

CONFINTEA VI

MID-TERM REVIEW 2017

The status of adult learning and education in the Arab States

 REGIONAL REPORT



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Prepared by Sami Nassar



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Sami Nassar

INTRODUCTION

FROM 'ADULT EDUCATION' TO 'ADULT LEARNING AND EDUCATION'

Since the first International Conference on Adult Education (CONFINTEA), held in Elsinore, Denmark, in 1949, the concept of adult education has developed and broadened from being both a 'substitute education' for some men and women and supplementary education for all to playing a leading role in education (UNESCO, 1963, p. 5). CONFINTEA III, held in Tokyo, Japan, in 1972, suggested a new perspective for adult education by affirming that 'the future of adult education lay within the framework of life-long education' (UNESCO, 1972, p. 21).

Moreover, two landmark reports – the Faure Report (*Learning to Be*, 1972) and the Delors Report (*Learning: The Treasure Within*, 1996) – and the influential 1976 UNESCO *Recommendation on the Development of Adult Education*, set out the vital role of adult education as 'forming part of lifelong education and learning' (UNESCO and UIL, 2009, p. 24).

CONFINTEA V, held in Hamburg, Germany, in 1997, recognized lifelong learning 'from cradle to grave as a philosophy, a conceptual framework and an organising principle of all forms of education, based on inclusive, emancipatory, humanistic and democratic values, it also affirmed that adult learning and education represent a significant component of the lifelong learning process, which embraces a learning continuum ranging from formal to non-formal to informal learning' (UNESCO and UIL, 2009, p. 39).

CONFINTEA VI, held in Belém, Brazil, in 2009, adopted the Belém Framework for Action (BFA) to guide Member States in 'harnessing the power and potential of adult learning and education'. This framework contains five areas of action: policy, governance, financing, participation and inclusion, and quality.

From 2009 onwards, UIL has issued the *Global Report on Adult Learning and Education (GRALE)* as a monitoring mechanism of the BFA's five areas of action. *GRALE* is concerned with collecting and analysing data and information on participation and progress in adult education programmes, identifying challenges, evaluating change over time, and sharing best practices to improve the scope of adult learning and education (ALE).

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, adopted by the UN General Assembly on 25 September 2015, committed to 'providing inclusive and equitable quality education at all levels – early childhood, primary, secondary, tertiary, technical and vocational training. All people, irrespective of sex, age, race or ethnicity, and persons with disabilities, migrants, indigenous peoples, children and youth, especially those in vulnerable situations, should have access to life-long learning opportunities that help them to acquire the knowledge and skills needed to exploit opportunities and to participate fully in society' (UN-General Assembly, 2015).

At its 38th session, the General Conference of UNESCO, held in Paris from 3 to 18 November 2015, revised the 1976 *Recommendation on the Development of Adult Education*, and adopted the new *Recommendation on Adult Learning and Education (RALE)* (UNESCO and UIL, 2016), reflecting contemporary educational, cultural, political, social and economic challenges, as set out in the Hamburg Declaration and the BFA.

RALE (2015) reflects the drastic changes witnessed by the world today. It denotes the necessity of integrating the three types of learning processes– formal, non-formal and informal – under the umbrella of adult learning and education. To meet the demands of a knowledge society, the 2015 *Recommendation on Adult Learning and Education* regards ALE as the basis of a sustainable learning society that enhances lifelong learning in different settings and spaces for both the individual and the community. Another important feature of this new *RALE* is the broad and flexible concept of the term 'adult' to allow the inclusion of all target groups in ALE activities, regardless of their age or prior learning.

RALE provides a new definition and broader scope of ALE that offers a variety of continuing learning opportunities to equip adults with transversal and generic competencies and capabilities that enable them to exercise their rights and roles as active citizens capable of contributing to the political, social and economic activities of their communities.

THE ARAB CONTEXT: A REGION IN TRANSITION

Over the last five years, the Arab region has witnessed tremendous changes in all aspects of life, mainly because of the political events and conflicts that turned to civil war in some Arab countries. Change in the Arab region takes place in the context of global forces and trends. Changing age-structure and other demographic trends have exacerbated the challenges to governments, particularly regarding education, unemployment, under-employment and job creation. Low labour participation, partial empowerment of women, environmental degradation, food and water shortages, rapid urbanization and the insufficient provision of housing, education and medical care are yet other challenges.

In this respect, ALE in the Arab States has to face these obstacles and perform its mission in a region in transition, demographically, economically and politically.

POPULATION GROWTH

The *Arab Millennium Development Goals Report* predicts that the population in the Arab region will continue to grow, and there are remarkable movements of people from rural to urban areas, as young men and women leave agricultural employment in search of supposedly more reliable and better-paid urban jobs (UNDP and LAS, 2015, p. 7).

Another report reveals that the population reached 357.433 million people in 2010, and estimates that it will reach 467.945 million by 2025, with an annual growth rate of 1.8 per cent (*Appendix 1*). It is estimated that higher annual rates occur in conflict-affected countries, reaching 3.1 per cent per year in Iraq, and 3 per cent in Yemen. The biggest gains in population between 2010 and 2025 will be in Egypt (20 million), Iraq and Sudan (17 million each), and Yemen (13 million) (Mirkin, 2013, p. 12).

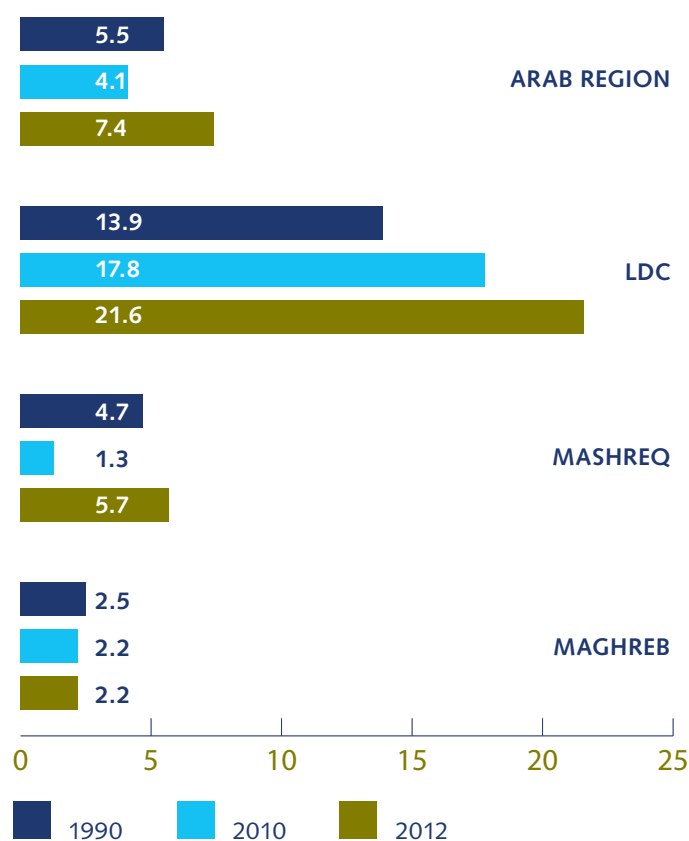
POVERTY AND UNEMPLOYMENT

Poverty, whether measured in terms of human capabilities or in money-metric terms of income or expenditure, reflects the convergence of social, economic and political exclusion. Poverty is glaring for the majority of the Arab rural population. It is sufficient to note that 50 per cent of the Arab population is rural, while agriculture, their primary economic activity, accounts for just 15 per cent of the region's GDP (gross domestic product). In fact, the

Arab region is the only developing region that has shown an increase in poverty and hunger since 1990, according to a 2014 United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) report. Extreme poverty has increased and the rate of reducing undernourishment is still below the target by 20 per cent (UNDP, 2014, pp. 116–119).

It is worth noting that great disparities exist among the Arab States. Countries such as Yemen and Sudan are suffering greatly, while the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries have more stable economies. *Figure 1* demonstrates extreme poverty that is particularly evident in the least developed countries (LDCs) and the other sub-regions. The categorization is as follows: LDCs comprise Mauritania, Sudan and Yemen; Mashreq countries comprise Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine and the Syrian Arab Republic; and the Maghreb region comprises Algeria, Libya, Morocco and Tunisia (World Education Forum, 2015, pp. 11–12).

Figure 1: Incidence of extreme poverty, based on the international poverty line of US \$1.25 a day (percentages)



Source: Data for 1990 and 2000 are from World Bank, 2013; data for 2012 are ESCWA estimates as quoted in World Education Forum, 2015, p. 12.

High rates of unemployment, poverty, critical economic conditions, and large numbers of internally displaced persons (IDPs) and refugees make the education situation very difficult in terms of poor infrastructure and facilities, absenteeism and drop-out of pupils for economic reasons or for fear of violent actions, shortened school days and disturbed school years. In the wake of the 'Arab Spring' in 2011, the youth unemployment rate rose sharply and is almost three times higher than the total unemployment rate. The Arab States need to create 12 million additional jobs by 2025 to prevent youth unemployment, currently at almost 30 per cent in the region, increasing even further.

POLITICAL CONFLICTS

Political instability, conflict, violence, surging fuel and food prices and food insecurity have precipitated significant forced population displacements within transition countries. Recent conflicts in the region have inhibited the development of Arab countries. Without noticeable improvements in employment prospects, especially for young people, rising demonstrations, unrest and violence appear unavoidable for the nearly half a billion people expected to be living in the Arab region by 2025 (UNDP, 2012, pp. 7–8).

About five years after the Arab Spring it seems that regime change did not necessarily lead to the diffusion of democratic values, and that traditional political values and practices (the obedience paradigm) are still legitimized as the ideal of good citizenship and active participation in political and social life. The turmoil and uncertainty that has followed the Arab Spring has negatively affected both formal and non-formal education in the region, especially damaging funding allocated to education and its infrastructure.

CRISIS OF REFUGEES

The crisis of refugees and IDPs, resulting from turmoil and civil war in Arab countries, is one of the most persistent challenges facing the region today. Millions of Syrian, Iraqi, Yemeni and Libyan refugees and displaced people need security, food, shelter, education and work. Some believe the crisis will lead to a 'lost generation', with the majority of Syrian children and young adults lacking

fundamental necessities and unable to gain an education. The crisis reveals the absence, or inadequate implementation, of existing norms, obligations or standards, and highlights the need for the international community to address the situation of 'stranded migrant workers' more systematically.¹

In 2013 alone, more than 9,500 people a day abandoned their homes as the Syrian Arab Republic entered its third year of conflict. As of December 2013, of the 4.8 million school-aged Syrian children and young adults, some 2.2 million inside the country were out of school, as were a half-million refugee children in Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey (UNESCO, 2015, p. 104).

GENDER ISSUES IN GENERAL EDUCATION

There has been strong regional progress towards gender parity in education, a crucial step to creating equal opportunities for women and men. Many more girls now go to primary school in the region; the gender parity index (GPI) for primary education reached 0.93 in 2011. This is, however, still below the parity level, set at 1 with a margin of plus or minus 0.03. Only GCC countries are within that range. The situation is similar in secondary education, where the majority of Arab countries, except the least developed countries, have achieved or are close to achieving gender parity. For the Arab region as a whole, the relevant GPI remains at 0.91, well below the parity level, due to the low GPI in LDCs. Indeed, LDCs face even more difficulties with secondary education than with primary education. The cost of secondary schooling is often higher, which can force parents to ration resources among children.

In tertiary education, the Arab States' GPI is 1.58 in GCC countries and 1.22 in Maghreb countries, while it is very low in LDCs, standing at 0.43. In some GCC countries, such as Qatar and the United Arab Emirates, the enrolment rate for women is double that of men; this is because of these states' ambitious development plans as well as the growing interest of women in getting university degrees to have better jobs, whereas men prefer to have their own businesses.

Yet women in the Arab States hold less than 20 per cent of paid jobs outside the agricultural sector. At the global level, women's share outside agriculture has slowly

1 <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2015/09/syrias-refugee-crisis-in-numbers>

increased, from 35 per cent to 40 per cent. In the Arab region, their share has decreased in the last 20 years. Only GCC and Maghreb countries have experienced a small increase; LDCs and Mashreq countries have seen a decline. The limited numbers of women who find paid employment are not on equal footing with men: on average, they are paid less than men for the same work. Women's wages in manufacturing as a share of men's wages in Egypt, Jordan, Palestine and the Syrian Arab Republic are 66 per cent, 68 per cent, 50 per cent and 79 per cent, respectively. The gender pay gap remains poorly unexplained, beyond the general notion of gender discrimination as a factor in persistent exclusion. There can also be gender differences in time use, as women may prefer part-time or lower-paying occupations to enable them to carry out their responsibilities at home. Women across the region are under-represented in senior management positions, such as legislators, senior officials and managers. In countries with available data, the highest share is in Kuwait at 14 per cent. For most other Arab countries, the share is below 10 per cent, with the lowest rate in Yemen at 2 per cent. Globally, women occupy only 25 per cent of senior management positions, but this is still much higher than in Arab countries (UNDP and LAS, 2015, pp. 22–24).

Even Tunisia, which has the highest percentage of women's participation in non-agricultural activities, comes below the average for developing regions. This low participation of women in the labour force, as opposed to the relatively high participation of women in higher education in some countries (e.g. the Gulf States), means the Arab region has the lowest labour force participation by women of all regions (UNDP, 2012, pp. 3–4).

