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Publication Date

2009

Peer reviewed



CHAPTER 4

PARTICIPATION AND EQUITY IN ADULT EDUCATION

Adult education provides a means to address the development challenges of the 21st century. It enables people to acquire knowledge, skills and values which allow them to improve the quality of their present and future lives. It helps people to discover what resources they need, identify new possibilities to acquire them and, most importantly, to use the resources at their disposal to fulfil their aspirations. In short, access to, and participation in, relevant and appropriate adult education are fundamental to personal, economic and societal development.

Equity was a key issue of the CONFINTEA V deliberations. It must certainly be central to any new vision of adult learning and education. As previous chapters underscore, equitable access and participation are clear expressions of sustainable educational inclusion and social justice. People of all ages have the right to basic education, which is a prerequisite for further learning.

In reality, however, overall participation rates in adult education in most countries are low, and there are very significant inequalities of access and participation both within and between nations. This chapter first reviews patterns of participation in adult education across groups of countries and sets out the main reasons for non-participation. It then specifies major obstacles to raising participation levels and concludes by proposing the directions in which adult learning and education policy must move if these obstacles are to be overcome.

4.1 Low overall rates of participation

Describing and analysing international adult education participation patterns are fraught with difficulties, given the paucity of comparative statistical data related to adult learning and education. This is acutely the case for the countries of the South. Nevertheless, of the 154 National Reports submitted in preparation for CONFINTEA VI, 29 cited participation rates in adult education while 66 presented participation rates in literacy programmes (see Table 4.1). This represents an overall increase when compared with the data compiled for CONFINTEA V. Nevertheless, the quality and comparability of available data from the 2008 National Reports, especially from developing countries, are problematic. In far too many cases, data on adult education lack historical reference points and are insufficiently comprehensive in their coverage.

In many cases countries only provide enrolment data in government-led programmes; data on participation in NGO programmes are typically sparse or non-existent. In other cases, the available information do not reflect a broad understanding of adult learning and education such as, for example, the inclusion of participation in employer-provided and/or -funded training. Thus statistics on adult education for most countries of the South must be viewed with caution, since reported figures may underestimate actual participation levels.

It is only for high-income countries, and a select set of developing nations, that fairly robust and comparable data have been available since the mid-1990s. They cover participation in adult education and its provision. They also include information on the characteristics of adult participants and

Table 4.1
Information on participation in adult education, by type of programme and sector

| Regions/number of countries with reports | Arab states 19 | Asia-Pacific 29 |
|---|---|---|
| Enrolment rates in highschoools and/or universities | Iraq, Kuwait, Oman 3 | Bhutan, China, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Mongolia, New Zealand, Palau, Republic of Korea, Tajikistan, Thailand, Uzbekistan, Vietnam 11 |
| <i>Percentage</i> | 16 | 38 |
| Enrolment rates in vocational education and training | Kuwait, Libya, Palestine, Yemen 4 | Bhutan, China, Iran, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Republic of Korea, New Zealand, Tajikistan, Thailand, Uzbekistan 10 |
| <i>Percentage</i> | 21 | 34 |
| Participation rates in literacy programmes | Algeria, Bahrain, Egypt, Iraq, Kuwait, Libya, Mauritania, Oman, Palestine, Qatar, Syria, Tunisia, Yemen 13 | Afghanistan, China, India, Lao People's Democratic Republic, New Zealand, Pakistan, Papua New Guinea, Thailand, Vietnam 9 |
| <i>Percentage</i> | 68 | 31 |
| Participation rates in adult learning and education | N/A N/A | Australia, Palau, Republic of Korea, Vietnam 4 |
| <i>Percentage</i> | N/A | 14 |
| Participation rates in specific adult education programmes | Jordan, Kuwait, Libya, Oman, Yemen 5 | Bhutan, Japan, Kazakhstan, Republic of Korea, Tajikistan, Vietnam 6 |
| <i>Percentage</i> | 26 | 21 |

