviews even though the interviewers did not specifically ask for them. This shows that the initiatives are being heard and recognised, at least to some extent.

CONFINTEA conferences

The CONFINTEA conferences take place every 12 years, the last ones were in Hamburg (1997), Belém (2009) and Marrakech (2022). Their declarations were not echoed very much in the focus groups. The Brazilian and South African interviews did touch on the CONFINTEAs and their impact. In Brazil, state-based Forums (professional ALE networks) were established as preparation for the Belem conference. Since then, they have proposed policy, offered training, and mobilised in preparation for CONFINTEAs. Currently they are described as having "lost a lot of their gas", but they do hold a national conference every two years and regional meetings on the off years (Pos. 16). When active, they engendered a substantive dialogue between Forum representatives and the education ministry with regard to ALE policy (Pos. 16).

- We attend all of the UNESCO Forums and Conferences… just Marrakech … (CONFINTEA VII) we need them to be working on how to translate Marrakech to (our context). (South Africa, Pos. 65)

Unfortunately, the Marrakech Framework for action has had no visible impact in the case study countries, but it has been taken up by some regional and national ALE professional associations to reinforce their claims for substantial implementation and funding of ALE.

Monitoring (SDG indicators and GRALE)

The monitoring process is a policy making process that is sometimes called "soft law (O'Hagan, 2004). It works with benchmarks and comparisons and motivates governments to improve their position within international rankings. This is the core modus operandi in educational policies within the European Union (Grotlüschen & Haberzeth, 2015). League tables reduce policies to figures (Grotlüschen & Buddeberg 2020), but they also include a chance to motivate countries to improve their ALE systems. This will take time and needs advocacy by the meso-level associations, because so far the member states only report their progress towards the SDG indicators and the GRALE as best as they can. But this process does not necessarily lead to better databases even though the national statistics bodies exist. For example, in Kyrgyzstan "on many indicators, we have no data" (Kyrgyzstan, Pos. 25). Similarly in Brazil: "when UNESCO asks for information about non-formal education, like most other countries it's hit or miss [what they'll get] ...There is no real statistical basis for saying how much [ALE is

carried out in a country], so it would be difficult to compare" (Brazil, Pos. 14] In India "we leave most of the columns blank [for the GRALE report] because we don't know what to write" (India,, Pos. 73). Our South African informants report that "the reports about progressing towards the SDGs paint a beautiful picture, but when you look at the SDG report for 2022 it says that countries are improving [which is not the case] in South Africa" (South Africa, Pos. 87)

Learning Cities

The Ukrainian and Thai focus groups touch on Learning Cities. According to its online self-description, the UNESCO Global Network of Learning Cities aims at getting lifelong learning for all on the agenda. It addresses the 17 SDGs and especially SDG 4 ('Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all') as well as SDG 11 ('Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable').

Researchers (Thummaphan and Sripa, 2022) identify a set of guidelines for a successful implementation of a learning city as the "4Com Principle": communities promoting learning communities, communication approaches that are appropriate for teaching the target communities, commitment to promote the concept and to work in partnership with people and networks who share the learning city goal and combination or integration of the concept of learning into the social, economic, cultural and educational dimensions of the people's lives, through informal, non-formal and formal education from the national level down to the local community level – as also mentioned in UNESCO's official strategy regarding learning cities networks (cf. UNESCO 2021). Many cities[4] in the eight countries under consideration are members of the UNESCO Global Network of Learning Cities (UNESCO 2023). However, in addition to not centering CONFINTEA or GRALE the focus group discussions did not highlight their countries' participation in Learning Cities.

Regarding the supra-national initiatives, the international community was mentioned several times as helpful (e.g. ASPBAE) on the level of associations, and so was DVV-international. This community and associ-

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4/   Melitopol, Nikopol, Novoyavorivsk in Ukraine; Durban in South Africa, Nilambur, Thrissur and Warangal in India; Al-Muwaqqar, Al-Ramtha and Amman in Jordan; Canning, Circular Head, Melton and Wyndham in Australia, Cachoengsao, Chiang Mai, Chiang Rai, Hat Yai, Pharyao, Phuket and Sukhotai in Thailand; Contagem, Sao Paolo in Brazil.

ations require the local governments to facilitate the contextualisation of international initiatives in the local country or community. This work should be located in the educational (or labor) ministry.

Bills, laws, strategy papers and concepts on education or ALE

Adult education, in one form or another, is recognized in several countries as a right. For example, in Brazil adult education is a constitutional right. In other countries, adult education, even if it only addresses adult basic education, is protected, although not necessarily funded. Literacy programs in Brazil and India exist on paper but do not receive funding under the populist governments. Each country has an educational law, and in some cases this includes ALE (in India the focus on ALE takes up just one page out of 90 in the law governing education). Examples show that policy-making proceeds with regard to all educational sectors. Sometimes ALE has been successfully implemented into larger educational laws. Sometimes it has become a sector that is acknowledged as a provider for formal TVET. And in some cases law and policies are implemented especially with regard to ALE. However, the strategies of ALE providers and associations usually aim at adding a specific section on ALE to the overarching educational law.

Vocational and TVET law, National Qualifications Framework and Assessment

In many countries it relies on National Qualifications Frameworks (e.g. Jordan, Pos. 83, South Africa, Pos. 11–14). It is reported as problematic when there is no consistent Qualifications Framework (e.g. in India). These programs require curricula and assessments and when they lack consistency, they lead to regulatory difficulties in the TVET sector. While a formal regulatory structure can be helpful, formalisation can sometimes make it difficult for training centres to offer non-formal or short-term courses and appropriate range of assessment and the licence to issue a formal certificate that give recognition for the outcomes from the short-term courses. Therefore, ALE partners advocate for receiving licences as testing institutions (South Africa, Pos. 11–14) and as licensed training provider (e.g. in Kyrgyzstan).

***Law or policies on formal, non-formal and informal Adult
Learning and Education***

There are many examples of legislation and policy strategies for ALE in
most countries, even though they may be underfunded or unfunded. The
activities in the Ukraine illustrate one process of ALE policy formation
which follows two pathways simultaneously. ALE is currently structured by
a three year strategy which is framed by its EU membership application.
It also mirrors an intense discourse between policy makers and the adult
education association. One impressive outcome of this collaboration is the
legislative process, currently as a "parliament registered bill on adult educa-
tion" (Ukraine, Pos. 7). This came to the parliamentary process and is being
pursued even after the Russian attacks in February 2022. A bill on adult
Education is also part of draft recovery plans (cf. Ukrainian government
2022). This would strengthen quality and transparency in the sector, and it
could serve as a good example for other countries.

South Africa, Thailand, and India are also developing and enacting
new laws pertaining to ALE. South Africa has legislation on community
education and training that recognizes all forms of learning (Pos. 76), but
has a strong emphasis on skills development. Including non-formal edu-
cation into legislation is a shift that is reported to be "a bit challenging for
those who have been doing only formal education" (South Africa, Pos. 76).
Thailand has a so-called "post-school white paper" is said to be "our [new]
version of policy around lifelong learning" (Thailand, Pos. 77). Policies in
Thailand also include legislation on ALE that is a shift from the "Promo-
tion of Non-Formal and Informal Education Act" (GT 2008) towards a new
"Learning Promotions Act" that is being proposed by the Government
(Thailand, Pos. 8). The proposed Act is intended to be more demand-driv-
en, emphasising learning that responds to the people's needs and goals,
rather than being supply-driven, recruiting adult learners into programs
deemed useful without any local validation of communities' needs. The
new Act also enshrines a commitment for greater flexibility and inclusivity
to ensure access and relevance to the whole population. India has been
preparing a "new policy on adult learning and education since 2020" (Thai-
land, Pos. 6).

Behind successful implementation of ALE legislation stands a me-
so-level strategy that fuels the process, coordinates stakeholders, and
pushes the process forward. This is the core function of meso-level
institutions according to sociological theory (cf. Donges 2011, Quandt
& Scheufele 2011). Without meso-level associations, the policy process
would simply not happen. Sometimes the individuals on meso-levels may
feel unsuccessful or experience backlashes. But without their co-ordina-

tion of interests, stakeholders and power relations, the sector cannot gain any visibility or implementation. The meso-level is not ornamental, but fundamentally important.

Meso level hindrances – staff and quality

SDG 4 reads: "Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all". On the meso level, the core hindrance needing to be overcome is quality.

The meso level hindrances for SDG 4 is reflected in the need for well-trained staff in adult learning and education and in coordinated quality systems.

Lack of professionalization: ALE often relies on volunteers or VET teachers

A lack of trained professional ALE educators was broadly reported. Adult learning and education often follows different pedagogies than school education, often with a less strictly defined curriculum. This makes ALE teaching a complex job. Yet, training and professionalization of staff is a problem in several countries, at least in part, because adult educators do not have similar training opportunities or employment status as school teachers.

Some universities offer modules or study programs on ALE, but these do not necessarily lead to adequate employment status or earnings. In Ukraine, for example, informants report that there is a lack of understanding regarding the complexity of working in this field and this suppresses demand for training. This leads to a lack of professional staff, especially when a program becomes successful and is implemented widely. In one non-formal program, volunteer university students in Brazil received some training and ongoing mentoring. But in South Africa, there sometimes is not even enough support to cover the additional costs (e.g. for transportation) of participating in training. ALE and vocational teaching staff are often selected based on their subject matter expertise, but they may know nothing about teaching adults. In one example of this in Thailand, there are

no permanent teachers or trainers who are based in the communities as non-formal and informal education program facilitators, teachers or trainers. The situation was reported to be similar in South Africa.

In South Africa, informants reported that training college teachers to be non-formal educators has proven difficult. Teachers are already overworked and putting extra work onto their shoulders seems unrealistic (South Africa, Pos. 147). The informants ask: "Could we not be a dedicated group of people doing the non-formal education instead of putting it to [teachers] as an add on to the heavy bags they are already carrying?" (South Africa, Pos. 149). These difficulties discourage enrolments in training programs:

- the numbers of educators have dropped, there's a big battle around salaries of educators, universities struggling to get adult educators registered… so what's the point in registering for qualification if there's no job security (as an adult educator)? (South Africa, Pos. 79)

Similar discussion on ALE professionalization is common even in high-income countries. Professional staff for adult learning and education depends on effective training and stable and adequate income opportunities, but these are not common conditions for (potential) practitioners.

Quality, accreditation and licences: two sides of the same medal

The lack of professionalization of the ALE workforce can lead to perception, and the potential actuality, of low standards and low teaching quality. Developing syllabi and curricula, training programs for adequate skills and civic empowerment, effective assessment and transfer depend on qualified staff and adequate technical standards (e.g. accessible buildings, digital technology, cooperation with communities and employers). If legislation does not address these standards, associations may step in. But the discourse indicates that there are two sides of the medal. On the one side, the more formal and governmental a program becomes, the stricter the rules and frameworks are. On the other side, when government bodies or social partners do not control the quality, the certificates issued by training providers are not acknowledged as valuable (Jordan, Pos. 23, 30–31), especially not abroad (Kyrgyzstan). The demand for valuable certificates then moves towards expensive university courses that are viewed as having a higher reputation (Jordan, Pos. 33). Thus, avoiding the rigidity that is attached

to formal validation of programs comes with the risk of poor perception, especially when there are comparable programs being offered by more prestigious providers.

The situation in Kyrgyzstan shows that licences – which represent quality controls – are seen as a hindrance for training providers. As in other countries, regular vocational training is shaped and regulated by curricula and frameworks which are issued and controlled by the education ministry. Some countries report that national qualifications frameworks are developed and recognized (e.g. South Africa, Jordan, Australia), and if they are missing, this is seen as a problem (India). Apart from the formal vocational education for youth, there is another sector that offers retraining, upskilling, and short-term courses (in the case of Kyrgyzstan, this is usually a 2–3 month training). These courses are not only shorter, but they can be delivered in remote areas and they are less costly than formal VET. However, the question is whether they should be certified as an equivalent to courses provided by VET schools.

- we try to make official licences not obligatory for short term courses because, as for my association, almost all my members, they have official licences from the ministry of education for short-term courses, different types of courses, but it's very difficult to receive it. And also we have many courses which we realise without licences we just give them [an internal] certificate… and that's quite enough because people can receive new skills in short term and they can use it and earn money. So that's the main idea. We don't have to make it official; we don't have to make [it] complicated (Kyrgyzstan, Pos. 31)

The training centres issue their own certificates, but these are less valid than the governmental ones (Kyrgyzstan, Pos. 56–58). However, the government does not recognize the training centres' documents as formal certificates.