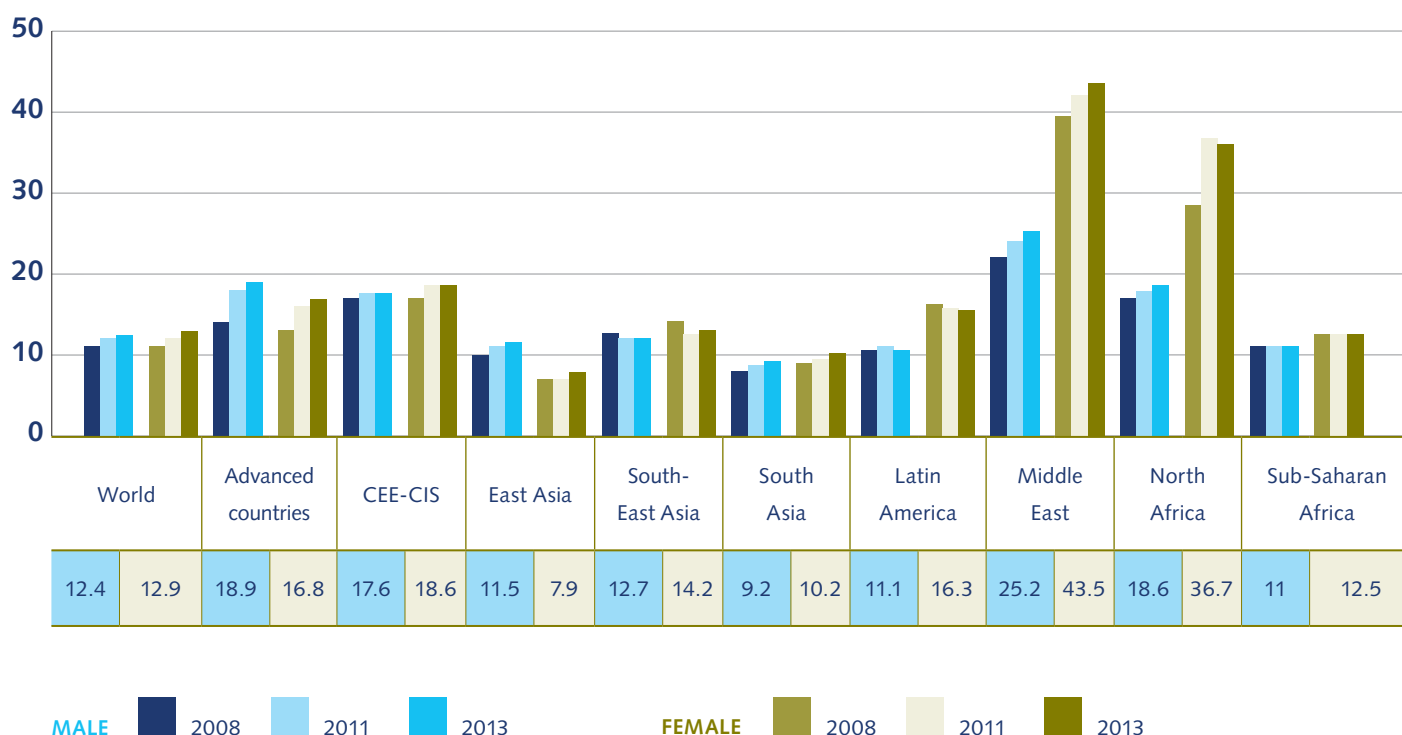
LITERACY DEVELOPMENT IN THE ARAB STATES

Literacy and basic skills are a major concern in the Arab States and are an essential component in the policies, legislations, structures and definitions of ALE. However, a small general improvement in adult literacy rates is manifested in a slight decrease in the number of illiterates.

The 2015 *Recommendation on Adult Learning and Education* defines literacy as a:

key component of adult learning and education. It involves a continuum of learning and proficiency levels, which allows citizens to engage in life-long learning and participate fully in community,

Figure 2: Participation of women in the labour force comparative to other regions in the world (percentages)



workplace and wider society. It includes the ability to read and write, to identify, understand, interpret, create, communicate and compute, using printed and written materials, as well as the ability to solve problems in an increasingly technological and information-rich environment. Literacy is an essential means of building people's knowledge, skills and competencies to cope with the evolving challenges and complexities of life, culture, economy and society. (UNESCO and UIL, 2016, p. 2)

This definition of literacy corresponds to the needs of Arab States, where literacy and basic skills of reading and writing come top of the list of priorities for target groups. It also opens wide perspectives for lifelong learning to equip people with twenty-first century skills, and could be used by the Arab States to develop the definition and objectives of literacy in their legislation and practice.

The Arab countries committed themselves to achieve the objectives of the World Declaration on Education for All (EFA), as well as to the Dakar Framework for Action and the United Nations Literacy Decade (UNLD). Several international and regional reports and studies have monitored the progress achieved in EFA's six goals in the Arab States as well as in ALE. These reports reveal that although progress has been achieved in primary education, literacy, equity and gender parity in general, Arab countries are still at risk of achieving neither the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in education nor the EFA goals. There are still sub-regional differences in

enrolment ratios, investment in education, and the gender parity index (GPI) between the Arab States, owing to economic conditions and political transformations (UNESCO Regional Bureau for the Arab States, 2014; UNESCO, 2015).

Table 1 shows the progress achieved in literacy between 2005 and 2012 and the projections made for literacy and illiteracy in 2015.

We can see from *Table 1* that slight progress has been made in the world adult literacy rate between 2012 and 2015. As a result of considerable efforts, the rate increased from 68 per cent in 2004 to 84 per cent in the period from 2005 to 2012, and it was projected to be 86 per cent by 2015. The total number of illiterates in the world was also projected to slightly decrease from 780.682 million in 2012 to 751.41 million in 2015. The female literacy rate remains the same, around 64 per cent, in the two periods due to population growth.

The situation is almost the same for the Arab States: the total number of illiterates decreased from 51.774 million in 2012 to 51.43 million in 2015, while the female literacy rate increased only from 66 per cent to 67 per cent due to population growth and other socio-economic factors. Prospect analysis showed that two countries, Morocco and Yemen, have a small chance of achieving SDG 4 ('Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all') by 2030, and six other countries, Algeria, Egypt, Iraq, Mauritania,

Table 1: Literacy and illiteracy (15+), 2005–2015

Country or territory	ADULT LITERACY RATE (15 and over / percentages)						ADULT ILLITERATES (15 and over)			
	2005–2012			Projected 2015			2005–2012		Projected 2015	
	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total sum	Female (%)	Total (000)	Female (%)
World	84	89	80	86	90	82	780,682	64	751,413	64
Countries in transition	100	100	99	100	100	100	1,144	69	77,978	65
Developing countries	80	86	75	83	88	78	771,717	64	742,803	64
Arab States	78	85	69	80	87	72	51,774	66	51,430	67

Sudan and Tunisia, were at serious risk of not achieving their 2015 target. This also shows the extent to which the literacy challenge is becoming urgent and large-scale (UNESCO, 2015, p. 135).

Table 2: Literacy rates in the Arab States, 2005–2014
(percentages)

COUNTRY	LITERACY RATE
Algeria	75
Bahrain	95
Egypt	75
Iraq	80
Jordan	98
Kuwait	96
Lebanon	90
Libya	91
Mauritania	52
Morocco	67
Oman	92
Palestine	96
Qatar	98
Saudi Arabia	94
Sudan	54
Syria	86
Tunisia	82
United Arab Emirates	90
Yemen	87

The trends are alarming in – projections for 2015 indicated that there would be some increase in the number of illiterate adults in several Arab States if certain factors persist, such as population growth, the inability of the education system to absorb all children, and the current instabilities that cause many students to miss out on years of schooling or to drop out before they master the minimum learning competencies. Those countries that are likely to experience an increase in the number of illiterate adults are Iraq and the Syrian Arab Republic, due to conflict, United Arab Emirates, due to the presence of low-skilled illiterate expatriate labourers, and Mauritania. This calls for strategies that will provide adults with better opportunities to attend literacy programmes leading to acquisition of literacy skills and their functional application (UNDP and LAS, 2015, pp. 22–23).

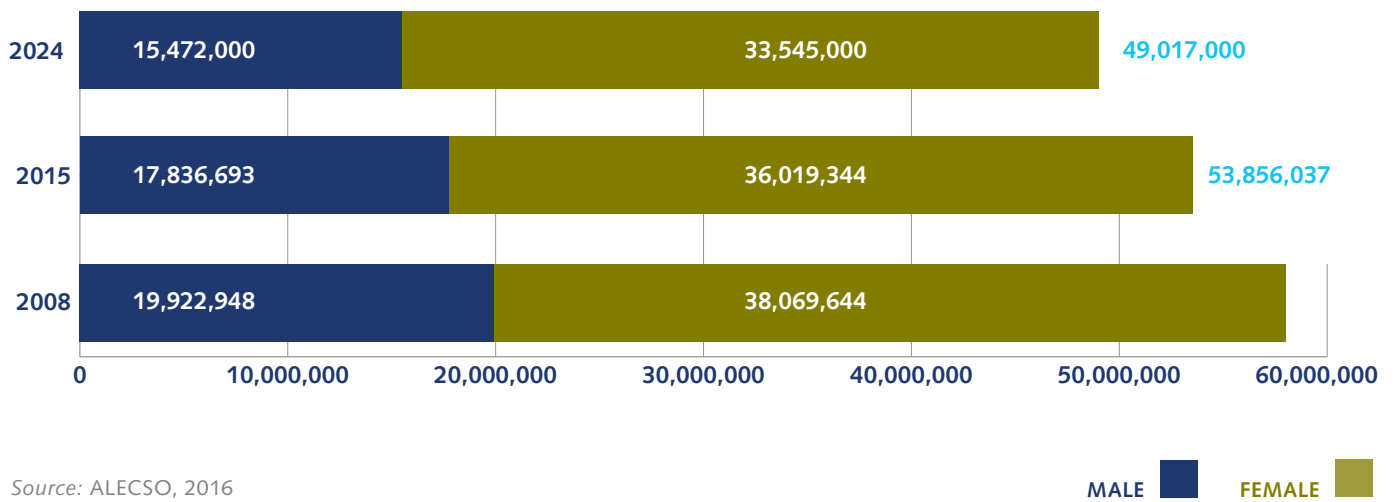
There are regional differences among the Arab States regarding literacy rates, as shown in *Table 2*.

It is expected that slight progress will be achieved between 2015 and 2024 – in this period the total number of illiterates is projected to decrease from 53.856 million to 49.017 million, of which 15.5 million will be illiterate males and 33.5 million illiterate females, as shown in *Figure 3*.

YOUTH LITERACY

Illiteracy among youth in the Arab States constitutes a future threat to the workforce. *Figure 4* shows that in 2015 the total number of illiterate youth of both sexes in the age group 15–24 years in the Arab States was 6.5 million. It is expected that the figure will have decreased by 2024 to about 5.5 million. This problem calls for increased effort in the field of youth education and training.

Figure 3: Literacy projections in the Arab States, 2008–2024



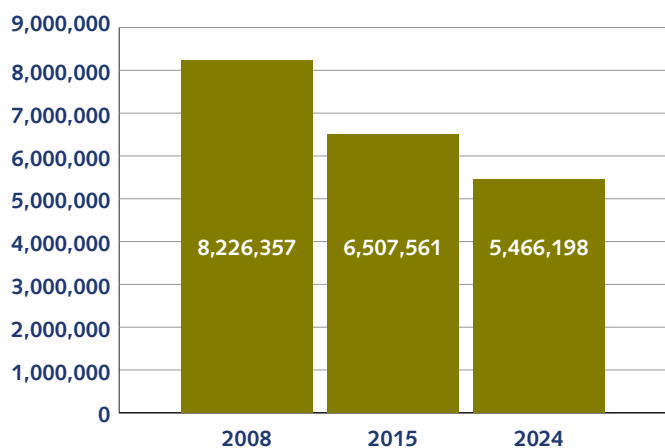
Source: ALECSO, 2016

GENDER BIAS IN LITERACY

Progress has been made towards gender parity in literacy. All countries where fewer than 90 women for every 100 men were literate in 2000 have moved towards parity, but none of them expected to reach parity by 2015. Table 3 shows female literacy according to GPI.

The GPI of literacy shows that girls and women in the Arab States are still a marginalized group and are exposed to various types of exclusion. There will be an increase in the number of female illiterate adults in several countries in the Arab region if some factors persist, such

Figure 4: Youth illiteracy in the Arab States, 2008–2024



Source: ALECSO, 2016

as population growth, inability of the education system to absorb all children, and the current instabilities that are causing many students, especially girls, to miss out on years of schooling or to drop out prior to acquiring minimum learning competencies.

EVALUATION OF LITERACY OUTCOMES

Most literacy legislation in Arab states defines a minimum standard of learning outcomes of the literate or the neo-literate to be equal either to the end of primary education or the end of the basic education stage, which includes intermediate or preparatory school (lower secondary school). The idea of minimum standards has been adopted by Arab States since the 1960s. Typically, a literacy programme is divided into two stages:

Basic stage, where the learner acquires basic skills in the ‘three Rs’ (reading, writing and arithmetic), and general knowledge, which is generally considered as equivalent to a primary education certificate.