Source: National Reports prepared for CONFINTEA VI

What is counted as organised forms of adult learning and education can be surmised from this question in the International Adult Literacy Survey (1994-1998): "During the past 12 months, that is since ..., did you receive any training or education including courses, private lessons, correspondence courses, workshops, on-the-job training, apprenticeship training, arts, crafts, recreation courses or any other training or education?" (OECD and Statistics Canada, 2000)

| Europe and North America | 38 | Latin America and Caribbean | 25 | Sub-Saharan Africa | 43 | Total 154 |
|---|-----------|---|-----------|---|-----------|------------------|
| Austria, Belgium (Flemish), Bulgaria, Canada, Denmark, Estonia, Norway, Poland, Romania, Russian Federation, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, United Kingdom, United States of America | 16 | Argentina, Brazil, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Jamaica, Peru, St. Lucia | 7 | Botswana, Cape Verde, Namibia, Sao Tome & Principe, Seychelles, United Republic of Tanzania | 6 | 43 |
| 42 | | 28 | | 14 | | 28 |
| Austria, Belgium (Flemish), Bulgaria, Canada, Denmark, Estonia, France, Ireland, Montenegro, Norway, Poland, Romania, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Turkey | 16 | Argentina, Dominican Republic, Haiti, Jamaica, Peru, St. Lucia | 6 | Botswana, Cape Verde, Eritrea, Ghana, Liberia, Namibia, Nigeria, Rwanda, Seychelles, United Republic of Tanzania | 10 | 46 |
| 42 | | 24 | | 23 | | 30 |
| Belgium (French), Canada, France, Ireland, Slovenia, United States of America | 6 | Brazil, Chile, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Jamaica, Mexico, Nicaragua, Paraguay, St. Lucia | 11 | Benin, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Chad, Democratic Republic of Congo, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Gabon, Ghana, Guinea, Kenya, Lesotho, Madagascar, Malawi, Mali, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, Niger, Nigeria, Rwanda, Sao Tome & Principe, Seychelles, Uganda, United Republic of Tanzania, Zambia, Zimbabwe | 27 | 66 |
| 16 | | 44 | | 63 | | 43 |
| Austria, Belgium (Flemish), Canada, Estonia, Germany, Lithuania, Norway, Poland, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, United Kingdom, United States of America | 15 | Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, Dominican Republic, Jamaica, St. Lucia, St. Vincent & the Grenadines | 7 | Cameroon, Seychelles, South Africa | 3 | 29 |
| 39 | | 28 | | 7 | | 19 |
| Belgium (Flemish), Canada, Denmark, Ireland, Lithuania, Montenegro, Norway, Poland, Romania, Russian Federation, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Turkey, United States of America | 18 | Chile, Ecuador, El Salvador, Haiti, Jamaica, Mexico, Nicaragua, Paraguay, St. Lucia | 9 | Botswana, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Cape Verde, Democratic Republic of Congo, Eritrea, Gambia, Ivory Coast, Lesotho, Liberia, Madagascar, Nigeria, Rwanda, Seychelles, South Africa, United Republic of Tanzania, Zimbabwe | 17 | 55 |
| 47 | | 36 | | 40 | | 36 |

can suggest explanations for the observed variations in participation. This section therefore relies heavily on the comparable information available for many countries of the North (mainly OECD countries), but also includes additional, though often non-comparable, programme-level data for some countries of the South.

Overall, while there is some improvement in participation rates in adult education since CONFINTEA V, in most countries they remain unacceptably low. The proportion of adults who have not completed primary schooling or its equivalent is evidence of a large unmet demand for adult basic education. Appendix Table 2 illustrates this unmet challenge for large segments of the population aged 25 and older. At least 18% of the world's adults have not completed primary schooling or ever been to school. This rate reaches 30% in Latin America and the Caribbean, 48% in the Arab States, 50% in sub-Saharan Africa and 53% in South and West Asia. Given that for many of the

poorest countries in the world, no data are available at all, it is certain that were these countries to be included in the estimates given in Appendix Table 2, average rates of adults not completing primary schooling would be even higher.