Meso level strategies – coordination and advocacy

Associations of all kinds have an intermediate position as they consist of individuals who are close to the implementation of programs (micro) and act as organisations or systems that can interact with policy makers and larger organisations (macro). They collect, bundle and select the interests of their micro level members and advocate for their collective interests to influence the policy makers (macro level). Being both connected to the micro and the macro levels, but being in-between affords power to these meso-level associations, organisations and bodies. They are more than informal networks, as they usually have elected boards that represent the legitimization by the members to act on their behalf. Thus, their work is not a mere "co-ordination" of actors, but a collective expression of political will in situations of conflict and power struggle. Associations negotiate these power relations where the dominant macro level bodies assert and seek to maintain their power; thus, meso bodies try to improve the position of their members and partners. This also includes raising the visibility of the field as a way to improve support and program access and quality.

It's all about networking and partnerships – associations and their activities

Focus group participants from many of the case-study countries described their associations of adult learning and education, and these are, in many ways, interconnected with international organisations or networks. While these associations may attach greater importance to their interconnection between (international) ALE scientific associations and practitioner associations, they also draw upon the expertise of researchers and scholars in the field. One partner noted, "It's all about networking" (India, Pos. 90).

A closer look shows that the power of the meso level lies in their structure as member associations with elected boards and legitimised speakers or presidents. For example, in India these people were invited

by governments to advise on the development of new ALE policies (India, Pos. 83–89). Even if their advice is later ignored, their active and consistent submissions and their advocacy in the policy making process may establish their legitimacy in raising their voice when policies affect their members' concerns. In Kyrgyzstan, this occurred when staff from training centres around the country formed an officially registered association as a way to collaborate. "It helps us a lot. It's more powerful" (Kyrgyzstan, Pos. 117). The Ukrainian association and partners integrate scholars and providers engaged in an advocacy process towards their ALE law. The process involved ALE practitioners in policy development and discussion described as "important, hard work" (Ukraine, Pos. 39). The outcome was that a small group of specialists prepared a document to bring to parliament that explicitly states the necessity of implementing education for adults.

These examples are not atypical of the intense work in all countries, where the meso-level associations try to collect opinions from their members, organise a consultation process, develop drafts, negotiate different perspectives, make common interests explicit, work in councils, committees, and expert groups, prepare scientific reports, address macro-level bodies, and advocate for the implementation of ALE.

Associations advance their members' interests by working with strong networks and partners. These may include "organisations, employers, training centres, colleges, professional schools with the high[er] education schools" (Kyrgyzstan, Pos. 101, as well: Jordan, Pos. 36, 61–62). They may also partner with community-based organisations, NGOs and civil society private training providers and federation of trade unions, local government councils (Australia) and academies of pedagogical sciences (Ukraine, Pos. 25).

Advocacy in conferences, forums and committees

The SDGs feature in the associations' work, and the associations try to advise governments with the help of civil society organisations to put more emphasis on ALE

- SDG 4 [was] presented in the higher-level forum… online because 2020 [was a] hard year [with the] corona virus, but people prepar[ed]. And it was a first when the policy government body and civil society prepared and discussed some issues. Of course, no[t] all the recommendation from the the civil society was implemented in this report but…it was presented on the High Level Forum by

government and all [the] people from civil society participated and [it is] very good practice (Kyrgyzstan, Pos. 18)

The dialogue enabled by conferences was also reported in Brazil (Brazil, Pos. 16). Other types of advocacy consist of committees and advisory groups. For example, in Jordan, where a National Framework for Adult Education is discussed in two committees:

- So recently I think it was five months ago, finally the Minister of Education, they approved this paper and based on the paper now there is the committee or two committees to work on developing the national framework for adult Education in. (Jordan, Pos. 46)

In this case there is optimism that the acknowledgement of a framework would also lead to funding of ALE activities:

- This is a process. First, we need to have a draft of a national framework. Then this draft supposed to be approved by the Minister of Education and to be submitted to the Prime Minister. If the Prime Minister or Prime Minister the Cabinet will approve it, then it has to go to the legal department at the Ministry of Education to state alone. So just alone, if this law will be approved by the parliament, then by default the funds are supposed to be provided. I see the ministry from Ministry of Planning, from the Treasury, from many other departments. So it's a process, difficult process and long. (Jordan, Pos. 54)

A similar process is underway in Kyrgyzstan with a working group consisting of many NGOs and some associations but not government bodies pushing" (Pos. 53) together with the civil sector. Meanwhile, the ministry addressed the ALE association as the legitimate partner to develop an action plan and start consultations (Kyrgyzstan, Pos. 29):

- now there is a big working group from civil sector which works in ... developing the new project of law of education and there will be five different laws: [including] VET, High School, Highest education [which are] in now one big document and official law but not approved yet by the ministry. It's in the process and there we fight for including this meaning [ALE] into this document. (Kyrgyzstan, Pos. 13, 53)

International influences are useful for the associations, for example, from international adult education associations (Kyrgyzstan, Pos. 54; India, Pos. 88), as well as the European Union and its requirements for fairness in competitive markets, transparency and proper legal processes, which are necessary for the EU membership (Ukraine, Pos. 36).

Research, reporting and statistics (beyond the SDGs and GRALE)

One of the strategies that associations apply to strengthen their advocacy process is the collection of data and dissemination of research findings. This serves to give evidence to areas of weakness, for example, in Ukraine to ineffective Soviet-era structures (Ukraine, Pos. 79). It is also used for investigating training needs such as in Ukraine where an online survey with 472 respondents (Ukraine, Pos. 61) helped to attest to the relevance of information and communication technology training.

However, experts from the countries agree that there is no consistent and comprehensive database that can be used for reporting on adult learning and education activities (e.g. in Brazil, Pos. 14; Kyrgyzstan, Pos. 21, Jordan, Pos. 81). South Africa and Thailand, on the other hand, at least track enrolments in non-formal education:

- There is a requirement at each local district level to report to the ONIE (Office of Non-formal and Informal Education) on the non-formal and informal education activities each year; this information is used by the government to determine the budget for the districts in the following year. (Thailand, Pos. 20)

Another approach is to use university resources for community-oriented research or participatory action research. Universities in India, Brazil and South Africa have a certain role in ALE, not only for advocacy but also by the research themes they address (e.g. womens' empowerment through literacy programs and arts programs against sexual harassment as well as tutorial assistance to migrant parents to fight language-based discrimination). These are "Idea[s] of research that are far more relevant to the lives, the struggles of people in the community" (South Africa, Pos. 83). Drawing on their research, scholars then make recommendations to policy makers, for example, to support activism and independent groups, "to see whether there are [more effective] mechanisms or programmatic or project responses" (South Africa, Pos. 93). The intense dialogue between scholars, community members, and training and testing centres is used to

present research findings and make recommendations. Researchers hope to encourage those in authority to provide adequate support (South Africa, Pos. 93–95)

Implement learner pathways (a dead end need not be lifelong)

An area of concern expressed by several experts was the lack of viable pathways for further learning once ALE participants complete short-term training or a basic, introductory program. Even when learning pathways exist, in Brazil, many adult learners are not completing it. In Australia, Indigenous Australian learners completing a basic literacy program are finding that this leads to a dead end because of the absence of a culturally appropriate and accessible pathway to further learning. In Jordan and South Africa, there is a struggle to facilitate people's transition from initial short-term training (Jordan) or school equivalent to formal vocational training (South Africa, Pos. 39, 77–79). These examples reinforce the need for policy that supports continued learning throughout adulthood. In other words, support for ALE at one point in time or for isolated programs does not adequately constitute what could be legitimately called a lifelong learning policy.

Bring systems together but ending in a straitjacket?

Grassroots movements often have pushed things into a recognized structure. A good example is the German movement that started from scratch and with no budget in 1961 to help Turkish so-called "guest workers" learn German. Of course, the instructional themes were centred around discrimination in the labor market, by legal bodies and in the housing market. Eventually, Folk High Schools stepped in and continued the movement (cf. Kesper-Biermann 2022). Then when the oil crisis hit in 1973 and unemployment rose dramatically, the job agencies began to fund German-language courses. Decades later, after a long advocacy process, the immigration act (Zuwanderungsgesetz) was renewed and now language courses are a legal right.

However, formalising the right to an education program comes with a price. The content and reporting structure of the German language programs is now fixed and has lost its critical dimension. Even the parts on civic education (100 hours) have been standardised with nothing in the curriculum that engages critically with actions of government bodies (cf. Heinemann & Monzó 2021). Critics of the current program are disappointed and advocate for a more open curriculum and autonomy for providers,

while the number of courses has become a substantial part of ALE in Germany. So this process of formalising ALE and bringing systems together is double-edged. While network theory and empirical findings – from feminist network research (cf. Frerichs & Wiemert 2002) – suggest that networks strengthen the focal actor, "bringing systems together" may need to be promoted with some caution.

Expanding the ALE networks to include formal education providers was mentioned by experts in Kyrgyzstan an approach to strengthen the ALE sector (Pos. 30, 130) and it is closely linked to the SDG 4 aims. The first phrase of the informant seems to be common sense, addressed towards ALE, but the examples in the second phrase can easily be read as teacher training and school qualifications with ALE being out of scope:

- when we think about ... inclusion we have [to] support inclusion by formal, non-formal all levels, infrastructure, books preparing teachers for inclusive education – we [try to improve] for formal issues, for all levels, e.g. training teachers, preparing computer skills, retraining all teachers in all levels. We work in this way. We don't need to separate some issues in adult ed, education of children we have a lot of common interest. We have to push our government, our ministry to discuss (Kyrgyzstan, Pos. 114–115)

This collective strategy is supported by the wording of the SDGs. There is some risk inherent in this approach, however, that the schooling sector, stronger in size and influence, will dominate the work of such a wide-ranging network. The integrated approach is different in Thailand (Thailand, 12–14) as well as in South Africa (South Africa, Pos. 112) because their approach did not emerge from the SDG 4 deliberations. In Thailand, for example, informants indicate that in their proposed new education act:

- we will not divide our educational system into three main systems: … formal, non-formal and informal", and the discourse around ALE would not focus on the structure or the model of education anymore, but they [would] use the word learning, which means [the learners'] intention" (Thailand, Pos. 12–14)

In the 1990s, an approach that treats the whole education system, from school education to ALE, as the subject of policy deliberation also emerged in Brazilian law (1996, cf. Hanemann 2017), but the expert there feels this was a mistake because, in encoding adult education as part of the formal school education system, it ignored any kind of policy around the informal system or broader purposes for adult education. ALE is largely compensa-

tory education within the national policy. Although ALE providers have some flexibility and a degree of autonomy, they have to follow the national school curriculum guidelines, thus creating what the expert called a "straitjacket" (Brazil, Pos. 4). Despite having to follow the mandate of the national curriculum guidelines, the system is fragmented, and there are many gaps in educational opportunities for adults.

The incoherence and lack of coordination in attempts to attend to the needs of adults in this single system is illustrated by several examples. The first is that the formal compensatory education system almost literally replicates children's schooling and is very traditional and school-like (Brazil, Pos. 6). The expert argued, in contrast, that ALE needs to "have its own identity" (Brazil, Pos. 32).

The second example relates to efforts to articulate school education with professional qualifications through proposals to connect 'centers of technology' that provide vocational training with compensatory education. While this may enable pathways to be created, these centres were found at this same time to be trying to upgrade their programs to university status and had no desire to connect with adult learning providers. An umbrella organization of 1000s of unions also tried making this kind of connection between training and education, but these efforts have not been very successful and they have largely been framed only as a vehicle for getting people jobs, diminishing their broader potential benefits.

In another example, Jordan does not allow people to return to school once they have stopped participating in formal schooling for three years. As an alternative, a training provider offers a three-year interim program that leads to a certificate and access to further formal education or vocational education. It addresses youth and adults, aged 16 and older (Jordan, Pos. 25, 64). The current policy process that seeks to integrate all forms of education for all ages and in all contexts in the education ministry is understood as a good chance for strengthening ALE.

The Australian experts come to a different conclusion about a one-size-fits-all approach, even within ALE:

- We early on adopted a practice of doing pre- and post- [literacy] training assessments using the Australian Core Skills Framework. … [However,] it's an uneasy mix. We're non accredited, completely grassroots. And yet we're using this instrument of accreditation and monitoring. (Australia, Pos. 71)

They identified that what was lacking in terms of a systems-based approach is consistency and sustainability of funding, not pedagogical uniformity. Pre-accredited training does not have a coherent funding structure

which pushes providers to find ways "in between the cracks of funding" and unfortunately,

> • I think that in some ways, the sector does it so well that the government thinks they don't need to fund them for it, because it happens within the delivery of the accredited training. So damned if you do, damned if you don't (Australia, Pos. 75–76)

South African policies also try to interconnect ALE with TVET and university education, and the latest interracial policy round was the so-called post-school education policy (Pos.77). ALE is seen as sitting "in-between" and has to fit in spaces that are left over.