Follow-up stage, where the neo-literate can master basic skills and continue their education in formal or non-formal learning.

Table 3: GPI in literacy by age group

UIS REGIONS	15+	15–24	65+
World	0.91956	0.97007	0.87204
Arab States	0.82973	0.96775	0.45384
Central and Eastern Europe	0.98848	0.99865	0.969
East Asia and the Pacific	0.96649	1.0004	0.86143
Central Asia	0.99951	1.00062	0.99302
Latin America and the Caribbean	0.99014	1.00413	0.94752
North America and Western Europe	n/a	n/a	n/a
South and West Asia	0.78028	0.94505	0.47523
Sub-Saharan Africa	0.795	0.00839	0.52083

Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics, October 2016

MONITORING ALE PROGRESS IN THE ARAB STATES SINCE 2009

This following sections aim to review the monitoring of progress achieved in respect to the five areas of action as defined by the BFA – policy, governance, financing, participation, equity and inclusion, and quality. Its findings are based on the responses of 13 Arab UNESCO Member States to the *GRALE III* monitoring survey, conducted by the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning.

1. POLICY

The Belém Framework of Action (BFA) recommends that ‘policies and legislative measures for adult education should be comprehensive, inclusive and integrated within a lifelong and life-wide learning perspective, based on sector-wide and inter-sectoral approaches, covering and linking all components of learning and education’.

GRALE III defines adult education policy as a ‘statement of intent that guides action, lays down principles and creates the conditions needed to foster learning opportunities and to enable adult learners to benefit regardless of their circumstances’ (UIL, 2016, p. 31).

In this respect, Member States should develop:

- (a) Comprehensive policies that address learning in a wide range of spheres, including the economic, political, social, cultural, technological and environmental.
- (b) Inclusive policies that address the learning needs of all adults by providing equitable access to learning opportunities, and differentiated strategies without discrimination on any grounds.
- (c) Integrated policies using interdisciplinary and inter-sectoral knowledge and expertise, encompassing education and training policies and related policy areas, such as economic development, human resource development, labour, health, environment, justice, agriculture and culture. (UIL, 2016, pp. 3–4)

DEFINITION OF ALE

Only nine of the Arab countries that responded to the *GRALE III* monitoring survey stated that they have an official definition of ALE: Algeria, Bahrain, Jordan, Morocco, Oman, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, the Syrian Arab Republic and the United Arab Emirates. Lebanon and Tunisia stated that they do not have an official definition for ALE. These definitions, generally, correspond to the definitions of adult education adopted by UNESCO Member States since the *Recommendation on the Development of Adult Education* in 1976 and the *2015 Recommendation on Adult Learning and Education*.

Traditionally, the trend in the Arab States has been to muddle the two terms, ‘literacy’ and ‘adult education’. They are interchangeable in common usage. Formally, because illiteracy has been the main concern of the

Arab States since the second half of the twentieth century, the majority of the Arab States are adopting definitions of adult education that give priority to literacy and basic skills.

However, the Arab States vary in respect of the scope and content of ALE. Some countries, such as Morocco and Oman, adopted a narrow concept of ALE and restricted it to adult literacy; other countries – such as Algeria, Bahrain, Jordan, Saudi Arabia and United Arab Emirates – have a rather broad concept of ALE, seeing it as an opportunity for young adults and youth to continue their education in formal and non-formal education institutions. In Jordan, for example, ALE is considered to be an integral part of comprehensive, social, economic, sustainable development. In Algeria, adult education aims to provide learning opportunities to young people and adults who have not attended school or who have inadequate schooling, or who aspire to improve their education and vocational skills. Some definitions emphasize the relations between ALE and employment, as in Algeria, Jordan, Saudi Arabia and United Arab Emirates.

Responses to the survey show that only Sudan and United Arab Emirates have changed their official definition of ALE since 2009. The definition was only slightly changed in Sudan, but completely changed in the United Arab Emirates to become relevant to the lifelong learning policy adopted by the government. Yet, nine Arab States (Algeria, Bahrain, Jordan, Morocco, Oman, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, the Syrian Arab Republic and the United Arab Emirates) stated that they give top priority to literacy and basic skills for ALE programmes. This is apparent also in the responses of the Arab States where adults with low levels of literacy or basic skills top the list of potential ALE target groups. Some countries have determined the extent of their policy framework to literacy and basic skills.

Definitions and scope of literacy

- In **Algeria**, the mission of adult education is to ensure a constant and developing level of literacy and general culture for all citizens. Adult education is offered freely to young people and adults who have not attended school, or who have inadequate schooling, or who aspire to raise their cultural level or socio-professional development.
- Bahrain** established a new approach to literacy and basic skills that enables adult learners to:
 - master basic learning skills to express themselves and participate in social and economic activities of their community;
 - master self-learning skills to contact various sources of knowledge;
 - develop their life skills in order to face their problems on both personal and social levels.
- In **Syria**, the extent of literacy and basic skills is not limited only to reading and writing, but includes the economic, social and health activities that help Syrian citizens in the development process.

COVERAGE OF DIFFERENT AREAS OF THE BFA IN THE ACTION PLANS OF CONFITEA VI

Four Arab States have enacted CONFITEA VI action plans following the BFA: Jordan, Oman, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. Only Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates have covered all five BFA areas in their action plans, whereas Jordan and Oman have covered some of them, as shown in *Table 4*.

Table 4: Coverage of different areas of the BFA

Country name	Adult literacy	Policy	Governance	Financing	Participation, equity, inclusion	Quality
Bahrain						
Egypt						
Jordan	✓			✓	✓	✓
Lebanon						
Morocco						
Oman	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
Saudi Arabia	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Sudan						
Syrian Arab Republic						
Tunisia						
United Arab Emirates	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
TOTAL	4	3	3	3	4	4

ALE policy frameworks

Iraq in 2011 endorsed an adult education policy framework as well as a comprehensive literacy strategy (Iraq Ministry of Education, 2015).

Mauritania's second 10-year plan for developing education (2011–2020) considers literacy as the basis of development and enlarges its scope to follow up new literates in all their life activities (Weld Weddo, 2015).

Egypt issued its new constitution in 2014 guaranteeing free and equitable education for all Egyptian children and youth in all public education institutions, from primary school to university. This constitution declares the commitment of the state to institute a plan for eradicating illiteracy within five years. In 2009, Decree no. 131 was issued to modify the definition and scope of literacy programmes to offer a range of learning opportunities to illiterates to continue their education in all its types and levels (Nassar, 2016a, pp. 24–26).

COUNTRIES THAT HAVE A POLICY FOR RVA OF NON-FORMAL AND INFORMAL LEARNING

The Belém Framework for Action (BFA), called for UNESCO 'to develop guidelines on outcomes, including those acquired through non-formal and informal learning, so that these may be recognised and validated' (UIL, 2010, p. 9). Member States committed themselves to 'developing or improving structures and mechanisms for the recognition, validation and accreditation of all forms of learning by establishing equivalency frameworks' (ibid., p. 7).

Seven Arab States stated they had policy frameworks for recognition, validation and accreditation (RVA) before 2009: Algeria, Bahrain, Egypt, Jordan, Morocco, Saudi Arabia and United Arab Emirates. The Syrian Arab Republic is the only country which has enacted new policy for RVA since 2009. In Bahrain, measures have been taken to introduce a parallel secondary education pathway so that learners can complete their studies and join university. Three countries (Lebanon, Oman and Tunisia) have stated that they do not have such a policy.

PROGRESS ACHIEVED IN THE ARAB STATES SINCE 2009

Eight Arab States said they have achieved significant progress in ALE policy since 2009: Bahrain, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Oman, Saudi Arabia, Sudan and United Arab Emirates, whereas Algeria, Egypt and Tunisia said there has been no change in their ALE policy since 2009.

The Arab States have shown very good progress in raising their literacy levels since the inception of the EFA goals. The regional literacy rate increased by 22 percentage points, reaching 77 per cent in 2011. Arab countries have shown more interest in providing adults with literacy programmes that accommodate their general lifestyle, such as having a day job. This has led the region to be among those with fewest illiterate adults (World Education Forum, 2015, pp. 9–10).

POTENTIAL ALE TARGET GROUPS

It is important to identify specific target groups in ALE policy in order to reduce inequalities in access to ALE programmes and provide support for those most in need. *Table 5* shows the potential ALE groups reported by respondent Arab States.

Table 5 indicates that:

- Ten of the countries that responded to the *GRALE III* monitoring survey identified adults with low levels of literacy or basic skills as the most important target group for ALE.
- The second-most important target group of potential learners was young people not in education, employment or training (reported by eight respondents).

These relatively high percentages indicate that adult literacy and provision of a variety of learning opportunities to young adults will continue to be the main concern of ALE policies in the Arab States in the coming years.

- Fewer countries identify as especially important for ALE policies more specific target groups such as refugees, who represent a problem to some Arab States (especially in Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq and Egypt) or adults with disabilities and other socially excluded groups. This suggests that recognition of these target groups remains a global challenge.

Table 5: ALE target groups in the Arab States

POTENTIAL ALE TARGET GROUPS	NUMBER OF STATES	PERCENTAGE OF STATES
Adults with low-level literacy or basic skills	10	83
Young persons not in education, employment or training	8	67
Individuals seeking personal growth and widening of knowledge horizons	7	58
Individuals seeking recognition for prior learning (especially non-formally and informally acquired)	5	42
Socially excluded groups	4	33
Residents of rural or sparsely populated areas	4	33
Individuals seeking to update work-relevant knowledge and skills	3	25
Workers in low-skill, low-wage or precarious positions	3	23
Adults living with disabilities	3	25
Senior citizens/retired people	3	25
Migrants and refugees from other countries	2	17
Parents and families	2	17
Long-term unemployed people	1	8
Lone or single parents	1	8
Minority ethnic, linguistic or religious minorities and indigenous peoples	0	0

- Because literacy is the main concern in the Arab States, their ALE concept is narrow, restricted mainly to literacy and basic skills. Adults with low-level literacy or basic skills come on top of the list of ALE target groups. Few Arab States have developed an ALE action plan following the BFA's five areas. One of the most pressing problems is the absence in most of the Arab States of legislation, procedures and bodies responsible for recognition, accreditation and validation of non-formal and informal learning.

The low performance in the field of ALE policy may be explained in terms of the political, economic and social problems arising from the conflicts in the Arab region, which have changed the priorities of development plans in some countries.

2. GOVERNANCE

Governance constitutes 'the exercise of economic, political and administrative authority to manage a country's affairs at all levels. It comprises the mechanisms, processes and institutions through which citizens and groups articulate their interests, exercise their legal rights, meet their obligations and mediate their differences. Good governance facilitates the implementation of adult learning and education policy in ways which are effective, transparent, accountable and equitable. Representation by and participation of all stakeholders are indispensable to guarantee responsiveness to the needs of all learners, in particular the most disadvantaged' (UIL, 2010, p. 39).

Responses of the Arab States show that there are some slight improvements in the following aspects of ALE governance since 2009:

- Participation of stakeholders: seven Arab States reported that participation of stakeholders has increased since 2009: Bahrain, Egypt, Jordan, Morocco, Saudi Arabia, Sudan and United Arab Emirates.
- Developing more effective monitoring and evaluation systems: eight states reported that they have developed more effective monitoring and evaluation systems: Algeria, Bahrain, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Oman, Saudi Arabia and Sudan.
- Introducing better coordination arrangements: nine states said that they have introduced better arrangements for coordinating ALE activities: Algeria, Bahrain, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Oman, Saudi Arabia, Sudan and United Arab Emirates.
- Roughly three out of four reports submitted to the second *Global Report on Adult Learning and Education (GRALE II)* confirmed that there was an entity at national level responsible for coordination of adult literacy; seven countries mention an entity that is responsible for adult education. Coordination units are often a sub-structure of a ministry (e.g., in Jordan, Palestine and Yemen), but concrete coordination activities are scarcely mentioned. In some cases, the coordination activities consist of periodic meetings of actors (e.g. in Tunisia and Yemen) for the support of programme activities (UIL, 2013, p. 65).
- Capacity-building initiatives: nine Arab States out of eleven which responded to this question in the *GRALE III* monitoring survey confirmed that

they had strengthened capacity-building: Algeria, Bahrain, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Oman, Saudi Arabia and United Arab Emirates.

- Although decentralization and interministerial cooperation are important mechanisms of governance for reaching potential groups of adult learners previously excluded or marginalized, the responses reflect a poor record of achievement, only five countries for either mechanism.
- Decentralization: five Arab States – Algeria, Egypt, Jordan, Morocco and Saudi Arabia – state that their ALE governance has become more decentralized since 2009. Intersectoral and inter-ministerial cooperation is another important aspect of ALE governance, closely related to decentralization. Five states (Jordan, Morocco, Oman, Saudi Arabia and United Arab Emirates) confirm that they have introduced inter-ministerial cooperation since 2009.

The *Arab Development Challenges Report 2011* has attributed this poor performance in human development, in the Arab States generally and in education particularly, to the impact of poor governance structures and poor accountability frameworks that led to high rates of corruption and disregard of quality issues (UNDP, 2012, p. 18).