The picture is mixed for some countries in Europe and North America, where adult education surveys are able to track patterns of participation. In Finland, for example, surveys in 1980, 1990, 1995 and 2000 concluded that there was a doubling of the participation rate over 20 years. Three national household education surveys undertaken in the United States of America in 1995, 1999 and 2001 indicate a growing rate of participation in adult education from 40% to 45% and 46% respectively. The first Europe-wide adult education survey, covering 29 countries, carried out between 2005 and 2006, reveals a wide range of divergence from the European average of 35.7%, with Sweden having the highest participation rate at 73.4% and Hungary having the lowest at 9.0% (see Table 4.2).

Table 4.2
Participation by adults in formal or non-formal education and training,
by country, gender and age, 2007 (percentages)

| Country | Sex | | | Age | | |
|-------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| | Male | Female | Total | 25-34 years | 35-54 years | 55-64 years |
| Austria | 44.0 | 39.9 | 41.9 | 47.1 | 45.7 | 25.4 |
| Bulgaria | 37.9 | 35.0 | 36.4 | 44.7 | 39.7 | 20.3 |
| Cyprus | 43.0 | 38.2 | 40.6 | 53.2 | 41.1 | 20.1 |
| Estonia | 36.9 | 46.7 | 42.1 | 52.5 | 42.6 | 27.5 |
| Finland | 48.9 | 61.3 | 55.0 | 66.0 | 58.6 | 37.8 |
| France | 36.4 | 33.8 | 35.1 | 48.2 | 35.9 | 16.2 |
| Germany | 48.3 | 42.4 | 45.4 | 53.3 | 48.7 | 28.2 |
| Greece | 14.3 | 14.6 | 14.5 | 22.7 | 14.0 | 5.1 |
| Hungary | 8.3 | 9.6 | 9.0 | 15.8 | 9.0 | 2.5 |
| Italy | 22.2 | 22.2 | 22.2 | 30.5 | 23.0 | 11.8 |
| Latvia | 25.9 | 39.0 | 32.7 | 39.0 | 34.3 | 21.8 |
| Lithuania | 28.7 | 38.7 | 33.9 | 42.7 | 35.1 | 19.0 |
| Norway | 53.3 | 55.9 | 54.6 | 65.0 | 55.5 | 41.2 |
| Poland | 21.3 | 22.4 | 21.8 | 34.1 | 20.7 | 6.8 |
| Slovakia | 45.3 | 42.8 | 44.0 | 51.0 | 48.3 | 23.8 |
| Spain | 30.8 | 31.0 | 30.9 | 39.7 | 30.8 | 17.0 |
| Sweden | 70.8 | 76.1 | 73.4 | 81.0 | 76.4 | 60.7 |
| United Kingdom | 47.2 | 51.3 | 49.3 | 58.8 | 50.3 | 37.0 |
| EU average | 36.1 | 35.4 | 35.7 | 44.7 | 37.2 | 21.6 |

Source: Eurostat, 2009

Countries with available comparable data on adult education activity can be divided into four distinct groups based on participation levels (see Box 4.1). This classification is based on data in Appendix Table 3 showing the proportion of adults aged 16 to 65 (excluding regular full-time students aged 16 to 24) who participated in any organised form of education or training within a 12-month reference period. Very few countries have participation rates at or above 50%, except for a number of European Nordic countries (Group 1). At the other end of the scale, several southern and eastern European countries – and Chile – fall into a group with the lowest participation levels. A study conducted in Brazil suggests a participation rate there of 16%.

In general, adult education participation rates are positively correlated with a country's level of economic development as measured by per capita GDP: on average,

the more prosperous the country, the higher the participation rate. Figures 4.1 and 4.2 cross-tabulate data to show how per capita GDP relates to the rate of participation in adult education and to the functional adult literacy rate. In both figures, the relationship is positive. However, there are interesting country variations. For example, participation rates in the Nordic countries are significantly higher than countries with similar levels of per capita GDP such as Australia, Belgium, Canada, France, Germany, Switzerland, the United Kingdom and the United States of America. While New Zealand, Slovenia, the Czech Republic and Portugal have similar income levels, participation rates are considerably higher in the first two than in the latter two countries.

Differences between income level and participation rate in adult education tend to be wider in countries of the South, especially among low-income countries.