> • the focus [is to] try and bring systems together community educa-tion training system, the old adult education… public adult edu-cation system together with the TVET college sector with higher education and then in-between fitting space for the other subsec-tors of adult ed, worker ed and so on. (South Africa, Pos. 77)

Such strategies are reported to be too broad and ambiguous and con-straining in the countries where they are implemented. In some cases, bringing systems together can mean the new system shifts away from *education* to an idea of *learning* that lies in the responsibility of the individ-ual and provides an excuse for withdrawing public funding. Second, the interconnection of systems may use the idea of adult learning and educa-tion, but in the end only provides teacher upskilling and labels it as ALE. And last, ALE can end up as fragmented in very small spaces in-between strong formal sectors.

Still, there is one argument from Brazil and South Africa, that reflects a different problem. The experts claim that the many activist and self-help, grass-roots community groups should either be supported by the govern-ment, because they focus on people trying to make peaceful and produc-tive lives, or they should be connected to community education, TVET, and university systems in a more fruitful way (South Africa, Pos. 93). Another proposal is to hand colleges over to the communities (South Africa, Pos. 110) and allow non-formal activities and activist groups to use their facilities. They "gotta make them living centres" (South Africa, Pos. 112).

The experts argue that non-formal activities are already underway, and that by opening the colleges, both sides would have an advantage. Others agree that the different educational sectors are discussed "as if they are free standing, as if they are silos instead of talking about them as

part of bigger networks" (South Africa, Pos. 115). The South Africa focus group clarifies that

- many of the community colleges are actually not physical infra-structures, [but] operate from schools and the schools have a fence around them and the fence is locked and the key is with the principal. It is not like [a] beautiful building where people can go. … [Rather, it is] adults sitting in the small school children's furniture … A lot of the teachers .. called lecturers – only know children's pedagogy, adults [are] disappointed, [because they are] treated like children. [There are] lots of struggles to make them multi-purpose centres, to make them really owned by the community … [When there is a] dispute, [the] principal will not open up, and class will not take place. (South Africa, Pos. 124–127)

The power over adult education of the school context and school adminis-tration regarding facilities and buildings was also reported in Brazil:

- we depend on school installations. Most of the adult education take[s] part in primary and secondary education ….buildings. … [but] quite often denied access to things that children have access to. They can't use the computer laboratory, the sport facilities, and all sorts of stupid things (Brazil, Pos. 32)

Overall, the co-operation between educational sectors needs a clear bal-ancing of its benefits and costs.

Micro level challenges: Inclusive lifelong learning for all

SDG 4 reads: "Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all" but on the micro level of ALE, the core hindrance that has to be overcome is achieving "inclusive and equitable" access to education.

This is taken from the SDG 4, and regarding the micro level, it addresses the inequality of participation both in total numbers of participants (butts on seats) as well as by specific subpopulations. ALE programs and projects on the micro level are provided by several organisations like companies, for-profit and non-profit training organisations, government structures and commercial providers. The structure of this chapter follows the SDG focus on equality and access as well as the Marrakech framework definitions of adult basic education, professional development and citizenship education. Grassroots activities were added to the citizenship section.

Inequality and access

Access and opportunities for ALE is unevenly distributed not only globally, but within national contexts. One of the experts on ALE in Thailand identified a "real lack of inclusive and flexible education" (Thailand Pos. 326), especially for people in marginalised social groups and rural people. Thus, one of the rationales and aspirations for their proposed Learning Promotions Act is for lifelong and life-wide learning to be more inclusive. As another expert outlined, the current challenges for achieving these aspirations start with the educational and learning disadvantages of the target population because of poverty, living in remote rural areas, and belonging to ethnic minority groups and other vulnerable groups. Moreover, there is a disparity in access to educational opportunities between the population group in urban areas with more active engagement in the economy, higher

social status, better health and hygiene services, and the population group in the rural areas who experience greater poverty, belong to minority ethnic groups, and suffer from higher rates of health problems and other vulnerabilities. Informants claim that the disparity of educational quality between urban and remote rural areas is high. This includes the disparity of resources used in the implementation of adult learning and education between urban establishments/schools, especially in large metropolitan areas, and those in rural areas or even in small urban areas that are far from Bangkok and its vicinities. The disparities affect quantity and quality of buildings, personnel, budget, media and materials used in providing learning and adult education in Thailand.

The GRALE 5 confirms that ALE policies do not reach those who need it most. This is reported as a micro level hindrance. Inequality of participation is also reflected in relationship to gender, 'race', migration, income, and educational level.

- most of the workers who study are victims of social, racial and educational inequalities for not having access to opportunities for the minimum guarantee of survival (Brazil, Pos. 19).

But in some cases, creative strategies are applied to overcome such hindrances. For those who cannot read and write, voice messages are sent:

- … to be more inclusive, we send (…) voice mails (India, Pos. 102).

Voice mails have also been used in South Africa in a parents' project with internal migrants of a different language. They were used to explain children's homework to the parents and how they can help their children be successful in school.

Gender and income as axes of inequality is observed in the cases of Jordan and India. Women are underrepresented in ALE in Jordan (Pos. 70). Many programs in Jordan are delivered by private providers charging high fees for courses, for example, language courses, that attract highly educated people (Pos. 84) and leave others marginalised. This is mirrored in India, because 'good education' is costly, access is limited to those who can pay for it (India, Pos 75)

This is explained as multi-layered discrimination. For example, women from a low caste (India, Pos. 131), experience discrimination not just in relation to their gender, but also in relation to an entrenched social system that has discrimination built into it. From their perspective, ALE does not get them to a better position, so there is no incentive to participate.

- it doesn't make sense. Why should [a] domestic [seek] help [to] learn [to] read when she knows she can't get any other job? (India, Pos. 165)

On the other hand, lifelong learning can be inclusive and an opportunity for the

- non-traditional adult learner who hasn't had previous access, who are in environments from which previously they were excluded from because of race, ethnicity etc. [to participate in ALE] (South Africa, Pos. 47)

The SDG expectation is to offer inclusive adult learning for all, but it is far from being realised in many contexts.

Butts on seats

Adult learning and education may take place within diverse contexts ranging from activist groups to private companies, but it remains difficult to persuade many people to participate in education and learning. However, there are several examples of successful outreach among the case study countries. A 1990s Brazilian program shows that co-operation with trade unions was helpful:

- together we mobilised. We went to talk to the building workers to explain and also to learn what it was to be a building worker, conditions at work and everything to do with the building industry ... it was very successful (...) in reaching the building workers (Brazil, Pos. 26)

In Jordan, the reason for low participation seems to be that people have to work all day and then are exhausted when it comes to ALE (Jordan, Pos. 68–70). Informants claim to need more marketing and better visibility on the internet (Jordan, Pos. 74–75). But marketing cannot address exhaustion as such, so this points out the need for commitment by the employers to provide paid time for ALE.

A different strategy is to get the community involved in discussions of what programs are needed, but interviewees argue instead that even after advertising the program, the providers are "sitting in the dark about what that thing is" (South Africa, 137–146). The informant states that "out of 10 colleagues, 7 did not know anything about the community outside the

gates" (South Africa, Pos.137–146). The problem of low enrolment not only limits learning opportunities, it has an impact on adult educators because what little pay they get in South Africa is contingent on the numbers of participants.

- even when you're passionate for education, even [if you] do it for free, [they also have to pay their own] transport cost. They don't have an income. Sometimes they get paid, and they do have to do their own recruitment … They go from house to house to house and say "won't you like to come to this course?" because only for butts on seats that you finally get paid (…) (South Africa, 137–146)

The necessity of providers to be connected to the community is obvious from this example. While that can be a resource intensive activity, without the community connections, it is unlikely that ALE programs can be sustainable.

Micro level strategies: Responding to crises

On the micro level we find all kinds of ALE activities, ranging from formalised compensatory schooling to professional training and civic engagement, even civil disobedience. The more authoritarian a regime becomes, the more informal and grassroots the answers may be. Evidence of this can be found in communities experiencing ecological disasters, water crises, and food insecurity and can be understood as a contribution that ALE providers have to offer for achieving the SDGs. Some scholars envision "education for sustainable development as a platform for community-based disaster preparedness" (Yamamoto 2015, p. 32). Belete cites optimism that Malaysia offers "local solutions to the climate crisis for Indigenous minorities in Malaysia" (Deli & Yasin, 2017 cited in Belete et al, 2022, pp. 265–266). But apart from environmental disaster and hunger, in some contexts, people are subject to authoritarian and populist regimes in which a disastrous situation may worsen into a catastrophe. Yet ALE can be found responding to learning needs of adults in times of war, patriarchy, religious oppression and sexist discrimination, lockdowns, water crisis, and unstable energy supply.

Basic Adult Education, literacy and compensatory schooling

Literacy programs may lead to empowerment and dignity (Daniels 1996), but sometimes they seem to be a false promise that barely does more than teach people to write their names. On the other hand, Freirean pedagogies are applied in Brazil, South Africa and Australia, and they understand literacy as much more than simple kinds of tasks like this.

Simply write your name

In Brazil, our expert described a national literacy program which was designed as part of an anti-poverty policy, Literate Brazil (Hanemann 2017),

as unsuccessful because it took this very narrow approach. The expectation was that students would complete literacy learning and then enter the primary system, but very few did. A large investment was made but without figuring out how to create continuity and support transition to the next step of the formal system. He said the policy was

> • learning to write your name and a bit more, and that's it. Yeah, that's enough for you. That's your right for education. Next one please (Brazil, Pos. 15).

A similar scenario is currently being played out in Australia where its version of the Freirean Yo Si Puedo literacy campaign is helping adults in Indigenous communities develop literacy. There, it is not the failure of the program *per se*, but the lack of a viable transition to further learning that is preventing the literacy learners from going further once they have completed the initial literacy program.

India has almost 40 percent of the world's population with the most limited literacy skills and cannot cater to all, so literacy provision has been prioritised to educating two groups: those in the so-called low levels of the Hindu caste system and women from other groups (India, Pos. 10–11). However, literacy programs have been cut back leaving a situation similar to what has been observed in Brazil and Australian Indigenous communities where:

> • [you] ask women, are you literate, they say yes… [this is] only signature, [the] definition of [literacy] (India, Pos. 24–25).

The literacy courses end with a certification if someone is able to sign.

Some kind of dignity: Literacy is more than writing

Experts in Jordan, India and South Africa report that less formalized adult literacy activities cover a wide range of basic education, e.g. financial literacy (India, South Africa) and basic vocational training like sewing (Jordan, Pos. 13–17), English (Australia 39–41), art workshops and cultural activities, and digital basic literacy for elderly (Kyrgyzstan, Pos. 166). In other words, this is understood as something much broader than just pure schooling" (Brazilian case description, Pos. 12), and writing is "one tiny part of adult education" (Australia draft 271122, Pos. 39–41). Basic education leads to "some kind of dignity, being able to assist their children" (South African Fo-

cus Group, Pos. 21), and adult education research on empowerment shows the

- role that Basic education can play for the empowerment of women that have no access to education (South African Focus Group, Pos. 43).

It is impressive that there is consensus around the world among experts and practitioners at the meso and micro levels that literacy and basic education should have a broad scope, but it is not necessarily reflected at the macro level in policies.

Compensatory education, second chance schooling or Adult Education

Adult Education as compensatory schooling comes closest to the Human Right to Education, and in some countries people have a right to get a first formal qualification without having to pay for it (e.g. in Germany). However, critics state that "We need to think of adult education, not as compensatory. There's no way you can compensate" (Brazil, Pos. 9).

Sometimes, adult education was available for decades before the international influence advocated for it, for example, in Thailand, where adult basic education including literacy and primary and secondary school equivalency education is provided (Thailand, Pos. 18).

Australia is running programs in a number of remote and regional Aboriginal communities, supported by the Literacy for Life Foundation, a charity:

- It came out of a kind of a steering group made up of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leaders from health and a lot of people from the health sector really, who ... identified a gap, I guess, in English literacy rates and a need. And then, because some people on that group had had experience in Timor Leste with the delivery or implementation of a nationwide adult literacy campaign, it was kind of mooted to trial a similar approach in Australian Aboriginal communities. And so that's what happened with a bit of funding through ... the [federal government's] Workplace English Language and Literacy funding. So again, very much tied to, you know, employment outcomes. And that was trialled in 2012. And the ... Literacy for Life Foundation was formed as a result of that when it became evident

that it was a viable model to pursue ... to be able to roll it out into more communities (Australia, Pos. 55).

When literacy programs claim to be compensatory, they often expect participants to pursue their education after going through an initial course or program. This is not always easy because of a lack of provision:

- One of the challenges facing the *Yes I can* campaign is the question of 'what next'; there is not an easily accessible pathway for people who complete the program to pursue further learning in their communities (Australia, Pos. 72).

On the other hand, participants do not always see a need to continue (e.g. in the Litra de Brazil case).

Professional Development, unemployment and retraining

Professional development is not only delivered by public training providers. It takes place informally at the workplace and it often takes place by non-formal workshops within companies, this may be onboarding seminars, leadership or technology-related training. Apart from this inhouse sector, individuals also may pay for their professional development, e.g. by attending costly programs offered by universities. This leads to an increase in the economic gaps of a country and leaves those at the low end of the income scale behind. This legitimises public investment in professional development, skills and overcoming unemployment. But there are markets, where the rather formal prioritisation of skills instead of popular education does not work, because there is no formal labor market. Countries like Jordan and South Africa face youth unemployment of more than 35 percent, and even highly trained youth cannot find jobs.