Governance and intersectoral cooperation

In **Morocco**, an inter-ministerial commission chaired by the prime minister oversees the coordination committee, which includes diverse technical and financial stakeholders from governmental and non-governmental institutions working on adult literacy in different sectors, including agriculture, fishing, sport and the military.

In **Oman**, collaboration between the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Endowments and Religious Affairs and the Ministry of Social Development has resulted in projects for targeted groups of learners in prisons and collaboration with Omani women's associations to improve literacy, in particular in remote villages.

In **Saudi Arabia**, the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Labour and the Ministry of Social Affairs entered into an agreement to implement a learning-neighborhood policy, draft adult education curricula, design tools for continuous assessment, and develop other policies and regulations for adult education (UIL, 2016, p. 42).

In the **United Arab Emirates**, a Supreme Committee has been established to attain the strategic objectives of the national vision for literacy and adult education from the following parties (UAE Ministry of Education, 2015):

- Education local councils
- Ministries of Social Affairs, Interior, and Higher Education and Scientific Research
- Women's associations and federations
- Abu Dhabi Center for Vocational Education and Training
- Local governorates

Despite slight improvements, governance in the majority of Arab States is not effective in supporting development efforts, especially in education. Historically, centralized education systems are a major factor in the poor governance of education in general and ALE in particular.

3. FINANCING

The BFA states that ‘adult learning and education represent a valuable investment which brings social benefits by creating more democratic, peaceful, inclusive, productive, healthy and sustainable societies. Significant financial investment is essential to ensure the quality provision of adult learning and education’ (UIL, 2010, p. 40). To this end, Member States should be committed to:

- seeking investment of at least 6 per cent of GNP in education, with an increasing share of resources allocated to ALE;
- integrating ALE into financial strategies across government departments;
- initiating transnational funding for adult literacy and adult education programmes;
- creating incentives for attracting alternative sources of funding for ALE, for example from non-governmental organizations, the private sector, communities and individuals;
- prioritizing investment in ALE for vulnerable and marginalized populations particularly individuals with disabilities. (UIL, 2016, pp. 42–43)

In the Arab States, ALE still receives only a small proportion of public funding. The *GRALE III* monitoring survey (UIL, 2016, pp. 44–47) shows the following:

- Only two of the responding Arab States, Oman and Saudi Arabia, spend at least 6 per cent of their GNP on education in general.
- Six countries spend less than 1 per cent of their public education budgets on ALE; these states are: Bahrain, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Sudan, and United Arab Emirates.
- Only Oman and Saudi Arabia spend more than 4 per cent on ALE.
- Seven states confirmed that they are planning to increase public spending on ALE as it is imperative for creating quality learning opportunities for adults. These states are: Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Syrian Arab Republic and United Arab Emirates. Bahrain, Oman and Tunisia reported that they tend to increase public spending on ALE.
- Only four states, Algeria, Lebanon, Sudan and United Arab Emirates, have introduced innovations in the financing of ALE since 2009.

Some national reports submitted to the CONFINTEA VI Regional Follow-Up Meeting for the Arab States, held in Alexandria, Egypt, in October 2015, show that financing ALE faces some problems. In Iraq, for example, there were cuts of about 75 per cent in funds allocated to ALE in 2012 (Iraq Ministry of Education, 2015, p. 3).

4. PARTICIPATION, INCLUSION AND EQUITY

It is interesting to note that the gender gap in education has been narrowing and there is higher participation of women in both formal and non-formal education in the majority of Arab States.

The responses of the Arab States to the *GRALE III* monitoring survey show that:

- Five Arab States – Jordan, Oman, Saudi Arabia, Sudan and Syrian Arab Republic – reported that women participate in formal and non-formal education more than men; three countries – Bahrain, Morocco and United Arab Emirates – reported equal participation between men and women. Only Egypt and Lebanon reported that men participate more.
- Only five countries have experienced an increase in overall participation in ALE since 2009: Algeria, Bahrain, Egypt, Morocco and Sudan, while a decrease is reported in Lebanon, Syrian Arab Republic and United Arab Emirates.
- Gender equity in participation in general education was reported by five of the seven countries which elected to answer this question: Bahrain, Egypt, Morocco, Oman and Saudi Arabia. Only United Arab Emirates reported more participation by women than men, and only Jordan reported that men participate more.
- All the Arab States that participated in the *GRALE III* monitoring survey reported that women participated more than men in literacy programmes. This is a consequence of the higher rate of illiteracy among women and girls in the Arab States, and also the efforts exerted by both the governmental sector and NGOs in the field of women's education.
- Women's participation in non-formal education is reported to be higher than men's in six of the respondent Arab States: Algeria, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Saudi Arabia and United Arab Emirates.
- Seven of the eight states which responded to this question reported that the participation of refugees from other countries has increased since 2009: Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Saudi Arabia, Sudan and United Arab Emirates – all countries seriously affected by political and military conflicts in the region. In Jordan, for example, it is estimated that in September 2015 the total number of Syrian students enrolled was 143,000; about 20,000 of them in camp schools and the rest in public schools. Also, 32,251 Syrian

adult youth were enrolled in different non-formal education programmes, in addition to about 30,000 out-of-school children (Touq, 2016, p. 1).

- Six countries of the nine countries which responded to this question, Bahrain, Egypt, Morocco, Saudi Arabia, Syrian Arab Republic and United Arab Emirates, reported significant innovation in ALE to improve access and participation since 2009.

Women and youth inclusion

In **Bahrain**, participation, in particular that of women, has been achieved by providing transportation to education centres from meeting points close to residential areas, as well as by awarding grants to learners who have completed the women's preparatory stage and are moving into continuing education courses in various fields (UIL, 2016, p. 54).

In order to improve access and participation by 2020, **Morocco** established:

- a specific programme for youth aged 15–24 years;
- sectoral programmes for the population aged 25–45 years;
- literacy programmes for employees in the private sector;
- post-literacy programmes;
- specific programmes for the inclusion of minority social groups.

The **United Arab Emirates** considers youth a top priority; several entities have therefore been established to address specific issues relevant to young people. One example of this is the Public Authority for Youth Welfare and Sports, which is responsible for providing youth with the physical and mental space to be creative, build their talents, participate in sport teams, and explore interests. Organizations affiliated to this authority comprise scuba diving, theatre and culture, Scouts and science clubs. Another example is the Emirates Foundation for Youth Development, which focuses on providing career counselling, employment services and programmes for young people with disabilities (World Education Forum, 2015, pp. 40–41).

5. QUALITY

As stated in the BFA, ‘quality in learning and education is a holistic, multidimensional concept and practice and demands constant attention and continuous development’ (UIL, 2010, p. 56). The *GRALE III* monitoring survey includes five areas for monitoring quality in the provision of ALE. The responses of the Arab States on these areas are as follows.

SYSTEMATIC COLLECTION OF INFORMATION

Responses from 12 Arab States show that they systematically collect information about the following outcomes of ALE:

- Completion rates (seven countries)
- Certificates or qualifications (nine countries)
- Labour market outcomes (three countries)
- Social outcomes (three countries)

The first two outcomes are easy to trace through official records. Labour market and social outcomes, of course, are very important measures of the quality of ALE programmes.

EDUCATION AND TRAINING PROGRAMMES FOR ALE TEACHERS AND FACILITATORS

Eleven of the 12 respondent Arab States reported that they have initial pre-service education and training programmes for ALE teachers/facilitators.

Only five of the respondent states – Algeria, Bahrain, Egypt, Oman and Saudi Arabia – confirmed that they have continuing, in-service education and training programmes for adult education teachers/facilitators with sufficient capacity, while five – Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Sudan and United Arab Emirates – reported that they have this kind of training but with inadequate capacity.

Eleven of the respondent states reported that they require initial qualifications for teaching in ALE programmes.

SUBSTANTIAL RESEARCH PRODUCED ON SPECIALIZED TOPICS FOR ALE

The responses to this question from 12 Arab States show that there has been substantial analysis and research on the following topics:

- Learning outcomes (10 countries)
- Quality criteria for teaching and learning (six countries)
- Impact of new technologies (six countries)
- Barriers to ALE participation (six countries)
- Diversity of providers (five countries)
- Equity issues (four countries)

These findings indicate that the respondent Arab States do not pay much attention to research on vital issues in ALE such as equity, diversity and the role of information and communication technologies (ICTs).

Examples of quality assessment

- **Bahrain** has set up the National Authority for Qualifications and Quality Assurance of Education and Training. This authority formulates quality standards for curricula, teaching methods and assessment (UIL, 2016, p. 58).
- **Egypt** established the National Authority for Quality Assurance and Accreditation in Education (NAQAEE), which has elaborated quality standards for adult education. NAQAEE has also developed a mechanism for accrediting assistant literacy and adult education trainers as well as professional literacy and adult education trainers at regional level (Nassar, 2016b, pp. 27–64).

ALE capacity-building is one of the most important issues that needs to be addressed by the majority of Arab States in qualifying teaching staff in different ALE programmes, especially those required for technical and vocational education and training (TVET) programmes.

6. THE IMPACT OF ALE

This part of the report examines the way in which adult education and learning (ALE) programmes in the respondent Arab States interact with and impact on the following three important domains of sustainable development: health and well-being; employment and the labour market; and social, civic and community life.

While it has been established that education is a very important determinant of improvements achieved in the three domains, it is worthwhile mentioning that it is difficult to assume linear cause-and-effect relationships between education and the domains, especially in the field of ALE, which is a lifelong learning process that includes formal, non-formal and informal education. Also, we should take into consideration that political conflicts and economic constraints affect all aspects of life in some Arab States, especially in the domains of health, social welfare and stability, employment and labour.

IMPLEMENTING THE BFA

Literacy levels remain a leading concern and challenge for Arab States.

Adults with low-level literacy or basic skills come on top of the list of ALE target groups in the Arab States, and some countries have limited the extent of their policy framework to literacy and basic skills development only. In addition, the majority of Arab States still promote a traditional concept of ALE, which restricts literacy to the three Rs.

WIDENING ALE

A new concept of literacy across the region is called for – one that corresponds to the broad concept of literacy in *RALE* and is therefore not limited to the basic skills of reading and writing, but includes many the competencies that enable ‘citizens to engage in lifelong learning and participate fully in community, workplace and wider society’ (UNESCO and UIL, 2016, p. 2).

DEVELOPING NEW POLICIES FOR ALE

Only two-thirds of the respondent Arab States reported that they have achieved significant progress in ALE policy since 2009, and the majority of the Arab States have yet

to adopt all five areas of the BFA in their ALE work. This means that greater efforts are needed in Arab States to adopt ALE policies which are aligned to the BFA in order to achieve SDG 4 by 2030.

GOOD GOVERNANCE MATTERS

Ineffective governance is considered to be one of the main hindrances to development efforts, especially in education in the Arab States. Weak decentralization and lack of interministerial cooperation has a negative impact on building partnerships and obstructs efforts to reach potential groups of previously excluded adult learners or marginalized groups. Good governance is required for the development of ALE; achieving it depends largely on the state of democracy, moving towards more decentralization, and building partnerships with stakeholders including civil society organizations and non-governmental organizations.

PROMOTING GENDER EQUITY IN EDUCATION AND WORK

Good progress in gender parity in general education is reported in five of the seven respondent Arab States, while the United Arab Emirates reported more participation by women in ALE programmes. But more attention should be paid to achieving gender equity in work opportunities for educated young women. ALE can play an important role in the economic empowerment of women.

CAPACITY-BUILDING

Ineffective capacity-building is one of the most important issues that needs to be addressed by the majority of the Arab States when qualifying personnel in different ALE areas and activities, especially with regard to the teaching staff required for TVET programmes. Furthermore, the professionalization of adult education as a discipline in Arab universities needs more development in order to generate knowledge, on the one hand, and to train researchers and specialists in ALE, on the other.

HEALTH AND WELL-BEING

Several benefits to health and well-being are derived from investing in ALE, the most important of which are

good general health, healthy behaviours and attitudes, longer life expectancy, better mental health and inter-generational benefits (UIL, 2016, p. 69).

- Seven of the 11 Arab States that responded to this question in the *GRALE III* monitoring survey reported improvements since 2009 in policy-maker, researcher and practitioner knowledge of ALE benefits in the domain of health and well-being.
- Five of 12 respondents acknowledged that ALE contributes greatly to personal health and well-being.

Table 6 summarizes the barriers, rated important or very important, that prevent ALE from having a greater impact on health and well-being, as reported by respondent Arab States.

Table 6 shows that all the respondent Arab States cite illiteracy as impacting on health and well-being. For example, Arab States' child mortality rates are linked to the mothers' education levels, with the children of educated

mothers having much lower mortality rates (UN and LAS, 2015, p. 27). So, literacy programmes need to be re-oriented to be more effective and more relevant to the basic needs of marginalized groups, especially in health, economic, social and cultural domains.

After literacy, it is lack of access to information on ALE programmes, then poverty and household income inequalities, that prevent ALE from having a positive impact on health conditions.

EMPLOYMENT AND THE LABOUR MARKET

The Arab States have witnessed a considerable increase in unemployment rates, from 10 per cent in 2010 to 14.5 per cent in 2012. Least Developed Countries (LDCs) witnessed the highest increase, from 8.4 per cent to 18.4 per cent, followed by Mashreq countries, where the average rate rose from 11.3 per cent to 16.3 per cent. Maghreb countries have maintained a relatively stable rate of 10 per cent unemployment. Youth

Table 6: Barriers preventing ALE from impacting on health and well-being

FACTOR	NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS	COUNTRIES
Illiteracy	9 out of 9	Algeria, Bahrain, Egypt, Lebanon, Morocco, Oman, Saudi Arabia, Syrian Arab Republic and United Arab Emirates
Lack of access to information on ALE programmes	8 out of 9	Bahrain, Egypt, Lebanon, Morocco, Oman, Saudi Arabia, Syrian Arab Republic and United Arab Emirates
Household income inequalities	7 out of 8	Egypt, Lebanon, Morocco, Oman, Saudi Arabia, Syrian Arab Republic and United Arab Emirates
Poor quality of pedagogy, training materials and staff capacity	7 out of 9	Bahrain, Morocco, Oman, Saudi Arabia, Syrian Arab Republic, Tunisia and United Arab Emirates
Inadequate or misdirected funding	7 out of 10	Bahrain, Egypt, Lebanon, Morocco, Oman, Syrian Arab Republic and United Arab Emirates
Poor interdepartmental and intersectoral collaboration	5 out of 8	Bahrain, Lebanon, Oman, Tunisia and United Arab Emirates
Community resistance	4 out of 10	Bahrain, Lebanon, Syrian Arab Republic and Tunisia

unemployment across the region had hovered at about 25 per cent since 2007, but increased to 26 per cent in 2011 while the world average was about 13 per cent (UNDP and LAS, 2015, p. 10).

It is difficult to identify every aspect of the relationship between education in general and labour. For ALE, the matter is even more difficult and complicated. To understand the impact of ALE on the labour market, one must look beyond ALE programmes that cater directly to learning for work. For individuals, ALE activities that meet personal, social, political or cultural needs can be the key to developing their employability and productivity in the labour market (UIL, 2016, p. 88).

ALE outcomes in employment and labour operate on two levels (ibid., p. 89):

A specific level, which includes the following outcomes:

- More individuals are employable.
- More individuals have access to the labour market.

- More individuals can progress along the career ladder.
- More individuals are able to switch employment or even occupation.

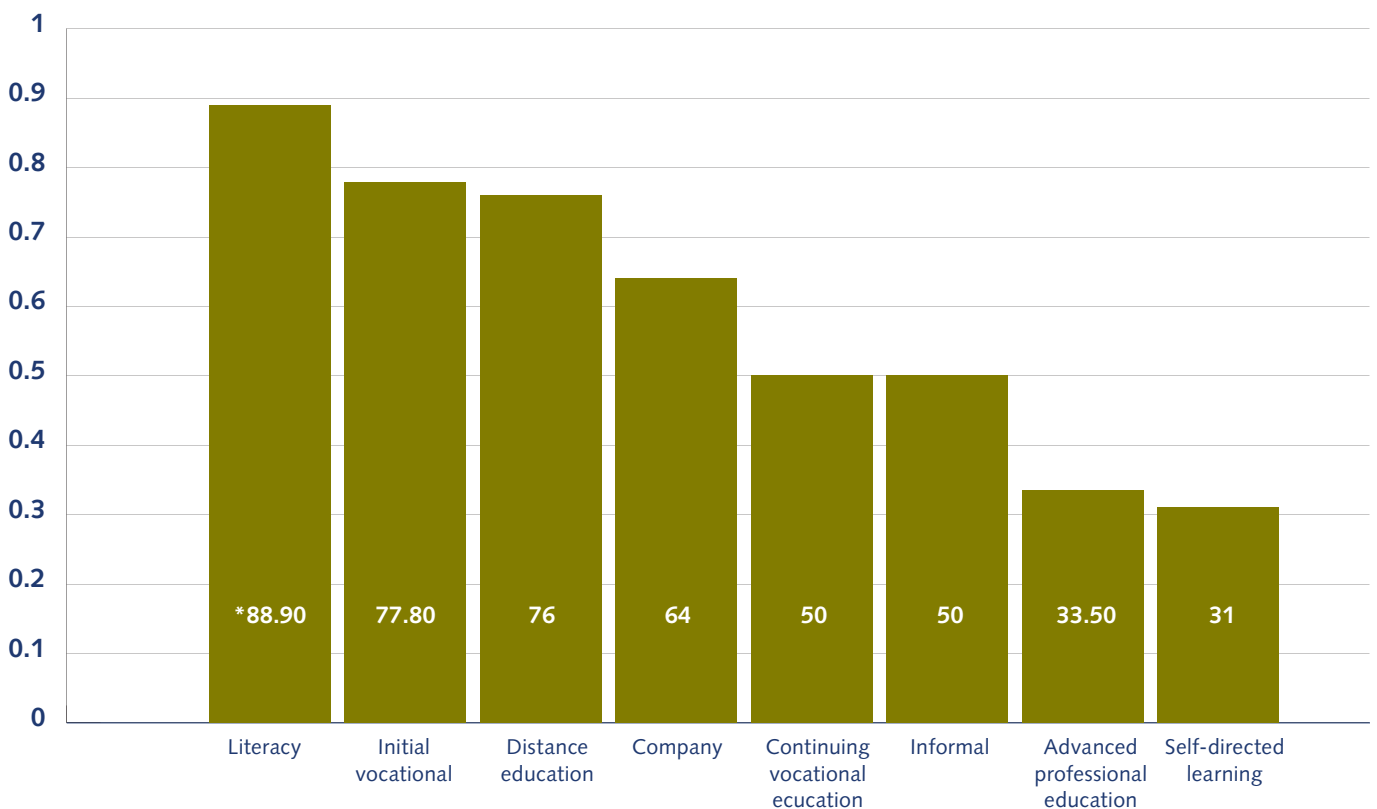
And a wider level, which includes:

- Employees are satisfied with their jobs.
- Individuals are healthier and have a greater sense of well-being.

The Arab States that responded to the *GRALE III* monitoring survey stated that there was evidence that ALE has an impact, at the individual level, on both men and women, in several facets of employment and labour.

The following ALE programmes and learning strategies are perceived as having the most positive impact on productivity: literacy, initial vocational education, distance education, company training, continuing vocational education, informal workplace learning, advanced professional education and self-directed learning (see *Figure 5*).

Figure 5: Types of ALE that Arab States view as having the most positive impact on productivity and employment (percentages*)



RECOGNITION, VALIDATION AND ACCREDITATION OF NON-FORMAL EDUCATION

The Arab States have high expectations of ALE in terms of labour market outcomes. Seven of 11 respondent countries agreed that ALE benefits employment, especially for the following:

- Youth with low levels of literacy or basic skills.
- Young persons who are not in education.
- Individuals who are seeking jobs and training.
- Workers in low-skill, low-wage or precarious positions.

These categories call for recognition of prior learning (especially non-formally and informally acquired). Legislation for recognition, validation and accreditation (RVA) should be adopted to facilitate mobility of workers among various vocations and professions.

DISTANCE EDUCATION AND ONLINE LEARNING STRATEGIES

Information and communication technologies (ICTs) should be utilized to provide adult learners with a large diversity of learning and training opportunities to increase their employability and productivity and increase access to ALE programmes.

EMPLOYABILITY

Seven countries out of nine (Bahrain, Egypt, Jordan, Morocco, Saudi Arabia, Syrian Arab Republic and United Arab Emirates) reported that ALE has an impact on the employability of both sexes. Lebanon and Sudan reported that they saw no evidence of an impact.

The youth employment-to-population ratio is relatively low and decreased significantly between 1991 and 2011, partly due to improved schooling, which delays young people's entry into work, and a lack of demand from the labour market (UN and LAS, 2015, p. 9). This calls for a diversification of ALE programmes in order to provide youth and adults with learning opportunities for technical and vocational training.

Of those enrolled in secondary education in the region, an average of 9.5 per cent were enrolled in technical vocational education and training (TVET) programmes in 2011. Only Egypt, Lebanon and Tunisia exceeded the

2011 average, while five countries – Palestine, Qatar, Sudan, United Arab Emirates and Yemen – registered proportions of less than 2 per cent enrolled in TVET programmes.

Formal TVET in the Arab States varies from vocational streams in lower- and upper-secondary schools to post-secondary institutions such as community colleges (in Jordan) or intermediate institutes (in the Syrian Arab Republic). Non-formal TVET covers informal apprenticeships (in Yemen and Morocco), NGO provision (in Palestine and Lebanon) and other community and rural training provision (in Tunisia and Lebanon) (UNESCO Regional Bureau for the Arab States, 2014, p. 12).

PERFORMANCE ON THE CURRENT JOB

Six out of eight countries – Bahrain, Egypt, Morocco, Saudi Arabia, Syrian Arab Republic and United Arab Emirates – reported that ALE impacts on the performance of both men and women in their current job, in terms of individual productivity, quality of work and achievement.

CAREER PROSPECTS

Six out of seven countries – Bahrain, Egypt, Morocco, Saudi Arabia, Sudan and United Arab Emirates – reported that ALE has an impact on the career prospects of both men and women.

EMPLOYEE SALARY LEVEL

Five out of seven countries – Morocco, Oman, Saudi Arabia, Syrian Arab Republic and United Arab Emirates – reported that ALE has an impact on employee salary level.

JOB SATISFACTION

Four out of seven countries – Egypt, Morocco, Sudan and United Arab Emirates – agreed that ALE has an impact on job satisfaction, motivation and commitment to work.

CONTINUING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Five out of seven countries – Bahrain, Morocco, Saudi Arabia, Sudan and United Arab Emirates – reported that ALE has a positive impact on continuing professional and skills development leading to recognized certification or qualification.

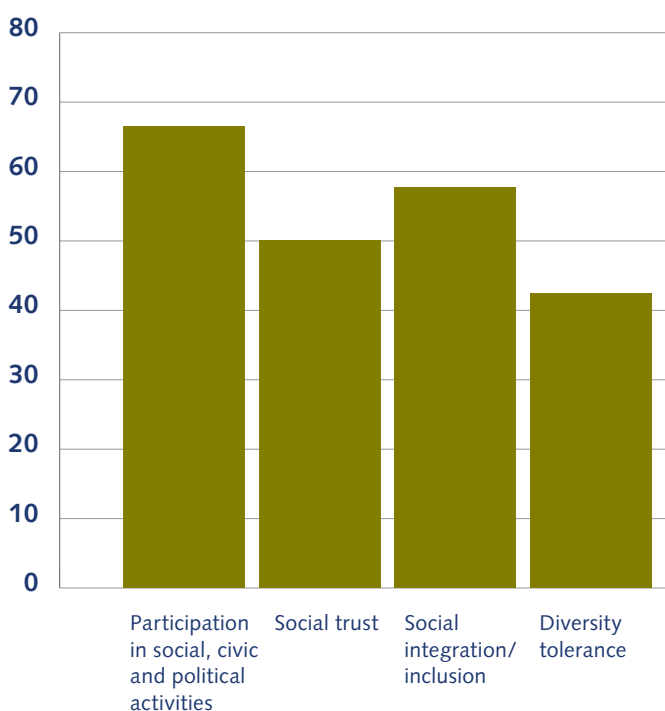
SOCIAL, CIVIC AND COMMUNITY LIFE

There are multiple links between ALE and societal outcomes. The Hamburg Declaration, which was adopted at the fifth International Conference on Adult Education (CONFINTEA V) in 1997, states that ‘adult education is both a consequence of active citizenship and a condition for full participation in society’. Thus, while ALE can lead to social change, civic and social structures also affect the availability and quality of ALE. Healthy social and political institutions and flourishing communities encourage and enable adults to keep on learning. This, in turn, strengthens social cohesion and trust (UIL, 2016, p. 107).

Six out of 11 Arab States which responded to the question in the *GRALE III* monitoring survey acknowledged the benefits of ALE in social, civic and community life. The survey identified four major domains and asked Member States if they had evidence to show that ALE had a positive effect on the domains.

Figure 6 illustrates the responses of Arab States for each of the four domains: participation in social, civic and political activities, social trust, social integration, diversity and tolerance.

Figure 6: Domains in which ALE has positive impacts (percentages)



There are other social benefits and outcomes of ALE in the areas of social, civic and community life.

Ten out of 12 Arab States reported that policy-makers see ALE as important in the areas of personal development, quality of life, well-being and social and cultural participation. Nine out of 11 states reported that ALE is important in developing and maintaining trustful social relations and active social integration.

ALE in formal, non-formal and informal settings helps individuals acquire greater skills, knowledge and understanding. This, in turn, can have considerable ‘spill-over’ benefits for families, their work and their community environments. ALE can have a strong impact on active citizenship, political voice, social cohesion, diversity and tolerance in the following dimensions.

MULTILINGUALISM AND SOCIAL DIVERSITY

Six out of 11 Arab States reported that literacy and basic skills contribute to a large extent to the strengthening of multilingualism and social diversity.

ACCESS TO EDUCATION, LITERATURE, ARTS AND CULTURAL HERITAGE

Eight out of 12 Arab States reported that literacy and basic skills contribute to a large extent in helping individuals to access education, literature, arts and cultural heritage.

ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY IN LOCAL COMMUNITIES

Seven out of 12 Arab States reported that literacy and basic skills help individuals to maintain environmental sustainability in local communities. This response reflects a lack of awareness of the role of ALE in environmental sustainability, particularly in light of the fact that the Arab States will suffer greatly from climate change, through water scarcity, desertification, reduced agricultural productivity, food insecurity, seawater rise, inundation of fertile lands and coastal infrastructure, and the loss of biodiversity (UNDP and LAS, 2015, p. 36).

ACTIVE CITIZENSHIP AND COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION

Political instability in some Arab States has led to ALE being promoted as a way to foster social cohesion, political participation, active citizenship, involvement in

democratic and social life, social interaction, and tolerant and diversified societies. Eleven out of 12 States agreed that literacy and basic skills play a vital role in promoting active citizenship and community participation.

DEMOCRATIC VALUES AND PEACEFUL COEXISTENCE

Nine out of 10 States reported that literacy and basic skills contribute to the strengthening of democratic values and peaceful coexistence.

Participation in civic and community life

The Hawaa (Eve) Association in **Egypt** launched an initiative aimed at educating and empowering women, with a special emphasis on marginalized illiterate working women in the informal sector. The initiative also aims to develop women's awareness of the benefits of education, health and social security services, as well as combating all forms of violence against women.

Tunisia reported that ALE programmes provided through the National Programme of Adult Education has contributed to changing the mentality of adult learners, helping them to become aware of the values of democracy, solidarity and tolerance, and making them better able to live with others who are different.

United Arab Emirates reported that ALE has contributed to increased participation in parliamentary elections (National Council elections), better retention rates of those who are pursuing graduate studies, and improved coexistence in Emirates society, which is a cosmopolitan one.

ECONOMIC RETURNS

Seven out of 11 states reported that policy-makers regard ALE as important in the following dimensions: employability, innovation capacity, financial autonomy, living standards, skills levels improvement and structural labour market evolution.

These findings indicate that the economic returns of ALE are of less importance than the non-economic outcomes for ALE policy-makers in the Arab States.

7. THE WAY FORWARD TO 2030

INTERNATIONAL AND REGIONAL COOPERATION

The Arab States have participated in every International Conference on Adult Education, from CONFINTEA I, held in Elsinore in 1949, to CONFINTEA VI, held in Belém in 2009. They have also adopted the international declarations and recommendations issued by these conferences and other international conferences as well as by UN organizations and its specialized agencies.

In the last two years, the international arena has witnessed significant efforts encouraging cooperation on both international and regional levels to develop ALE. At the UN Sustainable Development Summit, held from 25 to 27 September 2015, Member States formally adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. This agenda sets a vision for a world:

- Free of poverty, hunger, disease and want, where all life can thrive. We envisage a world free of fear and violence.
- A world with universal literacy.
- A world with equitable and universal access to quality education at all levels, to health care and social protection, where physical, mental and social well-being are assured.
- A world where we reaffirm our commitments regarding the human right to safe drinking water and sanitation and where there is improved hygiene; and where food is sufficient, safe, affordable and nutritious.
- A world where human habitats are safe, resilient and sustainable and where there is universal access to affordable, reliable and sustainable energy. (UN General Assembly, 2015, pp. 3–4, 35)

There are 17 Sustainable Development Goals and 169 corresponding targets. Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4 calls on countries to 'ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all'. SDG 4 has seven substantive targets aiming to provide:

Inclusive and equitable quality education at all levels – early childhood, primary, secondary, tertiary, technical and training. All people, irrespective of sex, age, race or ethnicity, and persons with disabilities, migrants, indigenous peoples, children and youth, especially those in vulnerable situations, should have access to life-long learning opportunities that help them to acquire the knowledge and skills needed to exploit opportunities and to participate fully in society. We will strive to provide children and youth with a nurturing environment for the full realization of their rights and capabilities, helping our countries to reap the demographic dividend, including through safe schools and cohesive communities and families. (UN General Assembly, 2015, pp. 7, 35)

At the World Education Forum (WEF) held in Incheon, Republic of Korea, from 19 to 22 May 2015, governments agreed to transform citizens' lives through education and committed to achieve SDG 4 and its corresponding targets. The Incheon Declaration emphasizes the importance of strengthening science, technology and innovation, as well as harnessing ICTs to transform education systems.²

To put this declaration into effect, more cooperation is needed at both international and regional levels. UNESCO and other international organizations can cooperate with regional and national institutions working in the field of education in the Arab States such as the Arab League Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organization (ALECSO), the Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (ISESCO) and organizations affiliated to the European Council to help transform ALE in the Arab States.

The CONFINTEA VI Regional Follow-up Meeting for the Arab States took place from 26 to 28 October 2015 in Alexandria, Egypt. UIL, in cooperation with the UNESCO Regional Office in Beirut and ISESCO, planned and coordinated the meeting, which aimed to assess developments in adult learning and education in the Arab States since 2009.

2 <http://en.unesco.org/world-education-forum-2015/incheon-declaration>

At this meeting, titled ‘Six years after Belém: Assessing adult learning and education for peace and sustainable development’, participants gathered evidence on the progress of literacy and ALE. In addition, they assessed the vital role played by literacy and ALE in achieving the Arab States’ education goals, and generated a concrete regional action plan for monitoring and implementing the recommendations of the Belém Framework for Action at national and regional levels.

THE ARAB REGIONAL ACTION PLAN FOR DEVELOPING ALE

The participants at the meeting adopted a Regional Action Plan with five projects. They agreed that these projects will contribute to the enhancement of ALE in the Arab region, especially its significance for social and economic empowerment and establishing the foundations of global citizenship. The following sub-sections provide an assessment of actions to be undertaken to implement these projects.

PROJECT 1: OPERATIONALIZE AND STRENGTHEN UNESCO CATEGORY II REGIONAL RESOURCE CENTRE AT SIRS-EL-LAYYAN

To support the ALE Regional Action Plan, UIL, the Regional UNESCO Office in Beirut and the UNESCO Office in Cairo will support the development of the Regional Centre for Adult Education in Sirs-el-Layyan, Egypt, to enable it to perform its activities in capacity-building and producing context-sensitive learning materials.

To put this project into effect, UNESCO commissioned a study of the institutional development and action plan of the Sirs-el-Layyan Centre (Nassar, 2016). Two international and regional meetings took place in Cairo from 16 to 18 May 2017 to finalize a strategy to increase the capacity of the centre so that it can operate as a hub for adult learning and education in the Arab region (UNESCO Regional Bureau and UIL, 2017).

The efficiency of the centre in performing its roles in ALE depends mainly upon:

- maintaining its independence and regional entity;
- continuous host-country support;
- continuous UNESCO technical assistance;
- the improvement of the infrastructure of the centre, especially that of ICT;
- coordination and cooperation with peer centres

(e.g. the Regional Centre for Educational Planning in UAE, and the Regional Centre for Quality and Excellence in Education in Saudi Arabia);

- the ability of the centre to outreach to Arab communities through a variety of face-to-face and online education and training activities to improve health practices and conditions and to develop youth skills for labour market;
- upskilling and continuing professional development of the staff of the centre.

PROJECT 2: CREATE A REGIONAL MULTI-STAKEHOLDER PARTNERSHIP FOR LITERACY

Local and national government authorities, civil society, academics, the scientific community, the private sector and global multi-stakeholder partnerships are some of the important partners that have helped implement global agendas. A recent analysis highlights 10 factors in making development partnerships effective: they include securing high-level leadership, ensuring context-specific and country-led partnerships, clarifying roles and responsibilities, and focusing on financing, results and accountability (UNESCO, 2016, p. 145).

In addition to the concerned ministries, there are many bodies in the Arab States that can participate in enhancing ALE programmes at regional levels. During the last decade the majority of Arab universities have established academic departments of adult and continuing education; they can play an important role in developing ALE in the Arab States through research, building capacity, and providing continuing learning opportunities to youth and adults through either traditional or online courses.

There are also three Category II regional centres affiliated to the UNESCO Regional Centre for Adult Education in Egypt – the RCEP in the United Arab Emirates and the Regional Centre for Quality and Excellence in Education in Saudi Arabia. These institutions can play important role in promoting partnership in ALE in the Arab region especially in:

- producing prototype educational materials for polyvalent ALE programmes;
- capacity-building and training stakeholders in planning and implementing ALE programmes in accordance with the BFA;
- producing ALE quality standards, benchmarks and rubrics for ALE projects for the Arab States.

Civil society organizations can play a vital role in supporting and coordinating efforts in ALE. The Arab States have experienced great development since the 1970s and they have become more diversified to include professional groups such as syndicates, public-interest advocates, unions and NGOs such as the Arab Literacy Network, which was established in 1999 with a membership of 56 non-governmental and governmental organizations from 15 Arab States comprising the Arab Network for Literacy and Adult Education in Egypt, the Arab Network for Popular Education in Lebanon, the campaign of the Arab Education for All in Palestinian autonomous territories, and the Arab Network for Civic Education in Jordan (El-Samaloty, 2016).

On the regional level, groups such as the Women and Society Association is playing a leading role in women's education and literacy. In March 2015, the association launched its Arab Initiative for Social and Economic Empowerment of Women. The initiative aims to mobilize resources and the efforts of stakeholders concerned with women's social and economic empowerment through lifelong education. It also aims to promote community participation in lifelong learning programmes through establishing awards in six programmes: literacy, building partnerships, art, media programmes, research and youth innovations (Women and Society Association, 2015).

This initiative is funded by the Women and Society Association and its partners from NGOs and the private sector. It is planned to last 15 years and is subject to evaluation and review every five years.

It is worthwhile mentioning that there are some reservations about the role of civil society organizations and NGOs in the Arab States, especially after the Arab Spring and the spread of violence in countries where the relationship between national-level NGOs and civil society institutions and governments is sometimes marred

by tensions or suspicions. Yet most NGOs are working closely with government bodies and national political parties in many countries, and they have provided good contributions, especially in the fields of education, literacy and social service. They see their involvement in education as part of their mission to work for justice and human rights (Yousif, 2009, p. 21).

So, it is important to re-establish this relationship along principles of democratic life to enhance NGOs' roles in the provision of lifelong and life-wide learning opportunities for all, especially for marginalized groups, those living in remote areas and refugees. The NGOs also have a vital role in citizenship education and peace education to restore social stability.

On the regional level, there have been some efforts to establish a Regional Alliance for Literacy (RAL). The aforementioned consultative expert meeting on establishing a Regional Centre for Adult Education in Egypt recommended that Arab States should promote a literacy agenda as well as identify key partners and stakeholders in literacy work in a regional alliance to achieve the SDGs and the objectives of the Arab Literacy Decade (UNESCO Regional Bureau and UIL, 2017, pp. 18–19).

PROJECT 3: SUPPORT THE CONCEPTUAL UNDERSTANDING AND MAINSTREAMING OF THE UNESCO GLOBAL NETWORK OF LEARNING CITIES

The learning cities concept has become an important component of ALE and a building block of a learning society. Learning cities foster a culture of learning throughout life and revitalize learning in families, neighbourhoods and other learning spaces, as well as in the workplace (UIL, 2016, p. 2).

The learning city concept³ is still unfamiliar in the majority of Arab States. Whereas the UNESCO network of learning cities includes 195 members, representing 47

3 UNESCO has defined a learning city as 'one which invests in quality lifelong learning for all to: promote inclusive learning from basic to higher education; invest in the sustainable growth of its workplaces; revitalise the vibrant energy of its communities; nurture a culture of learning throughout life; exploit the value of local, regional and international partnerships; and guarantee the fulfillment of its environmental obligations. In so doing, a city would release the strength and capacity of all its resources for creating individual empowerment and cultural prosperity, social cohesion and economic prosperity, and sustainable development. To determine the progress of a city, a set of *Key Features of Learning Cities* have been developed by UNESCO, the details of which were announced at a major conference in Beijing in October 2013, which launched the International Platform of Learning Cities.' (<http://uil.unesco.org/system/files/list-of-members-unesco-gnnc-uil.pdf>)

countries, there are only 18 learning cities in five Arab States, distributed as follows:

- Algeria has nine learning cities: Aïn Madhi, Algiers, Hammamet, Kais, Mazouna, Robbah, Tamanrasset, Timimoun and Tlemcen.
- Egypt has two learning cities: Aswan and Giza.
- Jordan has five learning cities: Amman, Irbid, Jerash, Al-Salt and Zarqa.
- Tunisia has one learning city: Tunis.
- Qatar also has one learning city: Al-Wakra.

The success of learning cities depends on the following principles: inclusive learning in the education system, revitalised learning in families and communities, effective learning for and in the workplace, extended use of modern learning technologies, enhanced quality in learning, and a vibrant culture of learning throughout life.

In 2015, Amman (Jordan) won the UNESCO Learning City Award (UIL, 2016, p. 17); this year, 2017, Giza (Egypt) won the same prize.

The mainstreaming of learning cities and their involvement in ALE programmes in the Arab States depend on:

- the ability of learning cities to find innovative solutions for challenges they face, especially in health, environmental sustainability, literacy and unemployment;
- building partnerships and networking among cities on national, regional and international levels through which Arab universities, NGOs, cultural centres and other educational institutions could adopt initiatives for lifelong learning and adult learning, and education programmes for marginalized groups.