Data for Brazil are available from a survey carried out by two NGOs which found that in 2007, 16% had taken a non-formal education course in the last 12 months, 31% had done so previously to this, and 52% had never done so. The results confirm an earlier survey from 2001, so this would place Brazil in the group of countries with participation levels of under 20% (see Box 4.1).

(Brazil National Report prepared for CONFINTEA VI)

Box 4.1

Country groupings by participation in organised forms of adult education in the previous year, population aged 16-65

Group 1: Participation rates close to or exceeding 50%

This Group comprises the Nordic countries, including Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden.

Group 2: Participation rates between 35% and 50%

This Group includes countries of Anglo-Saxon origin: Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the United Kingdom and the United States of America. A few of the smaller Central and Northern European countries, including Austria, Luxembourg, the Netherlands and Switzerland, as well as the Caribbean island of Bermuda, are also among this group.

Group 3: Participation rates between 20% and 35%

This Group features the remainder of Northern European countries including Belgium (Flanders) and Germany as well as Ireland. Also among this Group are some Eastern European countries, namely Czech Republic and Slovenia, and some Southern European countries including France, Italy and Spain.

Group 4: Participation rates consistently below 20%

This Group includes the remaining Southern European countries, namely Greece and Portugal, as well as some additional Eastern European countries, Hungary and Poland, and the only South American country with comparable data, Chile.

(Calculations based on the following databases: Statistics Canada (1994-1998) International Adult Literacy Survey; National Center for Education Statistics (2003); and Eurobarometer (2003). See also Desjardins et al, 2006: 36 and Rubenson and Desjardins, 2009: 193.)

Figure 4.1
Relationship between per capita GDP and rate of participation in adult education