Combined provision instead of linear skills model

When the skills strategy and TVET training does not lead to labor market success, people start looking for alternatives and they start rejecting the narrative that skills would lead to jobs (South Africa, Pos. 92). It is reported that the crisis in jobs in the country is so severe that young adults are not even bothering to try getting a qualification, they go on with making their lives (Pos. 92). The youth unemployment rate is projected to grow to 40

percent in the next five years in South Africa and the relationship between skills and employment or earnings decreases.

- we know [that it is] absolutely false to draw that linear relationship. [there is a] need to start looking at what non-formal education can introduce as alternatives as a useful move. That needs to be supported (South Africa, Pos. 79–81).

However, the non-formal programs also address skills, but this is much less formal and it aims at informal labor or a solidarity economy, sometimes starting from women's networks. The experts report that when this happens, "the effect is so immediate, so visible" (South Africa, Pos. 82). The combination of skills-oriented and social parts allows the women to take advantage of the course even if it does not lead to formal vocational education or formal jobs.

- [this is an] amazing thing, we offer four programs in hairdressing, beauty, sowing, graphic design. We combine a theoretical part and then another part that is more to do with social context things people are experiencing and how they are responding. (South Africa, Pos. 82)

The social context includes experiencing violence of all kinds and responding to it in collaborative efforts. The non-formal program allows them to combine skills and "something that can earn you an income" (South Africa, Pos. 83) but also improves the social fabric in the community or settlement. The governments' orientation towards preparation to formal vocational education generally does not match with the community needs in this way. However, a lack of equipment like sowing machines hinder people from using their newly acquired skills (South Africa, Pos. 86). This seems to be a waste of resources and it is obviously frustrating and demotivating for all stakeholders. The economic argument for ALE within lifelong learning is relevant, but it can only apply where labor markets grow or change substantially.

Retraining for integration and jobs (bridge the gap)

The role of training providers lies in bridging the gap between the governmental TVET sector and the private training sector or the private labor market. In Jordan, this is a professional training program (Jordan, Pos. 65).

Labor market needs for skilled workers often need a flexible and fast provision of training:

- We say the Vocational Training Corporation, it's a government entity. It has centers all over Jordan. It's supposed to bridge the gap between, you know, the government sector and the private sector, providing people with skills, vocational skills that can respond better to the market (Jordan, Pos. 65)

These programs address workers from abroad, while other programs allow people to adapt to changes and retrain in a different profession (e.g. accounting, Pos. 77). High and upper medium income countries like Australia or the Ukraine usually offer retraining for job seekers based on funding by the educational or labour ministries, e.g. The Skills for Education and Employment program for job seekers in Australia (Australia, Pos.41). Interestingly, this process started in Kyrgyzstan with the help of the Asian Development Bank, aiming at short courses for unemployed adults. These courses are officially accredited by the ministry of education, even though they are non-formal and provided by non-governmental training centres (Kyrgyzstan, Pos. 72–73).

- now it is a state organisation and also a member of adult education association. They supported the process for training for adult education in several directions and now they start with 70percent of training course paid by [government] funds and 30percent by participants. (Kyrgyzstan, Pos. 92–95)

This development aid project is reported as sustainable and led to the institutionalisation of short-term courses rather than long-term formal technical and vocational education. The flexibility of training centres proves relevant for addressing changing labour markets.

Cheap labour as competitive advantage in globalised markets

Whether a skills-oriented strategy is more effective with short-term courses or with formal TVET depends on the labour market as well. When cheap labour is regarded as the competitive advantage of a country, then policy makers will not invest in upskilling, neither by short and non-formal nor by long and formalised TVET. Globalised industry and commerce rely on exploiting staff in middle- and low-income countries, and "a lot of stuff that we buy in H&M is manufactured in India; they don't need very high skills"

(India, 156–160). As long as the high-income countries continue to buy and import products from companies that fundamentally underpay and exploit their staff, this will go on.

- India is a huge market [with a] big manufacturing [sector], the nature of economy is not knowledge economy. We don't need people who are highly skill[ed] because … [skilled people would] need high-paid jobs (India, Pos. 156–160).

From the perspective of working people in India, the investment in vocational skills is too costly, it does not give enough (or any) return (165), because qualified jobs are rare (India, Pos. 163–165). Global labour markets heavily affect the needs and possibilities of professional skills development. Taylorized industries end up competing around the globe, while the care and service sectors mirror the inequalities of societies, where the wealthy families can employ domestic services informally and without any social security.

Skills for working abroad – refugees – returning home during the COVID pandemic

Skills strategies do not only address the national labour market, because some countries earn substantial parts of their GDP abroad (152). Kyrgyzstan reports migration to Russia, Kazakhstan, European countries and Korea, where vocationally skilled adults are employed (Pos. 33–37, 49, 148). The skills they learn in colleges and training centres are required for employment and earnings, and the more formal the certificates are, the easier the external migrants find validation of their skills in other countries. However, both the Russian war against Ukraine as well as the COVID pandemic led to Kyrgyzstan citizens returning to the country (Pos. 90) as well as from remote regions to the capital:

- now with this situation in the world, yes we have some people to *come* to Kyrgyzstan, from Russia from Ukraine but... for our country we have our internal migration, internal for example from the remote region to the capital city to Bishkek (Kyrgyzstan Focus Group, Pos. 36–37).

Today, internal migrants from remote areas, lockdown-affected workers from Kazakhstan, Russia, Korea and Europe, returned workers from Russia as well as anti-war refugees from Russia and war refugees from Ukraine meet in Bishkek – and they all compete for jobs and housing.

Citizenship Education and grassroots activities

When it comes to citizenship education or popular education, the levels of formality vary and sometimes even mix. Centres may be state-funded, but activities can be no-budget grassroots initiatives as well. Schools may belong to the formal education system, but parental education for internal migrants who speak a different language can also be an initiative from the nearby university. An incredible variety of activities addresses disaster and injustice of all kinds. For example, catastrophic labour markets and food insecurity are answered by Urban Gardening initiatives or a Solidarity Economy in South Africa. Other countries report important influence of the workers movement. Sometimes, corporate social responsibility programs are helpful. It becomes clear that on the micro level there is no time to wait for the policy making process. The pressure is immediate and requires immediate responses, often enough for mere survival. "So much incidental learning goes on." (Australia draft 271122, Pos. 52) in the non-accredited, informal learning spaces that elude any government frameworks of education. Two specific programs, the Yes I can Indigenous adult literacy campaign and the Men's Shed movement are examples of organised community-based initiatives that have been successful and growing despite the policy neglect.

Overcome sexual harassment

Adult Learning and Education is flexible, it is a baseline for overcoming challenges and it takes place whether governments support it or not. The macro-level hindrances like disasters and climate injustice often enough led to violent governments, exploitation in companies and brutality in families. All this is addressed in attempts to improve social justice, e.g. in family relations where ALE programs lead to better behavior of men towards women and children:

- we had quite a lot of feedback from families. Families would say before the worker started taking part in the project, communication with the family was very poor. He shouted more than.., he wasn't capable of talking properly with his children or his wife. And they said the longer he took part in the project, the more they saw changes, how his communication with the family, the whole family climate improved, the was real communication (Brazil, Pos. 30).

Addressing gender-based violence and sexism is an response to patriarchal structures around the world. Self-help groups have existed for decades,

e.g. in India (Indian Focus Group, Pos. 103–104). Arts-based projects for women with low literacy skills represent the violence that happened to them:

- Indian women wear … 6 metre long cloth [Sari]. Most women informal workers wear them, so collectively they decided that they (wouldn't show their individual names) but [instead] make a collective voice. So by using arts, they have depicted the kind of violence [that] happened to them 10 years ago when they were children or in workplace in roles through arts. And they put it on sari and presented that sari to the department chief minister of Delhi (…) After seeing that piece of advocacy, he immediately said it needs to (be addressed), mandated in law. So this kind of arts is … bringing change (Indian Focus Group, Pos. 106–110).

Women in self-help groups improve their financial skills (Indian Focus Group, Pos. 25), and when they are able to collect a certain amount of money, they save it and then lend it to group members at a 1percent interest rate (India, Pos. 26–27). They share stories, build awareness about the new gender equity law (from 2013), feel that they are together in that journey (Indian Focus Group, Pos. 101), participate in safety audits, and draw safety maps

- they do not know how to read and write but to draw. They make maps on safe spaces and unsafe spaces for them, in doing that, their learning, their knowledge is valued, it is considered (Indian Focus Group, Pos. 65).

Informants claim that it is important to know your rights and support the groups to understand the law (Indian Focus Group, Pos. 102). An informant reports a severe case of sexual harassment in a university where the student was told to have sex with her mentor in order to finish her degree. The student refused and took the case to a review committee, but the committee accused her of false reporting. The committee reacted by punishing the woman for making a complaint. After fighting her case through court in a two-year process and massive media coverage, the woman and her lawyer started offering legal assistance for other women in similar situations and assisted in three cases. Today, because of these activities, women have a right to be represented with a lawyer in front of the committee (India, Pos. 123–125). These activities are embedded in networking and non-formal learning provision at all levels that, in turn, improved the situation of female students.

Rebuild after Drought, Bushfire and Flood

Another impressive answer to disastrous macro-level crises is the way Australia's community-based and very informal programs such as the Men's Sheds address natural disasters. The history of the Men's Shed movement is less than 30 years old, and according to the key informant who has been researching this period, is linked to the emergence of a national men's health strategy. It is a grassroots informal learning initiative. The key informant explained that "they learn because they're doing something together, shoulder to shoulder. [The movement is] dedicated to connecting people and transforming the community and transforming the men" (Australia, Pos. 66). They support recovery from successive droughts, and other natural disasters such as bushfires and floods that have had devastating impacts in many rural and remote communities. The men's sheds are community sheds where men, typically older or unemployed men or men who are living alone, gather "in an atmosphere of old-fashioned mateship" (Australia, Pos. 61) to talk, work on community projects together or in other ways overcome feelings of social isolation:

- And ... the man said, 'well, first of all, you wouldn't enrol them in your programs, because ... why'd you enrol in programs?' [A woman who had identified the benefit of a health literacy program for the men] said, 'But what do I do?' And he said, 'Well, there's a shed out the back of the Aged Care Center, invite the men to come to the shed and do stuff in the shed. And just try that'. And she did (Australia, Pos. 63)

The success of the Men's Shed Movement lies in the men being participants – not customers, students or patients.

While in Queensland elderly men rebuild what has been affected by climate disasters, the Thai farmers search for vocational development. A key informant explained that in the rural agricultural areas, farmers who have not had a successful year due to natural disasters or other problems, would look to other sources of income to make up for lost income (Thailand, Pos. 29). This in turn leads to the demand for short vocational development programs such as in motorcycle repair, silk weaving, and basic electronics that would enable the farmers to supplement their income by performing jobs using their new skills (Thailand, Pos. 29).

Community ownership for overcoming disaster and crime

Informants repeatedly explain that the reason for success lies in the owner-ship and commitment within the communities. This starts with the definition of learning needs in temples and with volunteers:

- In principle, the aim is for the needs of each local adult community to be identified through local community events such as village meetings and discussions at the local temple. These meetings may be facilitated by volunteers such as local teachers (Thailand, Pos. 19)

In Thailand, this type of effort is supported by the government. Previous research shows that in addition to these local ALE initiatives, Community Learning Centres (CLCs), public libraries, and educational radio and televi-sion have been administered by the government to support ALE activities (Charungkaittikul 2019). In Australia, similarly, it was also explained that the success of the Yo si puedo model is firmly rooted in the commitment to community control of the program. This has meant that the facilitators of the program were people who are from the community but had no formal qualification as a teacher.

- It's also meant to be a population level intervention. So it's not about the individual becoming more literate. It's about staying in a community until you've reached a critical mass of ... people have come through. So ... really the aim ...., it was kind of a big picture, reduce the rates of low English literacy by about 3percent in a community because then you've got a viable kind of adult popu-lation who can take back control of local organisations (Australia, Pos. 57–58).

This is similar for the Men's Sheds; they work because of being grounded in their communities:

- because it sits in community, and it works for community and it's understood by the communities. That's why in some ways, it's frag-mented. Because each community has its own needs and focus. But at the same time, it's strong because of that. So it's, it's, it's interesting. Australia, Pos. 74

In South Africa, learning networks and women's circles address burning issues, and the problems are severe, e.g. poverty, the impact of COVID,

natural disaster, energy, water crisis, crime, substance abuse, vandalism, stabbing, rape and teenage pregnancy (South Africa, Pos. 36, 50, 84–86). The community approach helps to work on solutions and re-establishes social norms.

