

# Developments: Digitalisation prioritised by the new government

Overall, the responses from Germany see a slight deterioration of the situation in adult learning (ALE) in Germany for 2020/2021.

From the point of view of the EAEA members, there were no major changes in Germany from 2020 to 2021 in terms of the political design of adult learning and education. However, the COVID-19 pandemic had a major impact on adult education providers in Germany as well. The pandemic regulations changed substantially during the year and led to a temporary closure of the adult education centres. This also highlighted the urgent need for digitisation in terms of facilities, equipment, but also the need for better digital skills of educators and learners and as well as better access to tools and hardware. Digitalisation of adult learning has, therefore, been prioritised by the new government.

## Establishing a culture of continuing learning

Several strategies guide adult learning and education in Germany. They include the [Nationale Dekade für Alphabetisierung und Grundbildung 2016 - 2026](#) (National Decade for Literacy and Basic education 2016 - 2026). With the National Decade for Literacy and Basic Education, the Federal Government is continuing its intention, following the results of the National Strategy, to systematically address the topic of literacy and basic

education and to anchor it in education policy and planning. The Decade initially targets adults with German as their mother tongue as well as migrants who have lived in Germany for a longer period of time. In the medium term, however, refugees are also to be addressed.

Integration courses are also a key pillar of the adult learning landscape in Germany. A nationwide course system supports the integration efforts of new immigrants as well as migrants who have been living in Germany for some time. The integration course is part of the Federal Government's overall language programme, which consists of integration courses and job-related language courses. ([Volkshochschule.de](https://www.volkshochschule.de))

[The National Strategy for Continuing Education and Training](#) aims to establish continuing education as an integral part of professional and entrepreneurial development and create a common culture of continuing education in Germany. It promotes continuing education from three angles:

- jobseekers get new chances for a job with further training
- it helps employees to be fit for the working world of tomorrow
- companies, especially small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and micro-enterprises, benefit from targeted training measures to attract skilled workers.

In 2021, the [Initiative Digitale Bildung](#) (initiative for digital education) was launched. The aim of the initiative is to work together with all stakeholders - with learners and teachers, school authorities and representatives from politics, science and civil society - on the further development of digital teaching and learning opportunities and to discuss the potentials of digital education.

## Sustainable development in focus

DW remarks on the relevance of social and environmental sustainability within their

organisation. Consequently, they have a strategy to promote sustainability in their work procedures and learning programmes. Beyond the organisation, there are plans to develop a sustainable development strategy for the entire ALE sector of Germany. Despite that, DWV acknowledges that there is still potential for further implementation of the sustainable development goals (SDGs) as it varies substantially in the ALE sector. Concepts and recommendations for the implementation of the SDGs are developed by DWV and passed on to the adult education centres.

The National Action Plan for Education for Sustainable Development is a central political strategy for structurally anchoring Education for Sustainable Development in the German educational landscape. It addresses curricula, syllabuses and training regulations as well as the initial, further and continuing training of pedagogical staff in formal, non-formal and informal education. Further central aspects are also a stronger networking of ESD actors and good practice, as well as a holistic transformation of learning institutions towards sustainability.

## German organisations are participating actively in CONFINTEA VII

DWV has been active in the CONFINTEA process for many years and will participate in CONFINTEA VII, the seventh UNESCO International Conference on Adult Education, in 2022 through representatives of DWV. DWV also notes that German civil society is involved or consulted to a certain extent in the planning of CONFINTEA VII.

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# Challenges and outlook: Widening digital divide

As in many other European countries, the digital divide widened in Germany during the COVID-19 pandemic. Those who already had very good digital skills were able to continue learning in a digital environment and further improve their digital skills. However, those who had no, or good digital skills usually dropped out of learning activities altogether or had significant problems following learning activities and requirements. EAEA's members also noted that it was particularly challenging to reach the target groups due to the lack of digital environment (poor internet connection, no access to digital devices, etc.). Outreach work in general was much more difficult than before the pandemic.

The continuation of learning programmes suffered greatly in part due to the pandemic. Some programmes had to be discontinued completely, while others were shifted entirely to digital instruction. Some programmes were able to continue hybrid, i.e. partly online and partly face-to-face. This required major changes in terms of teaching methods, platforms, tools, technical equipment as well as digital skills. For face-to-face training courses, learning providers had to implement a number of COVID-19 safety regulations.

## Advocacy to increase funding for adult learning and education

The pandemic led to a more difficult financial situation for education providers. On the one hand, they lost income from course fees for courses that could not be held or could only be held in part, and on the other hand, they had greater expenses for new technical

equipment and train-the-trainer programmes to improve the digital skills of teaching staff.

EAEAs German members also report a slight deterioration in ALE funding and a change in priorities following the federal government elections, which resulted in a new government that places more importance on digitalisation.

DWV is doing several lobbying activities around ALE funding in Germany:

- lobbying in the context of the federal election
- advocacy to prevent a VAT obligation for educational services
- lobbying for federal support for digitalisation at the state level and
- cooperation with the Ministers of Education of the Lnder ("Kultusministerkonferenz").

The current focal points of work in Germany include the areas of digitalisation and the prevention of VAT on educational services in the field of adult learning and education. The DWV's annual theme for 2022 is "Together in Diversity", which is part of the multi-year work programme on "The Volkshochschule 2030: Together in Diversity. Sustainable. Connected."

DWV recommendation to the German Government Ministries is to drive digitalisation forward and continue to support affordable education for everyone.

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