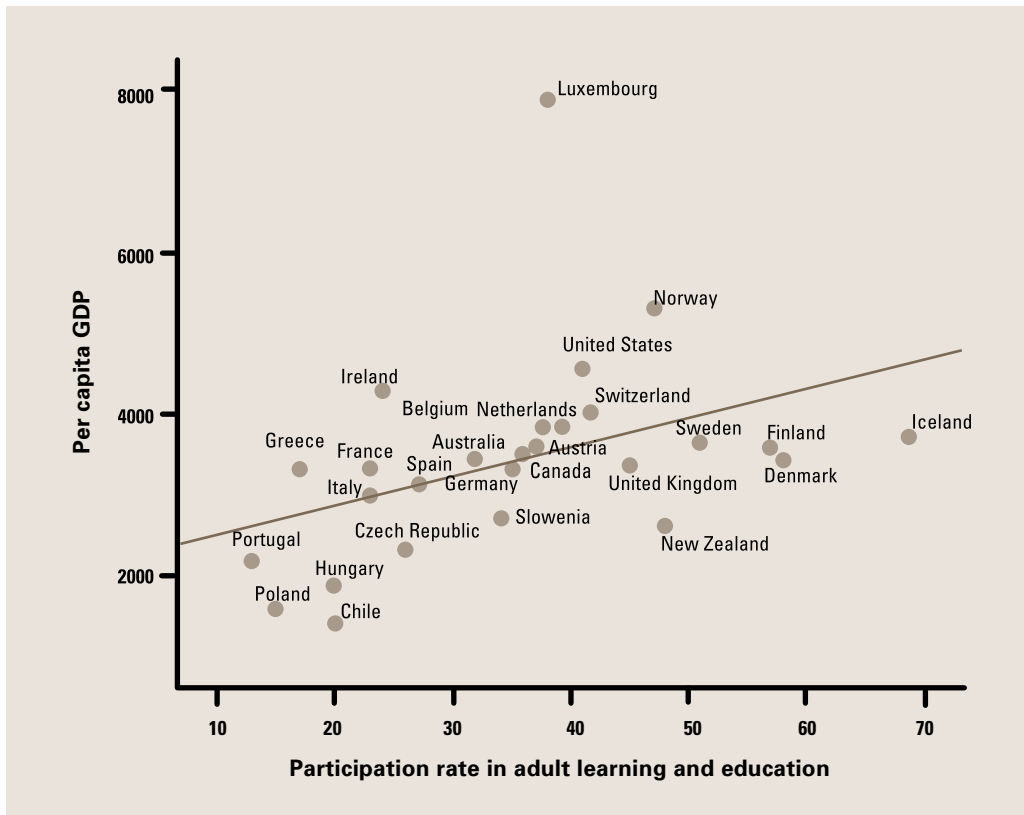
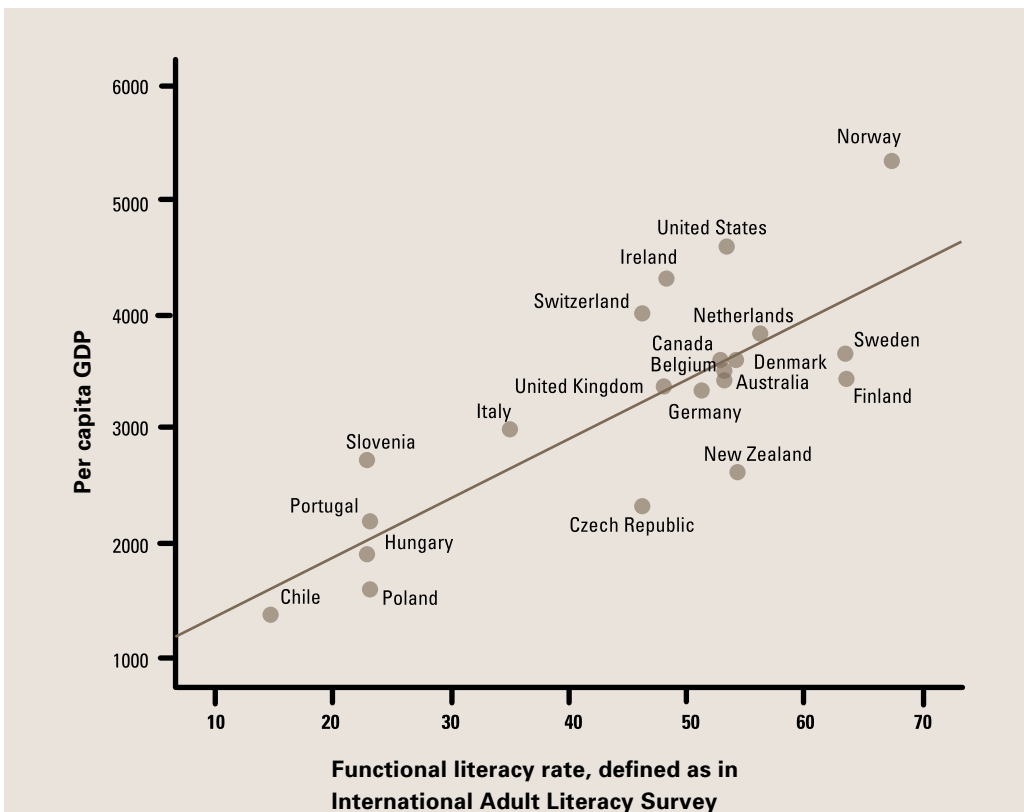


Figure 4.2
Relationship between per capita GDP and functional literacy rate



In some CONFINTEA VI National Reports, the evidence suggests that these differences may have increased in recent years.

Large differences in adult education participation between countries at different development stages are to be expected. However, variation between countries at the same development stage suggests that participation is not solely a function of income level (*per capita* GDP), but a consequence of other factors, perhaps particularly the impact of public policy. Several factors emerge from a reading of the National Reports:

- The degree to which public policies are supportive of adult education
- The extent to which governance and provision structures foster and promote adult participation in education and learning opportunities at work
- How much communities attach social value to adult learning and education
- The level of political commitment to diverse learning cultures and regard for learning as a means to improve social cohesion.

These factors help explain why some countries are more able than others at comparable per capita income levels to attain higher participation levels and relatively lower levels of inequity in access. Addressing equity issues is therefore paramount. One explanation for the success of adult education in the Nordic countries (Group 1) is that, for various historical, social and cultural reasons, these countries have established public policies that promote adult education, foster favourable structural conditions, target barriers to participation, and ensure that disadvantaged groups have equal opportunity to participate in adult education. Existing research reveals that differences among nations are not necessarily due to the existence of barriers to participation but rather to the conditions that allow persons and groups to overcome such barriers.