- We are seeing vandalism, things are being stolen, schools can't even operate. But what if that school was engaged with a community and ownership? It means that the community will ensure that the school is safe, that infrastructure is safe, because they have a social investment. That is what is needed in community colleges. It needs to be grounded in the community. The community has to own the college… then they will ensure that the college is safe because … we are not going to [let them] get away … we see how crime [happens]… and what's happening in our schools where young women being raped … where people being stabbed… at the space that's supposed to be safe. So we need the communities to be involved… so that .. ownership [leads to] responsibility (South Africa, Pos. 87–88)

Activism is rapidly emerging in all provinces, especially during the last 5 years. This covers environmental justice, women's groups, savings clubs, care givers, waste pickers organising recycling (South Africa, Pos. 92). It was reported that this is an "almost autonomous growth of initiatives all over" (South Africa, Pos. 92). Some of the activities are illegal or are acts of civil disobedience, like connecting others to the electricity grid (South Africa, Pos. 92) or taking land for gardening without asking who owns it.

The community colleges – which are more a name for an activity that takes place in schools, if at all – often did not meet the needs. For example, their land falls into disuse even after they had been growing vegetables. Key informants claim that providing internet access, baby clinics, literacy programs in those settings and developing proper facilities would turn the schools into vibrant centres (South Africa, Pos. 111). Growing vegetables and supporting a solidarity economy became an important part of responding to the crises brought about by the COVID lockdowns and the subsequent food insecurity in informal settlements (von Kotze, 2021).

- Cape Town together, community action network, growers network – community action networks formed soup kitchens and kept on going those and then realized that's not sustainable either …they have to start growing their own (South Africa, Pos. 101)

This kind of activism is close to civil disobedience but a legitimate answer to insupportable government decisions like lockdowns in South Africa as well as buying all the vaccines by the governments of the high-income countries.

- Small groups started reclaiming land, actually sometimes verges outside their houses … sometimes a free piece of land. [They] didn't ask who it belongs to, just took it over growing things on it (South Africa, Pos. 102).

During the pandemic, the South African colleges failed to offer health education. Instead, NGOs and CBOs did the job on vaccine literacy (South Africa, Pos. 72). In Jordan, CBOs are reported as being widespread (3.000 across the land, Jordan has 10 Million inhabitants), and they offer basic literacy education as well as a wide range of professional development and civic education (Jordan, Pos. 29–30), but their quality is precarious as is their status compared to university certificates (Jordan, Pos. 86). Apart from these discussions the community level seems to be highly relevant for overcoming disaster.

Education for Sustainable Development (ESD)

Besides the informal ALE responses to climate injustice, hunger, disease and war, the current context also strengthens the explicit approach to invest in education for sustainable development. This is understood quite differently, as in high-income countries people would discuss whether to buy ecologically produced textiles or how to improve the environment for local insects like bees. In middle- or low-income countries, informants report

- ESD is linked to poverty, building solidarity, the economy. [It] responds to immediate daily needs – issues [like] food, energy, forms of economic organisation, building community economies, local economies (South Africa, Pos. 69).

In Brazil, their "vibrant" university extension projects must indicate in proposals "to which [SDG] goal they are linked". However, this was reported as "just ticking boxes", indicating that the SDGs are given lip service but are not deeply integrated with most ALE. In South Africa, the academic discourse also is seen to be a starter of the discussion, but

- when people talk about ESD, then it's really about the needs, interests within communities. (South Africa, Pos. 70)

Making a living under disastrous conditions with only so many hours of energy a day, with unstable tap water supply, with food insecurity and the constant threat of floods, landslides, and wildfires brings people together in search for solutions. These solutions are not necessarily sustainable, they cannot solve climate injustice and they won't overcome the labour market crisis. But the function of adult learning and education lies in getting people together, allowing them to share solutions and to search for knowledge, and in several cases to get connected with larger social movements or associations.

Conclusion – When the going gets tough…

The findings section reports a set of analytic categories that were developed by comparing the data across countries. The model presented in this section is a conclusion, based on the research questions (effective strategies and hindrances regarding the implementation of ALE) and analysis of data. It is not an overarching political analysis model, but it strongly builds on sociological theory. The messages are threefold:

1. The orange parts in the model point to the normal policy-making process and highlight the relevance of meso-level associations. Researchers and professional associations and networks identify their members' positions and communicate and negotiate them with policymakers, trying to overcome hindrances, with the macro-level bodies, who have and award the resources.

2. The blue parts in the model show how ALE responds to local issues including hunger, war, and disease as well as populism and authoritarian political systems and other challenges, quickly adapting to mega-level crises and catastrophes. ALE cannot solve these supra-national crises and should not let the macro level off the hook. However, it helps to overcome everyday problems on the ground, it is flexible and fast, and indicates the many ways in which activism and self-organisation react to disaster and aggression.

3. The kind of implementation and non-implementation of ALE activities on the levels shows a dilemma between funding and autonomy: the more informal, autonomous, flexible and responsive an ALE activity is, the more precarious the funding will be. On the other hand, the more regulated and sufficient the program funding is, the more control is applied by the funding authorities or bodies.

Several theories explain the relationship between the micro-level (individuals, or in the case of ALE, local programs and providers) and macro-level (governments, ministries, political systems) (cf. Schimank 2001). The meso-level is not simply the middle level between micro and macro; its organisations bridge the distance between individuals and systems, playing an important go-between role. The meso-level (associations, political parties) collects the political will of individuals, aggregates it, and negotiates the result with the macro-level institutions (cf. Donges 2011, Quandt & Scheufele 2011). In peaceful times, with elected democratic regimes, efforts from this meso-level should be the usual way of influencing macro-level policies. However, when meso-level organisations are absent, there would be a vacuum and the expression of aggregated political interests would be difficult.

The role of meso-level institutions in adult learning and education is to organise their members, identify their needs and interests with regard to their practice, draft strategy papers with regard to ALE policies, and advocate for these policies on the national level. The meso-level entities may also attend international conferences, organise regional associations and networks, and leverage arguments launched by supra-national associations like UNESCO and OECD for advocacy purposes. Without the constant lobbying process by the meso-level, it is unlikely that the work of the supra-national policies would come to the attention of national governments. Stanistreet (2022) claims that governments try to avoid attending in substantive ways to supra-national educational policies that ask for the common good by instead simply paying lip service to them. He assumes that change will come as a result of activism and grassroots education. One core finding of this study is the parallel development of both policy strategies: The model shows how the regular process works, but it also shows that ALE finds lots of survival strategies on the micro level that answer the catastrophic and autocratic policies we described as mega-level.

This model suggests that as long as governance structures are stable and flexible, the regular advocacy structures are appropriate. This does not mean the outcomes advocacy will necessarily be effective or adequate, however. But if food, water, energy, and physical safety are affected, stakeholders at the micro and meso-levels do not wait for the systems to work right, they get going to step up and help provide what's needed.

Micro-level ALE provision is varied. Basic education and literacy is accepted as a human right in most countries (but defunded in some). Professional development takes place for retraining, upskilling, and integration into local labor markets. Commercial and business institutions, for-profit and non-profit training centers as well as public, or government-funded vocational colleges provide a variety of skills. Citizenship education can even include activism, e.g. women's self-help and empowerment groups,
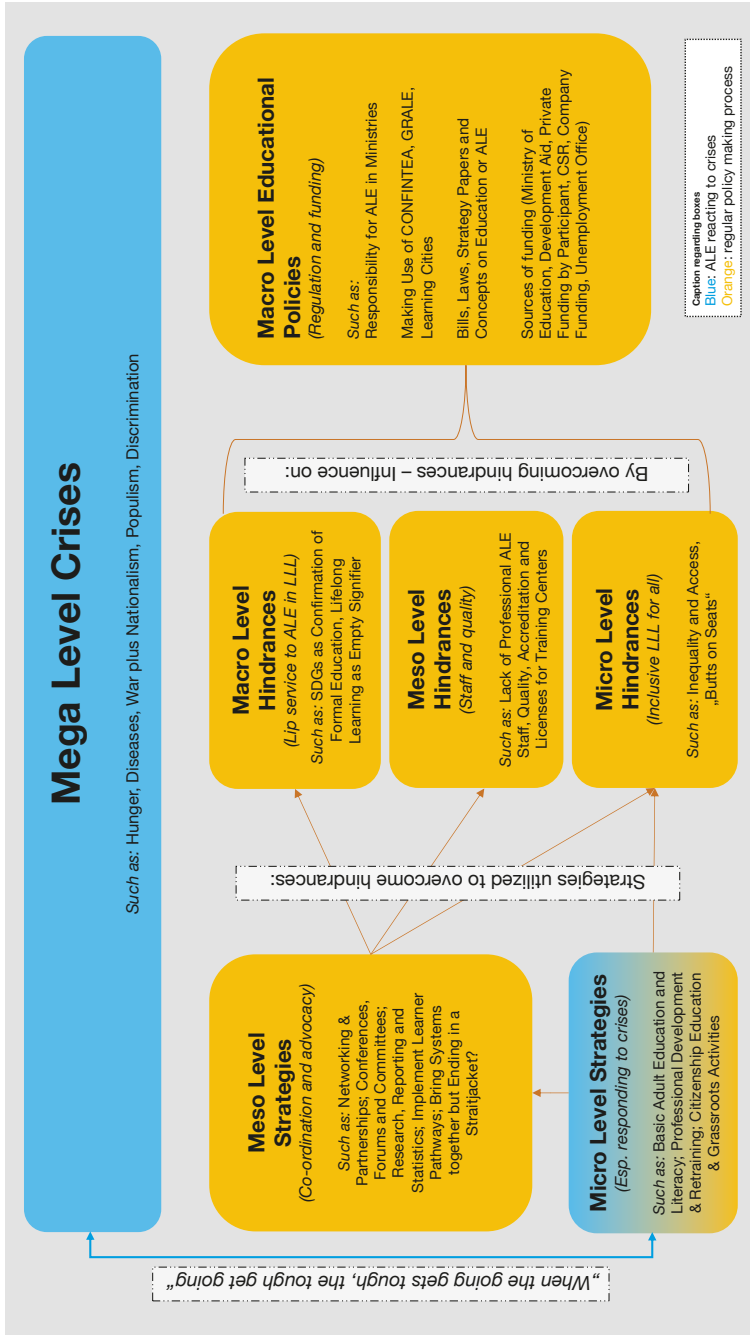
Mega Level Crises

Such as: Hunger, Diseases, War plus Nationalism, Populism, Discrimination

Macro Level Educational Policies
(Regulation and funding)

Such as:
Responsibility for ALE in Ministries

Making Use of CONFINTEA, GRALE, Learning Cities

Bills, Laws, Strategy Papers and Concepts on Education or ALE

Sources of funding (Ministry of Education, Development Aid, Private Funding by Participant, CSR, Company Funding, Unemployment Office)

Caption regarding boxes
Blue: ALE reacting to crises
Orange: regular policy making process

By overcoming hindrances – Influence on:

Macro Level Hindrances
(Lip service to ALE in LLL)
Such as: SDGs as Confirmation of Formal Education, Lifelong Learning as Empty Signifier

Meso Level Hindrances
(Staff and quality)
Such as: Lack of Professional ALE Staff, Quality, Accreditation and Licenses for Training Centers

Micro Level Hindrances
(Inclusive LLL for all)
Such as: Inequality and Access, „Butts on Seats"

Strategies utilized to overcome hindrances:

Meso Level Strategies
(Co-ordination and advocacy)

Such as: Networking & Partnerships; Conferences, Forums and Committees; Research, Reporting and Statistics; Implement Learner Pathways; Bring Systems together but Ending in a Straitjacket?

Micro Level Strategies
(Esp. responding to crises)

Such as: Basic Adult Education and Literacy; Professional Development & Retraining; Citizenship Education & Grassroots Activities

„When the going gets tough, the tough get going"

Figure 2: When the going gets tough... How Micro Level Strategies around ALE Contribute to Surviving Macro Level Crises. Source: own

savings clubs, (urban) gardening groups, and migrant parents' integration. Community-oriented action plans address vandalism and crime, access to clean water and healthy food, and energy. Men in local areas work together to rebuild after flood and fire. Training centres in Ukraine offer psychological assistance in order to cope with war there.

Grassroots activities, often closely linked to ALE training centers, emerge quickly when communities are under pressure because of war, disease and lockdown as well as hunger. They also provide coping strategies in response to authoritarian regimes, e.g. Russian aggression, Hindu nationalism and the ongoing patriarchy and sexual violence in India, and the right-wing, anti-progressive Bolsonaro regime. However, they remain contingent survival strategies. Some grassroots activities get connected to larger movements regarding, for example, food sovereignty and climate justice, and some get recognized by scholars and gain a certain visibility. Yet, there is no organisation that bundles their political will in terms of adult learning and education.

