

THE HAMBURG DECLARATION ON ADULT LEARNING

1. **W**e, the participants in the Fifth International Conference on Adult Education, meeting in the Free and Hanseatic City of Hamburg, reaffirm that only human-centred development and a participatory society based on the full respect of human rights will lead to sustainable and equitable development. The informed and effective participation of men and women in every sphere of life is needed if humanity is to survive and to meet the challenges of the future.
2. **A**dult education thus becomes more than a right; it is a key to the twenty-first century. It is both a consequence of active citizenship and a condition for full participation in society. It is a powerful concept for fostering ecologically sustainable development, for promoting democracy, justice, gender equity, and scientific, social and economic development, and for building a world in which violent conflict is replaced by dialogue and a culture of peace based on justice. Adult learning can shape identity and give meaning to life. Learning throughout life implies a rethinking of content to reflect such factors as age, gender equality, disability, language, culture and economic disparities.
3. **A**dult education denotes the entire body of ongoing learning processes, formal or otherwise, whereby people regarded as adults by the society to which they belong develop their abilities, enrich their knowledge, and improve their technical or professional qualifications or turn them in a new direction to meet their own needs and those of their society. Adult learning encompasses both formal and continuing education, non-formal learning and the spectrum of informal and incidental learning available in a multicultural learning society, where theory- and practice-based approaches are recognized.
4. **T**hough the content of adult learning and of education for children and adolescents will vary according to the economic, social, environmental and cultural context, and the needs of the people in the societies in which they take place, both are necessary elements of a

new vision of education in which learning becomes truly lifelong. The perspective of learning throughout life commands such complementarity and continuity. The potential contribution of adult and continuing education to the creation of an informed and tolerant citizenry, economic and social development, the promotion of literacy, the alleviation of poverty and the preservation of the environment is enormous and should, therefore, be built upon.

5. **T**he objectives of youth and adult education, viewed as a lifelong process, are to develop the autonomy and the sense of responsibility of people and communities, to reinforce the capacity to deal with the transformations taking place in the economy, in culture and in society as a whole, and to promote coexistence, tolerance and the informed and creative participation of citizens in their communities, in short to enable people and communities to take control of their destiny and society in order to face the challenges ahead. It is essential that approaches to adult learning be based on people's own heritage, culture, values and prior experiences and that the diverse ways in which these approaches are implemented enable and encourage every citizen to be actively involved and to have a voice.
6. **T**his Conference recognizes the diversity of political, economic and social systems and governmental structures among Member States. In accordance with that diversity and to ensure full respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, this Conference acknowledges that the particular circumstances of Member States will determine the measures governments may introduce to further the spirit of our objectives.
7. **T**he representatives of governments and organizations participating in the Fifth International Conference on Adult Education have decided to explore together the potential and the future of adult learning, broadly and dynamically conceived within a framework of lifelong learning.
8. **D**uring the present decade, adult learning has undergone substantial changes and experienced enormous growth in scope and scale. In the knowledge-based societies that are emerging around the world, adult and continuing education have become an imperative in the community and at the workplace. New demands from society and

working life raise expectations requiring each and every individual to continue renewing knowledge and skills throughout the whole of his or her life. At the heart of this transformation is a new role for the state and the emergence of expanded partnerships devoted to adult learning within civil society. The state remains the essential vehicle for ensuring the right to education for all, particularly for the most vulnerable groups of society, such as minorities and indigenous peoples, and for providing an overall policy framework. Within the new partnership emerging between the public, the private and the community sectors, the role of the state is shifting. It is not only a provider of adult education services but also an adviser, a funder, and a monitoring and evaluation agency. Governments and social partners must take the necessary measures to support individuals in expressing their educational needs and aspirations, and in gaining access to educational opportunities throughout their lives. Within governments, adult education is not confined to ministries of education; all ministries are engaged in promoting adult learning, and interministerial co-operation is essential. Moreover, employers, unions, non-governmental and community organizations, and indigenous people's and women's groups are involved and have a responsibility to interact and create opportunities for lifelong learning, with provision for recognition and accreditation.

9. **B**asic education for all means that people, whatever their age, have an opportunity, individually and collectively, to realize their potential. It is not only a right, it is also a duty and a responsibility both to others and to society as a whole. It is essential that the recognition of the right to education throughout life should be accompanied by measures to create the conditions required to exercise this right. The challenges of the twenty-first century cannot be met by governments, organizations or institutions alone; the energy, imagination and genius of people and their full, free and vigorous participation in every aspect of life are also needed. Youth and adult learning is one of the principal means of significantly increasing creativity and productivity, in the widest sense of those terms, and these in turn are indispensable to meeting the complex and interrelated problems of a world beset by accelerating change and growing complexity and risk.
10. **T**he new concept of youth and adult education presents a challenge to existing practices because it calls for effective networking within the formal and non-formal systems, and for innovation and more

creativity and flexibility. Such challenges should be met by new approaches to adult education within the concept of learning throughout life. Promoting learning, using mass media and local publicity, and offering impartial guidance are responsibilities for governments, social partners and providers. The ultimate goal should be the creation of a learning society committed to social justice and general well-being.

11. **Adult literacy.** Literacy, broadly conceived as the basic knowledge and skills needed by all in a rapidly changing world, is a fundamental human right. In every society literacy is a necessary skill in itself and one of the foundations of other life skills. There are millions, the majority of whom are women, who lack opportunities to learn or who have insufficient skills to be able to assert this right. The challenge is to enable them to do so. This will often imply the creation of preconditions for learning through awareness-raising and empowerment. Literacy is also a catalyst for participation in social, cultural, political and economic activities, and for learning throughout life. We therefore commit ourselves to ensuring opportunities for all to acquire and maintain literacy skills, and to create in all Member States a literate environment to support oral culture. The provision of learning opportunities for all, including the unreached and the excluded, is the most urgent concern. The Conference welcomes the initiative for a literacy decade in honour of Paulo Freire, to begin in 1998.
12. **R**ecognition of *the right to education and the right to learn* throughout life is more than ever a necessity; it is the right to read and write, the right to question and analyse, the right to have access to resources, and to develop and practise individual and collective skills and competences.
13. **Women's integration and empowerment.** Women have a right to equal opportunities; society, in turn, depends on their full contribution in all fields of work and aspects of life. Youth and adult learning policies should be responsive to local cultures and give priority to expanding educational opportunities for all women, while respecting their diversity and eliminating prejudices and stereotypes that both limit their access to youth and adult education and restrict the benefits they derive from them. Any attempts to restrict women's right to

literacy, education and training must be considered unacceptable. Practices and measures should be taken to counter them.

14. ***Culture of peace and education for citizenship and democracy.*** One of the foremost challenges of our age is to eliminate the culture of violence and to construct a culture of peace based on justice and tolerance within which dialogue, mutual recognition and negotiation will replace violence, in homes and communities, within nations and between countries.
15. ***Diversity and equality.*** Adult learning should reflect the richness of cultural diversity and respect traditional and indigenous peoples' knowledge and systems of learning; the right to learn in the mother tongue should be respected and implemented. Adult education faces an acute challenge in preserving and documenting the oral wisdom of minority groups, indigenous peoples and nomadic peoples. In turn, intercultural education should encourage learning between and about different cultures in support of peace, human rights and fundamental freedoms, democracy, justice, liberty, coexistence and diversity.
16. ***Health.*** Health is a basic human right. Investments in education are investments in health. Lifelong learning can contribute substantially to the promotion of health and the prevention of disease. Adult education offers significant opportunities to provide relevant, equitable and sustainable access to health knowledge.
17. ***Environmental sustainability.*** Education for environmental sustainability should be a lifelong learning process which recognizes that ecological problems exist within a socio-economic, political and cultural context. A sustainable future cannot be achieved without addressing the relationship between environmental problems and current development paradigms. Adult environmental education can play an important role in sensitizing and mobilizing communities and decision-makers towards sustained environmental action.
18. ***Indigenous education and culture.*** Indigenous peoples and nomadic peoples have the right of access to all levels and forms of education provided by the state. However, they are not to be denied the right to enjoy their own culture, or to use their own languages. Education for indigenous peoples and nomadic peoples should be linguistically and culturally appropriate to their needs and should facilitate access to further education and training.

19. ***Transformation of the economy.*** Globalization, changes in production patterns, rising unemployment and the difficulty of ensuring secure livelihoods call for more active labour policies and increased investment in developing the necessary skills to enable men and women to participate in the labour market and income-generating activities.
20. ***Access to information.*** The development of the new information and communication technologies brings with it new risks of social and occupational exclusion for groups of individuals and even businesses which are unable to adapt to this context. One of the roles of adult education in the future should therefore be to limit these risks of exclusion so that the information society does not lose sight of the human dimension.
21. ***The ageing population.*** There are now more older people in the world in relation to the total population than ever before, and the proportion is still rising. These older adults have much to contribute to the development of society. Therefore, it is important that they have the opportunity to learn on equal terms and in appropriate ways. Their skills and abilities should be recognized, valued and made use of.
22. ***I***n line with the Salamanca Statement, integration and access for people with disabilities should be promoted. Disabled persons have the right to equitable learning opportunities which recognize and respond to their educational needs and goals, and in which appropriate learning technology matches their special learning needs.
23. ***W***e must act with the utmost urgency to increase and guarantee national and international investment in youth and adult learning, and the commitment of private and community resources to them. The Agenda for the Future which we have adopted here is designed to achieve this end.
24. ***W***e call upon UNESCO as the United Nations lead agency in the field of education to play the leading role in promoting adult education as an integral part of a system of learning and to mobilize the support of all partners, particularly those within the United Nations system, in order to give priority to implementing the Agenda for the Future and to

facilitating provision of the services needed for reinforcing international co-ordination and co-operation.

25. **W**e urge UNESCO to encourage Member States to adopt policies and legislation that are favourable to and accommodate people with disabilities in educational programmes, as well as being sensitive to cultural, linguistic, gender and economic diversity.
26. **W**e solemnly declare that all parties will closely follow up the implementation of this Declaration and the Agenda for the Future, clearly distinguishing their respective responsibilities and complementing and co-operating with one another. We are determined to ensure that lifelong learning will become a more significant reality in the early twenty-first century. To that end, we commit ourselves to promoting the culture of learning through the “one hour a day for learning” movement and the development of a United Nations Week of Adult Learning.
27. **W**e, gathered together in Hamburg, convinced of the necessity of adult learning, pledge that all men and women shall be provided with the opportunity to learn throughout their lives. To that end, we will forge extended alliances to mobilize and share resources in order to make adult learning a joy, a tool, a right and a shared responsibility.