4.2 Inequity in participation

Within countries levels of participation vary according to socio-economic, demographic and regional factors, which reveal structural deficiencies in access to adult education.

Lack of comparable data limits the analysis of the characteristics of adult participants internationally. Apart from countries in Europe and North America, there is extremely limited information on adult education participation levels broken down by age, income, ethnicity, language and educational background.

Figures obtained from the countries of the North (see Appendix Table 3) show markedly lower rates for older workers and senior citizens, adults with low levels of education and low levels of skills, those working in low-skill jobs and the unemployed, those from poorer socio-economic backgrounds, and immigrants, migrants and ethnic minorities. These patterns are consistent across countries, but the extent of the disparities between such social groups varies from country to country (OECD and Statistics Canada, 2000; 2005). As previously mentioned, inequalities are substantially less pronounced in the Nordic countries (Group 1).

In the United States of America, the data from the national household education survey show differences in participation vis-à-vis key demographic variables. As in Europe, participation rates are higher in younger cohorts. Educational attainment and household income are positively related to participation in adult education. Race and ethnicity are also important factors in adult education participation (see Table 4.3).

Patterns of participation for women in Europe and North America are not as straightforward, with some countries experiencing lower rates than for males and others showing higher rates of participation, as the data displayed earlier in Table 4.2 illustrate. In general, gender disparities in participation rates and achievement are much greater in the countries of the South than of the North. They are especially prevalent in the Arab States, Asia and sub-Saharan Africa.

Table 4.3
Formal adult education participation rates, by selected demographic characteristics
and type of educational activity, USA, 2004-2005

| Characteristic | Participation in formal adult education activities (%) | | | | | | | | |
|--|--|----------------------------|-------------|---------------------------|--------------------------------------|--|-------------------|----------------------|---------------------------|
| | Number of adults (thousands) | Any formal adult education | ESL classes | Basic skills/ GED classes | Part-time college degree program (1) | Part-time vocational degree/ diploma program (2) | Apprenticeship(1) | Work-related courses | Personal-interest courses |
| Age | | | | | | | | | |
| 16 to 24 years | 25,104 | 53 | 2 | 6 | 9 | 2 | 3 | 21 | 27 |
| 25 to 34 years | 38,784 | 52 | 2 | 2 | 7 | 2 | 3 | 32 | 22 |
| 35 to 44 years | 42,890 | 49 | 1 | 1 | 4 | 1 | 1 | 34 | 22 |
| 45 to 54 years | 41,840 | 48 | # | # | 3 | 1 | 1 | 37 | 20 |
| 55 to 64 years | 29,068 | 40 | # | # | 1 | 1 | # | 27 | 21 |
| 65 years or older | 33,922 | 23 | # | # | # | # | # | 5 | 19 |
| Sex | | | | | | | | | |
| Male | 101,596 | 41 | 1 | 1 | 4 | 1 | 2 | 24 | 18 |
| Female | 110,011 | 47 | 1 | 1 | 4 | 1 | 1 | 29 | 24 |
| Race / ethnicity | | | | | | | | | |
| White, non-Hispanic | 146,614 | 46 | # | 1 | 4 | 1 | 1 | 29 | 22 |
| Black, non-Hispanic | 23,467 | 46 | # | 2 | 4 | 1 | 2 | 27 | 24 |
| Hispanic | 26,101 | 38 | 6 | 3 | 4 | 1 | 2 | 17 | 15 |
| Asian or Pacific Islander, non-Hispanic | 7,080 | 44 | 2 | 1! | 6 | 1! | 1! | 24 | 23 |
| Other race, non-Hispanic | 8,346 | 39 | # | 1 | 4 | 1 | 2 | 23 | 20 |
| Highest education level completed | | | | | | | | | |
| Less than a high school diploma / equivalent | 31,018 | 22 | 2 | 7 | # | 1 | 1 | 4 | 11 |
| High school diploma / equivalent | 64,334 | 33 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 2 | 17 | 16 |
| Some college/vocational/ associate's degree | 58,545 | 51 | 1 | # | 6 | 2 | 1 | 31 | 25 |
| Bachelor's degree | 37,244 | 60 | # | # | 6 | 1 | # | 44 | 29 |
| Graduate or professional education or degree | 20,466 | 66 | 1! | # | 7 | 1 | 1! | 51 | 30 |
| Household income | | | | | | | | | |
| \$20,000 or less | 34,670 | 28 | 1 | 2 | 2 | 1 | 2 | 11 | 16 |
| \$20,001 to \$35,000 | 35,839 | 36 | 2 | 2 | 4 | 1 | 1 | 18 | 17 |
| \$35,001 to \$50,000 | 33,376 | 42 | 2! | 1 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 23 | 22 |
| \$50,001 to \$75,000 | 47,114 | 48 | # | # | 5 | 1 | 1 | 33 | 21 |
| \$75,001 or more | 60,607 | 58 | 1 | 1 | 5 | 2 | 1 | 39 | 27 |
| Employment status | | | | | | | | | |
| Employed full-time | 106,389 | 53 | 1 | 1 | 5 | 2 | 2 | 40 | 20 |
| Employed part-time | 27,090 | 53 | 1 | 2! | 7 | 1 | 1 | 32 | 29 |
| Unemployed and looking for work | 9,941 | 38 | 2 | 6 | 3 | 2 | 2! | 14 | 23 |
| Not in the labour force | 68,187 | 28 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 6 | 20 |
| Occupation | | | | | | | | | |
| Professional / managerial | 48,647 | 70 | # | # | 8 | 1 | 1 | 56 | 29 |
| Sales / service / clerical | 66,218 | 48 | 1 | 2 | 5 | 2 | 1 | 31 | 22 |
| Trade and labour | 37,585 | 34 | 2 | 2! | 2 | 2 | 3 | 19 | 13 |
| Total | 211,607 | 44 | 1 | 1 | 4 | 1 | 1 | 27 | 21 |