Micro level ALE activities do not solve mega-problems such as climate injustice and right-wing populism. They need a meso-level structure that recognizes their value and their responsiveness. The immense flexibility of adult learning, sometimes building on existing ALE networks, is one of its most important advantages. But it needs to be sustainable on the local level (e.g. the growers' movement) and address the origins of the problem of the macro- and mega-levels (e.g. the overexploitation of the planet by high-income countries). Micro-level ALE activities cannot do that on their own, they need meso-level organisations. Our findings indicate that ALE meso-level organisations are active and robust in many countries.

Recommendations: ALE within LLL

Based on the findings of the literature review and the comparative analysis of the interviews from eight countries, a set of recommendations has been developed. The literature review clearly shows the impact of ALE, while the comparative research found ALE under pressure and in constant need for advocacy on the meso level.

- Build and support sustainable networks and associations

Networks play an important role in advocating for, innovating, and supporting ALE activities at the micro level and working to influence policy at the macro level. They can also serve as a "think tank" to develop policy and practice solutions to challenges faced at both levels. Made up of practitioners, researchers, consultants, and activists they are well positioned to understand conditions on the ground as well as collect data as evidence of those conditions those conditions and present these at the macro level. They also can leverage their connections to move fluidly through conversations and activities at all levels. However, network leaders and the networks themselves often do their work under often precarious conditions because they depend on unstable funding and the commitment and dedication of sometimes just a handful of individuals who act as champions. Efforts should be made to put permanent supports and structures in place that can sustain the important role the meso level networks and associations play in improving services and highlighting and building on the importance of ALE.

- Ensure coordination across stakeholders and within sectors that engage with ALE

Many different stakeholders and sectors engage with ALE including policy makers, government bureaucrats, researchers, meso-level networks, NGOs and international donors, practitioners, and those working in non-ALE sectors (e.g. business and industry, unions, and anti-poverty workers in housing, nutrition, and health). As is always the case, working together in

coordinated ways can yield better results than when diverse interests are at play, sometimes competitively with each other, at cross purposes, potentially both overlapping and missing the opportunity to fill in gaps. Because adult learning can support and be supported by the work of so many different sectors, it is common for a patchwork system to develop that doesn't work as effectively as it could both within and across countries. Identifying strategies for effective coordination could help build the knowledge base, create important data for advocacy, and better ensure that the full range of needs of adult learners are being met.

- Recognize and encourage grassroots efforts that support adult learning in ALE and other sectors

It is often grassroots efforts that are most closely tied to meeting the needs of adults within their own communities. These may be grassroots efforts that emerge directly from ALE or activities in other sectors such as health or nutrition that have an adult education component. Sometimes they are so successful and important that they become models for much larger efforts or eventually win wider support. Yet, these are often the most precarious and underfunded. Funding should be used to support small-scale, local efforts to meet ALE needs. These can be viewed as seed-fund projects that could serve as models for larger scale initiatives if they are demonstrated to be successful. In other words, grassroots programs can be particularly effective in responding to specific needs and also serve as incubators for innovation.

- Support the collection and use of high quality (quantitative and qualitative) data on ALE at both the national and cross-country levels to both advocate for and strengthen provision at the local, state, and national levels

The work of ALE scholars is extremely important in documenting its impact at the individual, national, and global levels. Research can support advocacy work and influence policy on ALE. It can also be used to improve recruitment, participation, program development and implementation, and instruction. However, it is important to acknowledge that different kinds of data serve different purposes. For example, some data are relevant in ensuring that reports on literacy levels from countries are valid. For meaningful cross-country comparability, however, a different standard for data collection may be necessary. For an impact on national policies it is often more relevant to come up with national level surveys and statistics, because these statistics are closely linked to a common understanding of ALE within

the country. Further, a sense of ownership and relevance is higher when the data are collected on behalf of the national ministry and by a country's own universities or statistical bodies. Monitoring the process would then require regular waves of data collection (every 10 years, for example). This within-country-comparison would avoid comparing different understandings of ALE across countries and it would support capacity building and a consultation process within the countries. Longitudinal data is particularly important for the causal evidence it provides of impact. Qualitative data creates important illustrative data about the conditions under which adult learning can be effective in a range of contexts for the diversity of learners filling in details that quantitative research omits.

- Highlight and strengthen the role of ALE within LLL by reinforcing the importance of a lifelong and lifewide approach to learning

Life expectancy around the world ranges from 51 to 88 years (Worlddata 2023) and is constantly rising. This means that after formal education, e.g. up to the age of twenty, the average life expectancy offers another approximately 30 to 60 years during which adults could continue learning through all phases of their lives. This is the longest period for learning. Therefore, lifelong learning is primarily adult learning and education.

The education of children and youth will always be a priority, but the importance of providing a range of educational opportunities for adults should not be diluted or only an afterthought (Belzer & Grotlüschen, 2022) within that concern. Clear connections between ALE and economic and social benefits have been demonstrated, but these can only accrue when adults have the opportunity to pursue academic credentials, vocational training, and skills that can benefit their families and their communities in formal compensatory, formal worker development programs, and non-formal settings. The needs for learning in adulthood cannot be met in any one way or any one context, but rather must be broad and comprehensive if they are to be effectively addressed. Not only can research and data make this imperative clear, but the expectations of SDG 4 and the MfA also drive home this priority.

- Leverage the flexibility and responsiveness of ALE to build on its strengths

ALE practitioners working at the micro and meso levels have demonstrated over and over, in country after country, that they can rise to the needs of learners in times of crisis, can remain active when governmental commitment is low, and can look to the future to meet emerging needs. While

these qualities, that tend to define the field generally, are a strength that should be leveraged, this should not be taken to mean that ALE is sustainable no matter what. Rather, the field can be most responsive when well-funded and well supported. However, it is important to note that policy-driven funding and other governmental supports can also inhibit flexibility and responsiveness.

- Ensure that ALE meets the wide range of educational, training, and civic needs that learners, employers, and governments have for learning in adulthood

The two most common and most highly supported forms of ALE are compensatory and vocational. Both serve important needs for credentialing and employability, but are relatively narrow in scope. ALE that serves community and family needs, that forwards civil discourse and democracy, and that has the potential to decrease inequality and increase social cohesion is often underfunded and sometimes, more or less, ignored or even discouraged. ALE that fully meets its potential will offer learning opportunities in a wide variety of contexts to meet a wide variety of needs.

The most effective structural mechanisms for accomplishing this are not definitely known. Rather, whether by statute or tradition, ALE is under a structural umbrella that covers lifelong learning or exists as its own distinct sector, it is less important than that it is understood as a priority. Weighing the pros and cons of where to "place" ALE should be done carefully; there will be different solutions in different contexts. However, in each case there should be full consideration of the distinct goals, needs, and challenges of ALE provision understood as separate from those for educating or children and youth.

- Provide meaningful support for ALE at the micro, meso, and macro levels

ALE can only fulfil its potential with policy level commitment. This can be demonstrated through legislation, funding, coordination, research, and knowledge sharing. Without adequate commitment, ALE will always be the poor step-child that can never live up to its potential. With a policy level commitment it can help individuals, families, and communities thrive. ALE can also play a role in addressing global crises such as climate change, hunger, conflict, and disinformation, but it must have the resources and support needed for it to thrive and succeed.

Annex I: Country Specific Examples

Even though the research questions and the design of the study highlight a comparative analysis, there are examples of the relationship between LLL and ALE from each country that are uniquely informative. There may be a certain overlap with the mega-, macro-, meso and micro level analysis, because there are commonalities such as the rise of right-wing populism in Brazil and India and overcoming Soviet structures in Ukraine and Kyrgyzstan. However, some aspects of the country-specific ALE context have not yet been discussed.

Overcoming War in a post-soviet era in Ukraine

Beginning with Ukraine, two main aspects can be pointed out that are specific for that country. First of all, the Ukrainian state is still dealing with a war, forced by the Russian attack in 2022. Secondly, as a former Soviet member state, former Soviet structures still play a role in institutional and societal structures. Both these aspects are visible in the empirical data and will be elaborated in more detail in this section with regard to selected aspects.

To begin, the empirical data of the Ukrainian case shows positive implications for ALE structures as a result of the war. The interview partners especially highlight that they hope and expect changes in how educational processes work. They

- think nowadays [there will be] new opportunity for ALE because [the] war will change [the] structure of educational processes, and it requires retraining [and] requalification for adults [which] will be new opportunities for them … this is not like …[the] war will change the education process itself…but also [there will be a] great necessity to have new working places, new experts, specialists to create them, this requirement… requalification. (Ukraine, Pos. 77)

In addition, the experts there point out that economic changes as result of the war and people returning from battlefields, full of motivation, might amplify and support these changes (Ukraine, Pos. 68 & 83). This process might also offer a chance to build new structures with new norms (societal, legislative), as well as rebuilding everything from zero (Ukraine, Pos. 81).

With reference to structural changes, the interview partners especially put a focus on former Soviet structures. They mention that they

- have lots of institutions that remain the same that we have from Soviet Union times and of course they need to be rebuilt, restructured, reorganised (Ukraine, Pos. 78).

and

- as soon as the war will be stopped, we will create new competitive market, Ukrainian market, where we could use all our opportunities to ruin this monopoly of old institutions (Ukraine, Pos. 83).

In a nutshell, the interviewees hope to be able to create a new way, an Ukrainian way, to organise their society and institutions – which explicitly indicates the change of educational structures, as well (Ukraine, Pos. 87), not least of which is to dry up a flow of a huge amount of money into these old soviet structures and hence create a realistic competitiveness for other educational structures such as NGOs (Ukraine, Pos. 78 – 79, 80 & 81).

This topic can also be found in the empirical data of the Kyrgyzstan focus group. Experts there also mentioned the struggle with former soviet structures and their influence on today's work. They especially address educational traditions and the utilized way of teaching. Because in the Soviet times they

- had only one education, one diploma for 40, 50 yrs. (Kyrgyzstan, Pos. 157)

The interview partners describe the conflict for today's changes and structures as

- if you work in your workplace for 40 years, it means that you are a good worker. Now (…), once a year they go to a centre and train, but not [on] new skills, the same. But now change skills, occupation, qualification; everything changes now. Tomorrow they have a new qualification, need new skills (Kyrgyzstan, Pos. 158–159).

In summary, in Ukraine and Kyrgyzstan, the old Soviet structures and ways of learning and teaching are no longer viable in today's context. Especially by referring to Lifelong learning the Interviewees from Kyrgyzstan name an educational framework they value as necessary for implementing from the macro to micro level to change structures (Kyrgyzstan Focus Group, Pos. 157). In Ukraine, we can see a society, institutions, and state undergoing accelerated change. By facing the war, Ukraine can be named as the country with the most dynamic activities compared to the other country cases in this study regarding structural changes, including influences on ALE and related terms. The chances of breaking with the past is a predominant topic of hoefulness, despite the current, ongoing challenges of fighting back the Russian attack.

Certificates for Outgoing Migration from Kyrgyzstan

As previously mentioned, the data from the Kyrgyzstan focus group points out some historically conditioned structures which influence the current adult educational context, including adult learners' topics. Here, we focus on how current existing educational structures (as result of the historical Soviet structures) in Kyrgyzstan match labour market needs and thereby requirements for adult learning.

It stands out that the the Kyrgyzstan focus group interviewees differentiate consequently between a governmental formal adult education sector and a private non-formal one with reference to the recognition of vocational education certificates (Kyrgyzstan, Pos. 65–68, 74, 76, 77, 134, 140, 141–143, 148). For example, they describe that

- now the government said they are willing to recognize nonformal education so we need time to prepare this (…) because you know in our country all formal education have the process to accreditation. if they they have no accreditation in their programs, they can't give the government certificate. (Kyrgyzstan, Pos. 65–68)

The interview partners discuss furthermore that "for informal education it will be hard to get this accreditation process" (Ibid.). However, they also state that there is an ongoing validation and recognition of good practice regarding the informal sector from the governmental perspective. This might influence policy making on the national level and thereby open new opportunities for the private sector (ibid.). The recognition of certificates, and therefore the role of the informal sector, is described the interviewees as important because many employers might think that they can only hire peo-

ple with certificates from formal governmental education centres. Having an official recognition of the private/informal sector's certificates might change this (Kyrgyzstan, Pos. 148).

Both the associations and representatives of training centres agree that flexibility is a high value and that governmental structures are less flexible than private providers (profit and nonprofit) (Kyrgyzstan, Pos. 105). The interviewees emphasise that specific situation to be of great significance because

- especially in [remote] regions, we can [offer] mobile courses, we can take trainer and equipment and move to a village that is very far and make training there. Vocational schools cannot do that. They are stable, they have good material base buildings, equipment. (Kyrgyzstan, Pos. 105)

In this way, the focus group points out that private and public structures react on governmental skill development funding, and as a result, build up educational, work-related programs which might be needed there, such as topics on computer literacy for employees (Kyrgyzstan, Pos. 106–107).

Apart from the recognition of certificates from the private sector in Kyrgyzstan, the focus group also discussed a focus on outgoing migration to Russia and other nearby countries and therefore the need for official certificates. People migrate to other countries because of a lack work in Kyrgyzstan (Kyrgyzstan, Pos. 37).

- Russia demands official certificates, but some migrants take certificates from private training centres and [whether] it's enough, it depends on [the] employer even in Russia, in Korea, in Turkey, in Kazakhstan. Some employers really need it formal and some- they take into account only the quality of skills (Kyrgyzstan, Pos. 149 and Pos. 148).

So, outgoing working migrants can't be sure which certificate might be accepted in the end. In this context, the interviewees emphasise that skills should match the needs in the different countries (Kyrgyzstan, Pos. 142).

To conclude the Kyrgyzstan case, we can state that the experts there focus on necessities regarding vocational training and its strong dependence on formal and informal structures. Unique for that case is the importance of outgoing worker migration to nearby countries and thereby the connection to adult education with it.

Improving Food Security by Urban gardening in South Africa

South Africa has been heavily affected by a water crisis since 2018 as results of climate injustice, an energy crisis, and lockdowns and job layoffs because of the pandemic. The focus group also reported on lootings and riots, started by the incarceration of president Zuma in 2021 and fueled by the extreme inequality in the country. Unemployment affects both skilled and unskilled adults (South Africa, Pos. 90). However, activists have started building solidarity economy (South Africa, Pos. 6). Non-formal adult education is seen as faster and more flexible than formal learning and allows to build local economies. The International Labor Organization just launched a report stating: "This work ranges from early childhood development and care for our elderly, to cooperatives providing fresh food and critical services such as finance and transport." (ILO 2021, p.2). Training providers try to support informal learning that focuses immediate needs (Pos. 69). Activism answers the crisis on all levels and includes informal learning as well as self-organised and community-organised non-formal learning.

- learning [is] emerging as part of autonomous spaces where people are now beginning to act, starting to do life making things, community gardens all over the country, how to deal with the water issue, and peacemaking attempts where groups of people deal with xenophobia, gender-based violence and other forms of violence (South Africa, Pos. 58).

The respondents are well aware that the country was on the edge of becoming ungovernable, with vigilantism and armed gangs taking over the power to protect owners of supermarkets and gas stations. This is a situation that easily can turn against refugees and minorities and become uncontrollable. "South Africa could turn nasty very quickly" (South Africa, Pos. 5).

The activists currently organize in several networks, e.g. Cape Town Together, which is one of the Community Action Networks (CANs), as well as the Growers Network. A focus gro participant explains that the community action networks started to help based on donations and food parcels, but saw that would not be sustainable so they started growing heir own food (South Africa, Pos. 10). Most importantly, this movement is not an upper class game (like urban gardening is in Germany), but it is a growers movement that generates income by selling produce to the wealthier neighborhoods. The movement itself

- was a huge movement it went right through the informal settlements and its growing so much because it sustained and it sustained through regular activities meetings of seed exchanges of knowledge exchanges of selling, of trading it's another whole economy but it's a social economy (South Africa, Pos. 103–104)

Growing vegetables requires a lot of knowledge and several techniques that are not taught in schools. This starts with collecting compost instead of having to buy artificial fertilizer, it has to do with finding seeds and young plants, learning how to use water effectively and finally, "How to make a pot of food for 50 people nutritious and healthy" (South Africa, Pos. 106). The informants state:

- Most amazing that learning and education was part of it. Every other week, online meeting, see what have we learned, what do we need to learn and what other information and invite people to speak and give us information (South African Focus Group, Pos. 107)

The informants report that local CANs got connected to the "Food sovereignty movement and other, and that again gets linked to Climate justice" (South African Focus Group, Pos. 109). By avoiding political parties, the groups try to fix the problem by themselves, without waiting for policy makers to get involved. However, for getting a political voice, this connection to larger activist organizations is essential. Because so far, the policy reaction is described as disappointing:

- communities look after each other and build economies – and this is seen as almost ornamental. (South African Focus Group, Pos. 121)

Scholars and informants from this focus group recommend to better integrate the activism into the ALE policy making process, because they offer better solutions to burning problems than the current national skills strategy.

The regime of Hindu nationalism in India

The Modi government came into power in 2014. It is said to be seeking to transform the secular democracy into an authoritarian Hindu state. The reports from our informants are confirmed by several international journalists' as well as by researchers' (e.g. Jaffrelot 2021) and intellectuals' criticism

(e.g. Babst & Urech 2020). The transformation accelerated in 2019 and became physically dangerous for Muslims. Outsiders from communities, hired by Hindu-nationalists, provoke Muslims by burning their possessions. In turn, the Muslins get angry and react, not understanding that the provocation came from outsiders and was started to make the religious groups of a peaceful community fight against each other (India, Pos. 139–140).

The propaganda centres around Hinduism and the government tries to implement a view of it being superior to all other religions. The narrative goes:

- 'our religion is great and we will be the global gurus; we will be the world guru because our religion and our practices are so great' (India, Pos. 138).

The interviewees report incidents and examples (Pos. 153) that show that a certain Islamophobia always has long been present, but it did not come to the surface before 2014. Hindu-nationalism has a function, it helps keep the Modi government in power even if there are massive economic problems. The rhetoric is close to brainwashing and uses black and white examples from everyday aspects of life such as clothing, food and colors.

- With so many illiterate people, when you tell them what you worship is eaten by the other community… Food is a basic thing, food, clothes. [In] political talks, they use a very concrete thing that can be understood like food, like colours. So green is the colour of Muslim, orange [for] Hinduism. It goes down to that level. And social media of course putting fuel into the fire (India, Pos. 141–143).

This propaganda leads to incredibly violent riots and lynchings which fundamentally change the society

- they have been so successful in doing all this kind of stupid brainwashing that in the name of cow vigilantism they got hold of Muslim people going with the cattle, and got hold of them, and common people have beaten them to death. Common people. From villages. Its not the same society which can do a mob lynching [and] that is very common now (India, Pos. 144–147).

India does not stand alone, it belongs to a globalised world where its political position affects many others. The Indian government did not condemn the Russian attack against Ukraine in 2022. At the same time German negotiations by the foreign minister aim at improving business relations

with India in order to get away from depending on China. With this shift to nationalism and populism, ALE was defunded, because the money went to propaganda, as key informants agree.

The Yes I Can Australian Aboriginal literacy campaign: bringing people back into the fold

While historical inequalities in social outcomes between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians have been acknowledged over many years, and despite the existence for over a decade of a national strategy for Closing the Gap[5]in vital areas including educational outcomes, no target has ever been set specifically to address the educational disadvantages experienced by Indigenous adults. The lack of a specific policy commitment to address the very low literacy and numeracy levels of no less than 40 percent of Indigenous Australian adults together with the lack of a coherent adult learning and education policy framework leaves few options for Indigenous adults to access appropriate literacy provision (Boughton & Williamson, 2019). Solutions outside the limited employment-focused government programs needed to be sought.

The *Yes I can* program was first introduced in a remote Aboriginal community in 2012, and is based on the well-established mass literacy campaign model *Yo sí Puedo* developed in Cuba and implemented in many communities in the Global South. *Yes I can* in Australia is running in a number of remote and regional Aboriginal communities, supported by the Literacy for Life Foundation (LFLF), a charity set up to train local community members to deliver literacy classes for their community members. It was initiated by people who had facilitated the *Yo sí puedo* campaign in Timor Leste and saw the benefit of the model for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. While *Yes I can* is not run within the framework of any existing government funded literacy programs, it has secured some government funding:

> a bit of funding through ... the [federal government's] Workplace English Language and Literacy funding. So again, very much tied to, you know, employment outcomes.(Australia, Pos. 359)

An example they gave of the kind of regulatory requirements they face as a recipient of government funding, albeit only meeting part of the cost of

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[5]/   *https://www.closingthegap.gov.au/*

running the program, is the need to assess the learners using a standard-ised tool:

> We early on adopted a practice of doing pre- and post-training assessments using the Australian Core Skills Framework. ...It's an uneasy mix. We're non accredited, completely grassroots. And yet we're using this instrument of accreditation and monitoring. Because … you've got to fight even harder to demonstrate that what you're doing has rigor and validity when you're non accredited, grassroots, community based. So there's just this uneasy mix constantly and what we do, yeah. (Australia, Pos. Pos. 465)

The expert informant from the LFLF explained that the federal government funding was never guaranteed to continue and so the continuity of the program was always precarious.

> with our ongoing pursuit of funding we really fall between many pillars, … we're bumped between education and skills, you know, [which are] different departments and … it turns out that nobody really has ultimate responsibility for this. It's shared across multiple departments, but there's no real obvious home for it because Department of Education is schools based…. and there is no adult … there's no kind of adult education bucket other than skills and employment. So it's this constant kind of trying to carve out that space for the work that we do. (Australia, Pos. 367)

Reconciling the poor fit between the only available government funding and what the program is really about has not been easy.

> And we appreciate that, you know, to get funding, but we also … fight our corner, which is… adult learning as a human right. And, … really, if people don't have any intention of being employed, it's not what they're there for. They want to read to their grandkids, they want it [for] whatever purpose they're there for. That is as legitimate as the 18 and 19 year old who's, you know, missed out on schooling and is coming back in order to get an entry level job. So, but that's … a very hard case to make and very hard to justify the funding. (Australia, Pos. 374)

It was also explained that the *Yo sí puedo* model is firmly committed to community control of the program.

It's also meant to be a population level intervention. … It's about staying in a community until you've reached a critical mass of ... people have come through. So ... really the aim ...., it was kind of a big picture, reduce the rates of low English literacy by about 3percent in a community because then you've got a viable kind of adult population who can take back control of local organisation. (Australia, Pos. 419)

The commitment to being a community-driven and owned program has meant training up community members who had no teacher training to become facilitators for the program because there were no trained teachers within the communities who could take up these roles.

The LFLF claims that the program has been running in 13 communities and graduated 303 participants[6]. The program uses some very structured lesson plans used globally in the *Yo sí puedo programs,*

So lesson plans are very structured and very prescriptive and … repetitive so that there's a kind of algorithm people can kind of get used to quickly. But we also need to have the flexibility to change and contextualize this model to each community and to the staff that we have and their skill sets and experience. (Australia, Pos. 453)

The LFLF informant explained this flexibility was a key source of the program's strength: "it's the pedagogy of contingency, ..., you're meeting people where they're at, and you're understanding the complications and interruptions that characterize their lives" (see also Boughton & Williamson, 2019).

The LFLF acknowledges that what the government may be seeking as success from the program may be different to what is valued by the communities where the program is run. The evaluation of the programs suggest that it is the personal and social outcomes, more than the human capital outcomes that stand out:

it's things like people … joining community organisations, … and you know, there's people [who will go to meetings at] the local Land Council, or the education group, or the community working party ... But other things like just being able to hold their head high.

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[6]/ *https://www.lflf.org.au/*

> … the self esteem and confidence is something that's commented on a lot. …They're disenfranchised, … long term marginalised on the periphery of their own community. And what the leadership say to us within the community over and over again, is that… these people have come back into the fold. (Australia, Pos. 509)

Their report of the evaluations suggests that *Yes I can* is succeeding in mobilising Aboriginal adults to engage in the program. But they admit it is only a first step:

> it's the very first step on a ladder that we assist people onto. And then the next job for us, and this is what determines long term success and sustainability of the outcomes is how we help to build that capacity and build that prioritising of adult education, … to whatever direction whatever their personal aspirations are. (Australia, Pos. 518)

What remains a major challenge is the 'what next' for those who complete the *Yes I can* program:

> where people leave us, they're still only really at the top end of level one of the Australian core skills framework. There needs to be more acknowledgement and resourcing in that space to be able to get people to continue on in further education. It's just not, it's just not enough. What we can do, … it's really just about … trust us to give education a second chance, and experience what it's like to succeed, even at a modest level, and take that confidence. (Australia, Pos. 652)

Engaging community elders in adult learning and education in Thailand

Thailand has a long and well-established history of adult education policies dating back nearly 100 years. The ownership of responsibilities for adult education at all levels of government from the national level down through the regions, provinces and down to the local districts and sub-districts may be attributed to the longevity of their history of adult education. This, together with having a designated Office of Non-formal and Informal Education (ONIE) may explain the responsiveness to emerging needs that appears to be a feature of adult learning and education in Thailand.

The ageing demographic of the society – 10 percent of the population are reported to be elderly – has led to programs to support this segment of the population. The non-formal and informal adult education sector consists of three kinds of programs: adult basic education including literacy and primary and secondary school equivalency education, vocational development and 'quality of life development' education It is the third of these that is serving an important role for the elderly in the Thai communities.

An expert informant explained that the government had established a "spiritual plan" to ensure a good quality of life for this population. This has involved facilitating group meetings where health professionals might be invited to develop and share their knowledge about matters concerning their health. The involvement of the local government and the support from local civil society organizations, businesses and service providers enables the coordinators of 'quality of life education' programs to organize meetings and information sessions such as these once the needs are identified.

Another side of this "spiritual plan" has been to enable the elderly people to share their "local wisdom" and expertise with younger members of the community. This could involve classes on cooking, traditional music and dance or craft. Thus, intergenerational learning where the senior members of the community are teaching the younger members is a feature in some communities.

Interest for these programs is determined locally: "they use several strategy like the temple meeting, village meeting, public hearing, getting together like a small group informally, and talking about what they want to learn." Programs that respond to emerging needs are accommodated by the flexibility that is possible in organizing the local educational plans. One of the key informants explained that "their organizing plan is rather flexible. It depends on each area, the needs of people and the contexts of the areas. Yes".

"We don't live in Paulo Freire land for nothing": Examples of popular education in Brazil

As noted earlier, Brazil constitutionally enshrines the right to education at any age. However, the education that is offered by statute is compensatory, nearly exactly mirroring primary and secondary education, often in actual schools for children. Government sponsored, non-formal and popular education has been largely defunded in recent years. In fact, Bolsonaro, the former right wing-nationalist president of Brazil promised when running for election that he would abolish the adult education Secretariat which he

considered subversive due to its cultural and historical connection to popular education and Paulo Freire. When he came to office, the Secretariat was abolished, and adult education was housed in a much lower level of the ministry with only a few staff people. So although programs still exist, there is currently no budget and no staff for non-formal education. Even in the formal ALE sector, enrollments have significantly dropped.

However, there are some good examples of non-formal educational offerings that have existed outside this government sanctioned system that are more learner-centred and have greater attention to the specific needs of poor people, workers, and the landless. These tend to be funded through partnerships or non-governmental entities.

One example dates back to the 1990s when the government wasn't paying much, if any, attention to adult literacy. It was an ALE project that was a partnership between a local building trade union and a university. At times, the project had some university financial assistance and international and national support as well, but these were unstable and having enough financial support was always a challenge. Perhaps this gave them a kind of licence to invent a program that was very centred on the needs of learners. While it started as a literacy program where they brought the program to the building site (where the workers lived) and used University students as teachers (with fairly intensive training and supervision), they realised there were many other educational needs and interests. For example, there were art workshops and cultural activities and a library; it was an idea of education that was "something much broader than just pure schooling". The program lasted for 28 years and had tremendous success "reaching the building workers, training university students as adult educators, and as a general mobilisation helping the building trade union which, as a result, became a stronger and more democratic, effective, participative and representative [organisation]". Some participants went on to complete primary education, some completed secondary education, and a few went to university; they also assumed positions of leadership within the trade union. There were also reported improvements in communication within the workers' families as a result of participating. Other federations of trade unions also developed literacy and ALE programs. In general, they can offer a more flexible version of adult school; in some cases there were concerted efforts to integrate school education with professional training and qualifications.

Another ALE opportunity that exists outside of the governmental structure and is quite distinct from the government sanctioned replication of child and youth education for adults is organised by the Landless Movement which is a highly developed national movement. They provide both school education for children, adult education and literacy. An example

of adult education comes from their focus on organic agriculture which means elimination of toxins, and any sort of chemical fertiliser. They have what are called "settlements" for workers created with land which was expropriated from big farms that couldn't prove that they were productive. They are taken over by the state and then distributed by workers who don't have land. The movement does a lot of training for workers to use their land in the best possible forms.

The existence of non-formal education has greatly declined in Brazil, however, due to changing political contexts. This illustrates that a broadly defined view of ALE which not only includes compensatory and vocational education but also education that meets the needs and interests of learners beyond a credential are perhaps most vulnerable to funding cuts and loss of support in spite of their important (potential) outcomes.

The invisibility of ALE in Jordan

Jordan's ALE provision was characterised by our experts as fragmented without much centralised, government led oversight. Although there are many different entities providing adult education, ALE as a part of an educational system is invisible in Jordan. There is not even a word for ALE in Arabic that evokes its function. As one expert explained, "There is no national definition [of adult education]…The concept itself is not well defined… when you say in Arabic, adult education, it literally means old education"

Adult education is largely focused on vocational and technical education, professional qualifications, and continuing education offered through the Ministry of Education, higher education, the private sector, international organisations and NGOs, nonprofits and charities. It is typically referred to as "continuing education". This long list of providers is one characteristic of ALE in Jordan that our informants suggested is problematic. They described the field as fragmented with no umbrella entity overseeing curriculum, monitoring quality, or collecting data on learners and learning outcomes. Even definitions of what ALE means and encompasses is localised to specific contexts. Many institutions and organisations working in the field do not even see themselves as adult education providers. As our informants explained, "Although there are many institutions that are working in the field, they are saying that they are working in the field of development, social development, community development. But actually, what they are doing is adult education without talking about adult education. So the concept…of adult education is missing."

Without centralised attention on ALE, in spite of a growing need for it due to rising unemployment and a large influx of Syrian refugees, the

quality of adult education opportunities and participation is generally low. Although there are about 3,000 local community-based organisations spread throughout the country that are taking up this role, they are not monitored and there is no recognized pathway from them into formal educational settings that can yield a recognized certificate or qualification.

There are two new directions that ALE provision in Jordan is heading in, however. The private sector is starting to get more involved. Our informants suggested that it is much better able to nimbly and flexibly respond to the labour market (a gap between the market and VET provision was noted). However, the private sector does not operate within an organised system of ALE. The Jordan experts emphasised the need for putting all programs, operating within many different sectors, under one umbrella. One said, "because without this, I think the chaos always will be there…This will enhance the quality because at that time, we can find a common criteria to make connection everything".

The second direction is doing just that: the government taking on a more centralising role in ALE. DVVI worked with several ministries to conduct the first ever adult education conference in Jordan in 2019. Prior to that, they had developed a policy paper (DVVI, Ministry of Education, University of Jordan and other ministries were involved) recommending the formation of a coherent adult education system. The conference adopted the paper and it is now the basis of work to develop a national framework for adult education. Our informants are optimistic that the framework would improve adult education, but there are many hurdles to getting it approved. Even in this process, the lack of knowledge about the purposes of adult education is viewed as a barrier to achieving success. Additionally, there is concern that some donors will resist a more unified approach because all efforts will be under the authority of the Ministry of Education (making training less visible as a separate entity; one that has received significant outside support). "So there are many levels of challenges—from [the] community level, local level, governmental level, nongovernmental level, but also international donors".

Annex II: Terminology

To provide on a common meaning of the utilized subject-specific terminology we use in this report, the terms of *Adult Learning and Education (ALE), Lifelong Learning (LLL), macro-, meso- and microlevels of adult learning and education, formal, non-formal and informal adult learning and education* and *Goal 4 of the UNESCO's Sustainable Development Goals* are defined by bringing in selected sources. We also provide in this annex the general research questions that guided our work as well as the interview protocol used in the focus groups.

Adult Learning and Education

Our basic understanding of the term *Adult Learning and Education* comes from the UNESCO definition published in the 2015 *Recommendation on Adult Learning and Education*, RALE (UNESCO 2015):

"Adult learning and education is a core component of lifelong learning. It comprises all forms of education and learning that aim to ensure that all adults participate in their societies and the world of work. It denotes the entire body of learning processes, formal, non-formal and informal, whereby those regarded as adults by the society in which they live, develop and enrich their capabilities for living and working, both in their own interests and those of their communities, organizations and societies. Adult learning and education involve sustained activities and processes of acquiring, recognizing, exchanging, and adapting capabilities" (UNESCO 2015, p. 6).

Lifelong Learning

Some see lifelong learning as equivalent to adult learning and education. Others may see it as a recognition of different forms of adult learning, especially informal learning. A systematic approach would see lifelong learning as primary, secondary, tertiary and quaternary sector of education. And lifelong, life wide learning is also used to highlight all content of adult learning,

e.g. basic adult education, professional development as well as citizenship education.

Formal, non-formal, and informal adult learning and education

We base our understanding of the terms *formal, non-formal, and informal Adult Learning and Education* on the classification of learning activities (CLA) published by the European Union in 2016 (European Commission & Eurostat, 2016).

Formal learning is understood as taught learning that leads to a recognized certificate, e.g. school qualifications, vocational certificates and tertiary diplomas. Formal learning in this report tries to separate between children/adolescents versus adults. That means primary and secondary school programs that are taught to children and adolescents are not the focus here while second chance school programs for adults are considered to be **formal adult learning and education**. Similar differentiations are made for initial vocational training that addresses adolescents versus further (vocational) education and training offered to adult learners, e.g. by employment services. Tertiary programs for non-traditional adult students are not discussed in the focus groups but could have been as examples of formal learning.

Non-formal adult learning and education is taught in structured and systematic, planned workshops and programs and understood as institutionalized learning and education but without having the authorization to issue formal recognition of completion. This may take place at the workplace, in community centers, as well as in non-governmental organizations or associations. A subsection can be seen in informal, local groups that organize non-formal learning activities.

Informal adult learning and education is self-organized and may not be formally planned or structured. It includes individual and group learning (like asking colleagues how to use a software), but it usually does not have an agreement on where and when to meet or what should be the subject matter. A sub-version is implicit learning (or learning *en passant*), where the learner did not even have an intention to learn. This may happen when newcomers pick up ways of working in a new job or job position or with new partners.

Sustainable Development Goal 4

As reference for a basic understanding on education we refer to the UNESCO's Sustainable Development Goals (SGDs) especially to Goal 4 (UN 2015, p. 15 seq.).

   Goal 4 includes the aim to "ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all" (ibid.). In detail goal 4 differentiates between goals 4.1 – 4.7:

4.1 By 2030, ensure that all girls and boys complete free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education leading to relevant and Goal-4 effective learning outcomes

4.2 By 2030, ensure that all girls and boys have access to quality early childhood development, care and preprimary education so that they are ready for primary education

4.3 By 2030, ensure equal access for all women and men to affordable and quality technical, vocational and tertiary education, including university

4.4 By 2030, substantially increase the number of youth and adults who have relevant skills, including technical and vocational skills, for employment, decent jobs and entrepreneurship

4.5 By 2030, eliminate gender disparities in education and ensure equal access to all levels of education and vocational training for the vulnerable, including persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples and children in vulnerable situations

4.6 By 2030, ensure that all youth and a substantial proportion of adults, both men and women, achieve literacy and numeracy

4.7 By 2030, ensure that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including, among others, through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture's contribution to sustainable development

Interview protocol

As part of focus group interviews we prepared an interview protocol to be used as leading structure during the interviews.

– – –

General checking before starting the recording:

Did everyone return the consent form
We will record the meeting – do all agree
START RECORDING
Repeat – all agreed to the recording
In case we use specific, short clips from the recording for a video, we will seek consent before publishing anything

Review definitions of ALE, LLL, macro and meso levels, and what SDG 4 is

It covered

Questions for RQ1:

Macro Level:

1. Is the term Lifelong Learning used in [country name] policy documents or other kinds of discourse? What does it mean when used in those contexts?

2. In what ways is Sustainable Development Goal 4 a part of discussions regarding Adult Learning and Education and Lifelong Learning?

3. Is there a national ALE policy in [country name]?
    1. If so, how would you summarize what that policy is?
    2. Who and what are the focus of ALE in [country name]?
    3. What is the relationship between vocational education and ALE in [name of country]?

4.

a. if yes, there is a policy: How did it get there (to have an ALE policy)? What policy strategies for implementing ALE as part of LLL have been effective?

b. if no, there is not a policy: What efforts have there been to promote a national ALE policy and what happened?

Meso Level:

5. Think about a meso-level ALE activity in your experience that was successful. We're especially interested in the social, political and economic context that contributed as well as how it got up and running, what the goal(s) was/were, who the partners and stakeholders were, what the primary educational activities were, and what supports were in place that contributed to its effectiveness.

   Probes—be sure to get information on:
   - social, political, and economic context
   - Goals/Purposes
   - Partners
   - Stakeholders
   - Activities
   - Participants
   - Supports
   - What obstacles were encountered and how were they overcome
   - Attributes of effectiveness

6. What about it makes you feel your example was successful? What does ALE success look like for you? What does it look like for policy makers?

7. From your experiences, what has been key to sustaining successful ALE activities?

Questions for RQ2:

8. Now, think about a meso-level ALE activity in your experience that was <u>not</u> successful. We're especially interested in the social, political and economic context that contributed as well as what efforts were made to try to get it up and running, what

the goal(s) was/were, who the partners and stakeholders were, what the primary educational activities were, and what barriers occurred that contributed to its lack of success.

Probes—be sure to get information on:
- Goals/Purposes
- Partners
- Stakeholders
- Intended activities
- Intended participants
- Supports/Supports lacking
- What obstacles were encountered and why? What prevented them from being addressed
- Attributes of ineffective/failed programs

9. What about it made you feel your example was unsuccessful? What about for policymakers?

10. In [name of country], over all, what do you see as the primary challenges that hinder the potential of ALE to address SDG 4?

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