

Developments: A high need for digital development

The situation of adult learning and education (ALE) in Germany has stayed the same in comparison to last year, according to The Deutscher Volkshochschul-Verband e.V. (DWW).

The DWW describes the German situation as follows:

- Currently, there are no more closures of adult education centres due to Covid-related issues.
- Former participants, however, need to be reactivated.
- There still is a high need for digital development, both for participants and instructors, as well as for facilities and equipment.
- Due to the new municipal sales tax obligation, which applies from January 1st 2023 onwards, there are high uncertainties in the adult education centres.

When it comes to new policies and strategies, the DWW mentions that for the first time, the coalition agreement of the new federal government contains a separate section on adult education.

Participation in policymaking

DWW participated in a hearing of the Conference of Ministers of Education and Culture on an "Initiative for Digital Continuing Education". The initiative calls for a federal funding programme originating from the federal government and directed at adult education centres (Volkshochschulen), among others.

In 2021, DWW lobbied for adult education in the context of the federal elections:

www.volkshochschule.de/wahl2021

Country reports by the European Commission

According to the DWV, the country reports of the European Commission do not reflect the situation in Germany. Besides, issues indicated in the country reports and the country-specific recommendations are not specifically taken into account when designing adult education and learning (ALE) programmes and projects in the German context.

Learners voice

In Germany, the voice of adult learners is not currently mentioned in ALE laws. However, learners can form learner councils within their adult education centres. The learners views are also represented by adult learning associations, based on their experience with the learning needs of their target groups.

Sustainability

The DWV has a strategy to coordinate and promote the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) in the ALE sector in Germany by developing concepts and recommendations for adult education centres. However, the implantation of the SDG varies and there still is potential for further implantation in the sector.

A national platform for education for sustainable development is available:

<https://www.bne-portal.de/bne/de/bundesweit/gremien/gremien.html>

CONFINTEA VII

DWV was present during the CONFINTEA VII conference and involved in the process leading up to the conference. There has also been a consultation between the German national UNESCO commission, the national ministries and civil society in Germany.

However, the DVW states that in order to make CONFINTEA more relevant, there should be more coordination between the global, European and national levels. This includes communicating the results of the outcome of the conference: the Marrakech Framework for Action (MFA). Additionally, there is a need for developing instruments to hold policymakers accountable for their promises in the framework.

Furthermore, the DVW states that in order to implement the MFA, reforms at all levels and a substantial increase in funding for ALE are necessary for Germany. In summary: CONFINTEA is important from a civil society perspective, but it is not sufficiently taken into account in national policymaking.

Challenges and future plans: Advocating for funding of ALE

According to the DVW, Covid-19 has had a lasting impact on ALE provision in Germany. Examples are the decreased funding for ALE since the beginning of the pandemic and the growing digital gap. The shifting learning activities did not attract a new group of learners, but ALE providers rather lost learners, especially those with low digital skills. In consequence, ALE providers had to reduce their staff.

Financing of ALE

In Germany, adult education is financed with project and programme funding, operating grants, fees paid by participants, vouchers, employer contributions and formula funding. In 2022, the funding of adult education has slightly deteriorated and the changing

political situation has impacted that.

The current federal government wants to reintroduce the national debt brake (Schuldenbremse), but at the same time, many special expenditures are necessary, not least in view of the effects of the war in Ukraine.

The DVW states that many of the promises made in the new coalition are unlikely to be kept due to the tight federal budget and changed priorities of the German government. One example is the initiative for the digitalisation of adult education centres, which relies on federal funding. Therefore, the DVW planned some advocacy strategies around the funding of ALE in Germany:

- Preventing a sales tax liability on educational services
- Enabling federal support for digitalisation at the state level
- Improving the administrative framework in the system of integration courses
- Emphasising the importance of general education over vocational education

Plans for the future

The DVW'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." For 2023 the annual theme will be Connected.

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