Estimate rounds to 0 or 0 cases in sample.
 ! Interpret data with caution; coefficient of variation is 50% or more.

1 Includes those enrolled only part-time in college or university degree or certificate programs or those enrolled through a combination of part-time and full-time enrollments in the 12 months prior to the interview.

2 Includes those enrolled only part-time in vocational or technical diploma, degree, certificate programs or those enrolled through a combination of part-time and full-time enrollments in the 12 months prior to the interview.

NOTE: Details may not sum to totals because of rounding.

The information gleaned from CONFINTEA VI National Reports suggests that there are large and systematic disparities in adult education participation between urban and rural populations, particularly in most countries of the South. The International Adult Literacy Survey data (see Appendix Table 3) indicate that the urban-rural gap in participation is wider than the gender gap in most high- and middle-income countries.

Older adults over the age of 45 also tend to be at a disadvantage when it comes to adult education participation. Until recently many countries had rarely targeted the older age groups in policies and programmes although now this group is a key target in high-income ageing societies. In low- and lower-middle income countries most government programmes give priority to younger adults. In some instances, programmes set upper age limits for access, typically age 35 or 40. As the Latin America-Caribbean Regional Synthesis Report (Torres, 2009) highlights, in Brazil and Mexico – the most populated countries in Latin America – over half of those over 50 years old either have low levels of education or have never been to school.

For the large majority of the countries included in Appendix Table 3, adults from migrant and minority backgrounds are at a greater disadvantage with respect to participation. This is true in the most prosperous countries but even more so in middle-income countries. A similar picture emerges for language status groups: people whose first language differs from the country's official language(s) are typically unfavoured. Participation is likely to be even lower if, for example, dimensions such as disability compound marginalisation due to gender, age and race.

Disadvantaging factors are cumulative so that, for example, older women living in rural areas are least likely to participate in adult education of any kind, particularly if they belong to a minority ethnic group. The needs of such social groups are immense and complex, and are clearly not being met by current provision and policy.

Rural areas with large indigenous populations (for example, