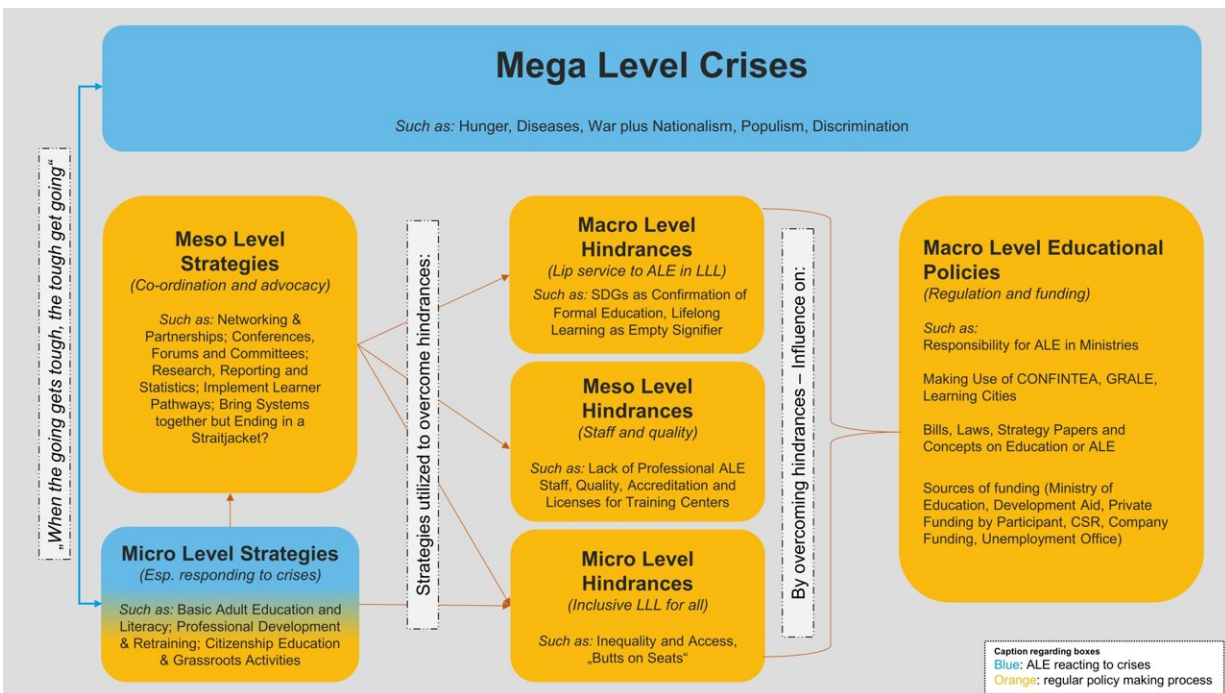


# Research shows societal factors shape adult learning and education

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Study on Adult Education in eight countries 2023, Universität Hamburg et al. The diagram shows the different levels that influence the development of adult education. Credit: Grotlüschen, Ertner 2023

From August 2022 until October 2022, interviews with 25 experts from selected countries were conducted and then analyzed through a Ground Theory approach. From this, a model emerged, showing how factors and actors at different societal levels—mega, macro, meso and

micro—interact to shape adult learning and education (ALE) in different contexts.

"Mega level" comparisons show that overarching issues such as war and conflict, historical and systemic discrimination, disease and [extreme poverty](#) as well as political authoritarianism act both as an impetus and as barriers to ALE activities.

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

The "meso level" is where the key driving force for the implementation of ALE in the policy arena is found. Advice to government from democratically structured associations with elected chairs have greater gravitas than advice from less formally constituted groupings. However, their effectiveness can be limited by factors such as lack of resources, funding and professional expertise.

At the "micro level", informal and non-formal ALE activities are provided by companies as in-service training, and by commercial providers, governmental organizations or civil society organizations that run training centers. Activities at the micro level are highly flexible. This is complemented by grassroots activists mobilizing community members in response to local issues and needs. ALE at the micro-level includes responding to the localized impact of severe weather events, improving the quality of life for the elderly, and challenging the prevalence of sexual harassment as acceptable behavior.

The report presents examples of successful, micro level and grassroots projects from each country. Many of these projects are carried out by DVV International, the main German organization fostering adult learning and education worldwide, together with local partners. The insights from the study led to recommendations about ways in which ALE could be strengthened within the framework of lifelong learning. The recommendations to associations and policy makers are:

- Build and support sustainable networks and associations
- Build coordination across stakeholders and within sectors that engage with ALE.
- Recognize and encourage grassroots efforts that support adult learning in ALE and other sectors
- Support the collection and use of high quality (quantitative and qualitative) data on ALE at both the national and cross-country levels to both advocate for and strengthen provision at the local, state, and national levels
- Highlight and strengthen the role of ALE in lifelong learning by reinforcing the importance of a lifelong and lifewide (across the full spectrum of adult learning needs and interests) approach to learning
- Leverage the flexibility and responsiveness of ALE to build on its strengths
- Ensure that ALE meets the wide range of educational, training, and civic needs that learners, employers, and governments have for learning in adulthood
- Provide meaningful support for ALE at the micro, meso, and macro levels

The research findings and recommendations will be presented for the different entities of DVV-International.

**More information:** Adult Learning and Education within the

Framework of Lifelong Learning. [www.dvv-international.de/fileadmin/user\\_upload/Work\\_04-2023\\_web.pdf](http://www.dvv-international.de/fileadmin/user_upload/Work_04-2023_web.pdf)

Findings were made available [online](#) 15 June 2023 as No. 81 in the Publication series International Perspectives in Adult Education (IPE).

DVV International invited the authors to present the findings at their annual Conference with their Regional Directors on 20.06.2023 in Bonn. The Universität Hamburg will host a webinar on 19.9.2023, more information can be found here: <https://www.conferences.uni-hamburg.de/e/studyonale>

Provided by University of Hamburg

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