PROJECT 4: DEVELOP A REGIONAL FRAMEWORK FOR THE RECOGNITION, VALIDATION AND ACCREDITATION OF ALL FORMS OF LEARNING BY ESTABLISHING EQUIVALENCY FRAMEWORKS

The Arab region stands out in terms of its overall unemployment problem. Youth unemployment has been at very high levels for decades. North Africa had been relatively resilient to the global economic crisis but, following the Arab Spring, economic growth decreased while youth unemployment increased by 5 per cent in 2011.

The already very high youth unemployment rate in the Arab region rose sharply in the wake of the Arab Spring and was hovering at around 27 per cent by 2012, the highest in the world and twice the global rate for youth. Furthermore, it is almost three times higher than the 10 per cent unemployment rate for the working-age population in the region (Mirkin, 2013, pp. 22–24).

The highest recorded youth unemployment rates are in Iraq (44 per cent), the Occupied Palestinian Territories (40 per cent), Egypt (31 per cent) and Saudi Arabia and Tunisia (both at 30 per cent). For young women in the Arab region, the situation is even worse: unemployment is higher, about 32 per cent, and labour force participation lower. Future employment prospects are clearly among the biggest concerns facing Palestinian youth. In 2011, 54 per cent of young women and 32 per cent of young men were unemployed (Mirkin, 2013, pp. 22–24).

To face the problem of unemployment there should be a strategy to facilitate individuals' access to competencies, enabling them to continue learning, enter the labour market and attain professional and social mobility. Such a strategy would be incomplete if it did not include recognition, validation and accreditation (RVA) of competencies or outcomes gained in learning settings all over the Arab region.⁴ In this context, it is suggested that Arab States do the following:

⁴ The demand for the recognition, validation and accreditation (RVA) of all forms of learning with a focus on non-formal and informal learning outcomes was expressed through the Belém Framework for Action. It called on UNESCO to develop guidelines on all learning outcomes, including those acquired through non-formal and informal learning, so that these might be recognized and validated. At the same time, Member States committed themselves to developing or improving structures and mechanisms for the recognition of all forms of learning by establishing recognition frameworks. (UNESCO and UIL, 2012, p. 3)

- Facilitate the development of Arab references or standards that integrate the outcomes of non-formal and informal learning, and, based on the Arab context, establish an Arab Qualifications Framework (AQF).
- Develop equivalencies between the outcomes of formal, non-formal and informal learning in the Arab references, standards or AQFs through a shared understanding of learning outcomes.
- Fostering transnational cooperation through projects and networks for sharing know-how and innovative practice. (UIL, 2010, p. 39)

The Arab States should establish a regional authority for recognition, validation and accreditation to serve as:

- an RVA observatory for collecting and disseminating best practices at different stages in the development of RVA systems;
- a coordinating body for facilitating policy dialogue, networking and sharing of experiences between Member States through peer-learning activities and cooperation among key stakeholders in different regions;
- a research centre on different RVA systems, mechanisms, instruments and tools, carrying out collaborative international research in the field of RVA;
- a hub for providing technical assistance and capacity-building to key national stakeholders and practitioners to enable them to construct and implement the RVA systems.

Capacity-building for the wide range of ALE leaderships and the different categories of personnel, especially government officials responsible for the implementation of the BFA, is one of the most important challenges facing Arab States. The developments and changes in the concept and perspectives of ALE that are reflected in international declarations such as Incheon, the BFA and the SDGs mean that the mission of capacity-building of key personnel in the Arab ministries of education is crucial. It is essential to make them more aware of the importance of aligning to the five areas of the Belém Framework for Action and *GRALE* data-collection methodologies.

The three regional centres in the Arab States (in Egypt, Saudi Arabia and UAE) could play a leading role in this respect, supported by UIL's CONFINTEA Fellowship programme, technical assistance from UNESCO and contributions from regional organizations and funds.

PROJECT 5: PROVIDE CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT TO GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE BELÉM FRAMEWORK FOR ACTION

The BFA emphasizes the role of capacity-building in ALE, especially in the following areas:

- Creating and maintaining mechanisms for the involvement of civil society organizations, social partners, the private sector, community and adult learners' and educators' organizations and all administrative levels of public authorities in the development, implementation and evaluation of adult learning and education policies and programmes.
- Undertaking measures to support the constructive and informed involvement of civil society organizations and community and adult learners' organizations, as appropriate, in policy and programme development, implementation and evaluation.
- Promoting and supporting intersectoral and inter-ministerial cooperation.

8. TOWARDS A NEW PARADIGM FOR ALE IN THE ARAB STATES

According to the outcomes and lessons learned from BFA monitoring and the fields of learning identified in the *Recommendation on Adult Learning and Education*, a new framework or paradigm for ALE is needed in the Arab States if the region is to attain the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030. This paradigm must:

- seek a future for the region that is free from poverty and based on human rights, equality, peace, dignity and well-being for all;
- adopt lifelong learning as a philosophy and governing concept for all ALE activities, placing it in national political legislations and commitments;
- emphasize that learners in the Arab region need diversified learning opportunities to update their skills in the knowledge society through lifelong learning. In the context of the new pedagogy, learning goes beyond work-specific skills and seeks to equip learners with transferable skills such as problem-solving, creativity and teamwork;
- contribute to transforming the lives of Arab citizens in respect of health and well-being, employability, and community life through eradicating illiteracy and concentrating on twenty-first century skills as an approach to improve their lives through effective teaching, learning materials based on ICTs, and well-trained teachers;
- contain actions to combat poverty, especially among marginalized and rural households, and to assist the economic empowerment of women;
- support ALE programmes by effective involvement of civil society, especially in health and well-being education, civil and peace education and technical and vocational education;
- establish partnerships with stakeholders at national, regional and international levels for coordination, financing and sharing experiences and resources;
- Take into consideration the following three policy implications:
 - Education as a fundamental and enabling human right. The right to ALE should best be interpreted in terms of access to high-quality opportunities across the life-course. Governments will therefore not only need to ensure that learning opportunities are available, they must also help adults to take full

advantage of such opportunities. They can do this by making adults aware of opportunities and providing them with financial and other forms of support.

- ALE is a part of a balanced educational life-course. There is no contradiction between investing early and investing for all: a lifelong approach combines investments for all ages and recognizes, for example, that investments directed at adults can also bring immense benefits for children.
- ALE is part of a holistic, intersectoral sustainable development agenda that will have multiple benefits and lasting impact. This means that stakeholders need to learn how different policies interact with one another, and to understand how to best combine them to achieve lasting impact. As this report has demonstrated, ALE needs to be considered as a part of a larger set of social, cultural and economic practices. (UIL, 2016, pp. 135–136)

The paradigm should also take into consideration the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which understands the importance of ALE and recognizes different forms of ALE (formal, non-formal and informal), by emphasizing the following targets:

- Ensure equal access for all women and men to affordable and quality technical, vocational and tertiary education, including university.
- Substantially increase the number of youth and adults who have relevant skills, including technical and vocational skills, for employment, decent jobs and entrepreneurship.
- 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.
- Ensure that all youth and a substantial proportion of adults, both men and women, achieve literacy and numeracy. (UN General Assembly, 2015, pp. 17, 35)

This paradigm has four fields of activities, which are outlined on the following pages: literacy, continuing training and professional development, peace culture and active citizenship, and the digital transformation of ALE.

LITERACY: A NEW PERSPECTIVE AND DIFFERENT APPROACHES

It seems that the narrow perspective of literacy adopted in the Arab States, which is limited to the three Rs, makes it very difficult to include a diversity of target groups with a wide range of different needs. The new paradigm adopts a wide scope for literacy that includes the following two principles:

- The Belém Framework for Action affirms that ‘the role of lifelong learning is critical in addressing global educational issues and challenges. Lifelong learning “from cradle to grave” is a philosophy, a conceptual framework and an organising principle of all forms of education, based on inclusive, emancipatory, humanistic and democratic values; it is all-encompassing and integral to the vision of a knowledge-based society’ (UIL, 2010, p. 37).
- In this respect, the Arab States should emphasize the importance of advocating a lifelong learning framework of literacy in the twenty-first century, where learners ‘[learn] to learn from experience and deal with the social dimensions of knowledge formation, [learn] to self-regulate time and effort to learn, [learn] to forget and to un-learn whenever necessary, and [learn] to make room for new knowledge. The ready availability of lifelong learning will provide pathways to learning only imagined before. In the future, learners of all ages will be able to access knowledge needed to solve simple or complex problems as they appear without the need to enrol in formal degree programmes, leave their jobs to attend school, or spend considerable sums of money to upgrade their skills’ (Scott, 2015, p. 12).

The following indicators could be used to measure progress achieved in encouraging lifelong education in the Arab region:

- The number of Arab States that have legislations or political statements that declare their commitment to adopt lifelong learning as a human right and a philosophy of education.
- The number of states that establish partnerships with various stakeholders in order to create new pathways for lifelong learning that provide diversified learning opportunities to manifold groups across their life-cycles.

- The numbers of learners involved in ALE programmes in each state.
- The ratio of mobile technology users in literacy learning.

The 2015 *Recommendation on Adult Learning and Education* provides a starting point for the Arab States to redefine literacy and expand its concept to meet the demands of the knowledge society and the transitions occurring in the region. This necessitates going beyond the traditional three Rs. Instead, there is a shift towards two new ‘three Rs’ concepts, which are necessary for competing in a globalized and intercultural knowledge society: the first concept involves *reasoning, resilience and responsibility*; the second *rigour, respect and relevance* (Scott, 2015, p. 12).

It is suggested that literacy and basic skills in the Arab States should be aligned with *GRALE III* policy approaches (UIL, 2016, p. 33), including:

- Policies with a strong focus on literacy and basic skills that are framed in terms of the human right to education.
- Policies that focus on skills with impact on health, social cohesion, economic development and poverty reduction, and on the central role of literacy in achieving these wider outcomes.
- Policies that highlight the importance of formally recognizing learning achievements and opportunities for advancement after literacy and basic skills are developed.
- Policies that target marginalized and disadvantaged people to achieve equity in literacy and basic skills.
- Policies that make long-term commitments to achieving measurable outcomes in literacy and basic skills.

Many indicators could be used to assess progress achieved in literacy programmes in the Arab States:

- Improvement in literacy ratios.
- Improvement in ratios of inclusion of marginalized groups (women, people living in poverty and remote areas, etc.).
- Diversity of literacy programmes that include twenty-first century skills as well as cultural learning (e.g. the arts, ethics, spirituality).

CONTINUING TRAINING AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Continuing training and professional development is a fundamental element in a continuum of learning that equips adults with the knowledge, skills and competencies to engage fully in rapidly changing societal and working environments (UNESCO, 2015, pp. 2–3).

The youth unemployment rate has risen sharply in the Arab States since 2011, and is almost three times higher than the general unemployment rate. Twelve million additional jobs need to be created in the region by 2025 to prevent the unemployment rate from increasing further.

The requirement for new skills for new jobs created a gap between the labour market and education. This has exacerbated the unemployment problem and reflects the absence of national qualifications frameworks as well as a dichotomy in the vision of the business sector and the education sector. This constitutes a challenge to ALE to qualify Arab youth and upgrade their skills in a rapidly changing global labour market.

The results of the *GRALE III* monitoring survey suggest that countries have high expectations of ALE in terms of labour market outcomes. More than half of the countries that responded to the survey agreed that ALE can have ‘strong’ or ‘moderate’ effects on productivity and employment. The survey also asked countries to consider which types of ALE might have the most positive effects on employability, and over half of the countries that responded saw initial vocational education and training as having the most positive impact (UIL, 2016, p. 95).

Technical and vocational education and training (TVET) in most Arab countries has been criticized for the lack of national strategies and policies and the weak contribution of the private sector in partnering with public education and training institutions. Major drawbacks of vocational and technical training are the stereotyping of training specializations and curricula, the limitation of training programmes, and the weakness of their connection with higher and university education and the labour market (UNDP, 2014, p. 101).

TVET programmes provided through ALE in Arab countries should be competency-based and linked to opportunities for workplace practice of the skills being learned.

TVET may also include basic literacy and numeracy and life skills topics for the young adult and youth in the age group 14–25. TVET may be introductory to qualify the trainees for the workplace, or qualify them for a diploma to continue their education to higher and university level, enabling youth to meet the demands of the knowledge society.

As adult learning and education takes place in many locations, is organized by many agencies, and is affected by, and must respond to, the advent of new media/technologies, learning increasingly needs to be delivered in creative and innovative ways, which may be difficult to measure. This constitutes a challenge to most Arab States, as they do not have legislation or mechanisms for the recognition, validation and accreditation of non-formal education or the experience acquired through informal education.

It is worthwhile mentioning here that continuing training and professional development in the Arab States should not be confined to technical and vocational competencies, but should extend its scope to include transversal competencies and soft skills that are required to ‘develop the capacity of individuals to: (a) think critically and to act with autonomy and a sense of responsibility; and (b) reinforce the capacity to deal with and shape the developments taking place in the economy and the world of work’ (UNESCO, 2015, p. 3).

To measure progress achieved in continuing training and professional development in the Arab States, the following indicators could be used:

- Increasing ratios of TVET institutions, programmes and enrolments.
- Diversity of continuing training and professional development programmes.
- Diversity of target groups.
- Existence of relationships between TVET institutions and the changing labour market.
- Improvement of youth employment ratios, especially TVET graduates.
- Available legislations and institutions for recognition and accreditation of learning gained through TVET.
- Opportunities for lifelong education available to TVET graduates.

PEACE CULTURE AND ACTIVE CITIZENSHIP

Adult learning and education includes education and learning opportunities for active citizenship, variously known as community, popular or liberal education. It empowers people to actively engage with social issues such as poverty, gender, intergenerational solidarity, social mobility, justice, equity, exclusion, violence, unemployment, environmental protection and climate change. It also helps people to lead a decent life in terms of health and well-being, culture, spirituality and all the other ways that contribute to personal development and dignity (UNESCO, 2015, p. 3).

The drastic and complicated changes and events occurring in the Arab region, especially violence, unemployment and weak participation, mean that education for active citizenship is one of ALE's main roles. This role has become more prominent in the age of social media, which have hugely increased the diffusion of a mixture of political ideas, sectarian and violent trends, as well as mobilizing youth towards peaceful or violent activities at national, regional and international levels.

The need for active citizenship education, especially for youth, has gained importance significantly in the Arab States due to the current political and social situation.

Active citizenship programmes focus on the following topics:

- Interpersonal and relationship skills
- Human rights education
- Citizenship education
- Global citizenship
- Civic education

Many indicators may be used to assess progress achieved in peace culture and citizenship education in the Arab States:

- An increase in the number of programmes and diversity of educational materials dealing with peace culture and citizenship education.
- Inclusion of democracy, gender equality, tolerance, cultural diversity and so on in these programmes.
- An increase in the number of government agencies, non-governmental organizations and civil society organizations participating in such programmes.

THE DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION OF ALE

The Qingdao Declaration (2015), which was issued by the International Conference on ICT and Post-2015 Education, asked Member States to 'seize digital opportunities [to] lead education transformation'. The UNESCO-led conference took place in May 2015 in Qingdao, China, and affirmed 'that lifelong learning is the guiding principle to enhance individuals' knowledge, skills and competencies for work and life. We recommend that ICT be used to deliver education and training, including technical and vocational education and training, in both formal and non-formal settings, at all times and in all places, as it can improve and diversify learning pathways, improve quality, and further reach vulnerable and underserved groups including rural youth and adults, women and girls, out-of-school youth, and people with disabilities'.

Future learning processes will inevitably take place in environments in which learners select their own modes of learning and bring personal technologies into education. Mobile devices will facilitate learning by reducing the boundaries between formal and informal learning. By using a mobile device, learners can independently and easily access supplementary materials to clarify ideas and share that knowledge with others (Scott, 2015, p. 9).

The Arab countries can benefit from the wide and fast diffusion of ICTs. The Arab Knowledge Report 2014 emphasized that ICT applications are expected to deepen and spread the effects of ICT, as well as distribute all kind of technologies in the Arab States that may be employed in the pursuit of knowledge and balanced and comprehensive socio-economic development (UNDP, 2014, p. 206).

ICT is already widely present in the Arab States in terms of household ownership of computers, a high percentage of mobile subscriptions and of internet users, and an exceedingly high number of Facebook users. Ease of access to mobile technologies and the rapid assimilation of mobile communications into the lives of those aged 25 years and under have increased the availability of continuous learning (see *Annex 2*).

The Arab Internet Population Forecast (2014–2018) also reflects the rapidly expanding sector, with the number of internet users in the Arab World predicted to rise to about 226 million by 2018. According to the report, the

internet penetration rate will jump from around 37.5 per cent in 2014 to over 55 per cent in 2018, which would be approximately 7 per cent above the world average of 3.6 billion forecast by e-marketers.

This means that the potential digital transformation in adult learning and education in the Arab States can provide e-learning opportunities to adult youth – particularly those living in remote areas – thereby helping them to continue their education, solving the problem of overcrowded schools, and supporting literacy campaigns as well as the education of refugees and internally displaced persons.

To evaluate progress achieved in ICT transformation, the following indicators may be used:

- The ratio of adult learners enrolled in e-learning institutions.
- The number of e-learning institutions.
- The ratios of adult learners using mobile learning.
- The size and quality of ALE e-course production.

9. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS 2017–2021

In respect of the challenges and changes occurring in the Arab region today, there is a growing need for an effective ALE approach that contributes to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals; establishes peaceful coexistence, democratic life, active citizenship and social cohesion; and enhances economic development. Over the next four years, Arab States need to develop their ALE programmes according to the BFA five areas: policy; governance; financing; participation, inclusion and equity; and quality.

POLICY

To transform ALE policies and their orientation towards the BFA areas of action, it is recommended that Arab States should:

- Issue legislation that is in accordance with the developments of the concept and scope of adult learning and education as described in the *Recommendation on Adult Learning and Education* and other international declarations, and that reflects the demographic, political, social and economic changes in the Arab region.
- Adopt lifelong learning as a philosophy of education and affirm this philosophy in statements, declarations and policy documents as a political commitment.
- Create a critical mass of ALE professional and senior cadres who are highly skilled and fully oriented towards international efforts, international declarations and trends in ALE.
- Facilitate the development of Arab references or standards that integrate the outcomes of non-formal and informal learning and, based on the Arab context, establish an Arab Qualifications Framework (AQF).
- Establish an RVA observatory for collecting and disseminating best practices at different stages in the development of recognition, validation and accreditation systems.

GOVERNANCE

Good governance is essential for Arab States in ALE programmes to build trust and partnerships of all stakeholders and to ensure inclusion and participation of all target groups. In this respect, it is recommended that the Arab States should:

- Promote coordination between development agencies, NGOs, national stakeholders and external assistance programmes to include capacity-building to promote transparent, accountable and inclusive management systems by local community agents for ALE programmes.
- Develop interministerial and intersectoral coordination and cooperation to reach potential groups of learners, especially youth, women and previously excluded or marginalized groups.
- Enhance the role of universities in ALE in respect of research and the development of online programmes for youth to continue their higher and university education.
- Support the three regional centres in Egypt, Saudi Arabia and United Arab Emirates to continue and develop as hubs for capacity-building at the regional level.

FINANCING

ALE in the Arab States is generally funded through government budgets; its share of government expenditure is very small, not exceeding 1 per cent in most countries. Funding is mainly channelled through the budget of ministries of education, and is expected to decrease in the coming decades due to political circumstances that require allocating more money for reconstruction. If we add to this the financial crisis resulting from low oil prices and the limited contribution of civil society in allocating direct investment to ALE programmes, we can see that it will be difficult to guarantee sufficient allocations for ALE. To increase the financing of ALE programmes, the Arab States should:

- Align finance with sustainable development requirements. While domestic public finance remains the central resource, all sources, including foreign direct investment, remittances and public-private partnerships, need to be mobilized to bridge the gap in financing ALE programmes.
- Encourage the private sector, especially industrial institutions, to provide investment in vocational training and continuing education, as well as investing in developing the infrastructure of educational institutions and training centres.

- Establish a special fund under the auspices of the Arab Monetary Fund to finance ALE projects especially for:
 - post-conflict countries;
 - countries with high rates of illiteracy;
 - empowerment of women;
 - illiterates in rural and remote areas;
 - experimental and pilot ALE projects;
 - TVET.

PARTICIPATION, INCLUSION AND EQUITY

There are many indicators of progress in achieving gender parity in ALE and, in some Arab States, innovative efforts to improve access and participation. In this respect, the Arab States should:

- Encourage online and other strategies of open learning, as well as home schooling, community schooling and family education to provide choices to meet different needs.
- Diversify learning opportunities and programmes that enable women and youth to develop their competencies relevant to the changing demands of labour market.
- Promote and support women's education programmes in formal and non-formal education to improve Gender Parity Index (GPI).

QUALITY

Quality is becoming a preoccupation among education policy-makers, planners and educators in the Arab States. In ALE, the issue is no longer merely access to programmes, but an imperative to ensure that ALE enables learners to acquire up-to-date knowledge and skills required for health and well-being, employability and a full social life. To improve the quality of ALE programmes, the Arab States should:

- Support universities, research and training centres in the region working in the areas of ALE, and create a network that will generate knowledge to help governments make informed policy decisions based on reliable information to improve the quality of education at regional and national level.
- Establish databases at national level to provide the information required for planning, monitoring, evaluation and decision-making.
- Enhance capacity-building of ALE data-collection personnel and activists to be able to align ALE

programmes and activities with the growing needs of learners, especially youth and women, to improve their participation in economic, political and social activities in their communities.

- Establish an Arab regional quality assurance body that is responsible for developing indicators to assess and monitor ALE progress in the Arab region.
- Develop initial and continuing professional development programmes for ALE personnel through cooperation between universities and the three regional centres in Egypt, Saudi Arabia and United Arab Emirates.
- Professionalize adult education as a discipline in Arab universities. More effort is needed to generate knowledge that meets rapid changes and helps train researchers and specialists in ALE.

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ANNEX 1: POPULATION GROWTH AND PROJECTIONS IN THE ARAB STATES

Table 7: Population growth and projections in the Arab States

COUNTRY OR AREA	TOTAL POPULATION (thousands)		INCREMENT (thousands)	ANNUAL GROWTH RATE (%)
	2010	2025	2010–2025	2010–2025
World	6,895,889	8,002,978	1,107,089	1.0
Arab Region, of which:	357,433	467,945	110,512	1.8
Transition countries	230,985	343,256	112,271	2.1
Egypt	81,121	100,909	19,788	1.5
Iraq	31,672	48,885	17,213	3.1
Libyan Arab Jamahiriya	6,355	7,465	1,110	0.8
OPT*	4,039	6,207	2,168	2.8
Somalia	9,331	14,152	4,821	2.6
Sudan**	43,522	60,811	17,289	2.4
Syria	20,411	26,009	5,598	1.7
Tunisia	10,481	11,921	1,440	1.0
Yemen	24,053	36,698	12,645	3.0

*Occupied Palestinian Territory **Includes South Sudan

Source: Population Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat 2011. *World Population Prospects: The 2010 Revision*.

ANNEX 2: ICT INDICATORS IN THE ARAB STATES

Table 8: ICT Indicators in the Arab States

COUNTRY	Households with a Computer		Number of Mobile Subscriptions per 100 Inhabitants (2013)	Number of Landline Subscriptions per 100 Inhabitants (2013)	Percentages of Internet Users per 100 Inhabitants (2013)	Number of Facebook Users per 100 Inhabitants (2012)
	Year	Year %				
Algeria	2010	20.00	102.01	7.98	16.5	4,111,320
Bahrain	2012	92.70	165.91	21.78	90.0	413,200
Comoros	--	--	47.28	3.13	6.5	19,940
Djibouti	2010	13.01	27.97	2.37	9.5	50,140
Egypt	2012	37.92	121.51	8.31	49.6	12,173,540
Iraq	2008	18.20	96.10	5.63	9.2	2,555,140
Jordan	2012	54.50	141.80	5.20	44.2	2,558,140
Kuwait	2012	82.31	190.29	15.08	75.5	890,780
Lebanon	2011	71.50	80.56	18.04	70.5	1,587,060
Libya	--	--	165.04	12.72	16.5	781,700
Mauritania	2010	2.99	102.53	1.39	6.2	106,200
Morocco	2012	43.06	128.53	8.86	56.0	5,091,760
Oman	2011	58.00	154.65	9.67	66.5	584,900
The State of Palestine	2012	53.94	73.74	9.29	46.6	956,960
Qatar	2012	91.51	152.64	19.02	85.3	671,720
Saudi Arabia	2010	57.30	176.50	16.37	60.5	5,852,520
Somalia	--	--	49.38	0.61	1.5	123,480
Sudan	2012	14.00	72.85	1.09	22.7	--
Syria	2010	40.37	55.97	20.22	26.2	--
Tunisia	2010	19.10	115.60	9.29	43.8	3,328,300
UAE	2012	85.20	171.87	21.32	88.0	3,442,940
Yemen	2010	3.96	69.01	4.68	20.0	495,440
The Arab Region						45,805,180

Source: Arab Knowledge Report 2014: Youth and localization of knowledge. Dubai, UNDP

The **Sixth International Conference on Adult Education (CONFINTEA VI)**, held in Brazil in December 2009, closed with the adoption of the Belém Framework for Action, which recorded the commitments of Member States and presented a strategic guide for the global development of adult learning and education from a lifelong learning perspective. The third *Global Report on Adult Learning and Education (GRALE III)*, published in 2016, drew on survey data to evaluate progress made by countries in fulfilling the commitments made in Brazil, while also highlighting some of the contributions adult learning and education can make to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The CONFINTEA VI Mid-Term Review, in Suwon, Republic of Korea, in October 2017, takes stock of progress made by Member States in the past eight years, looking ahead to *GRALE IV* in 2019. This regional report, one of five produced for the Mid-Term Review in cooperation with the International Council for Adult Education (ICAE), examines progress in the **Arab States**, exploring the contribution of key policy agreements and frameworks and offering recommendations in advance of CONFINTEA VII in 2021.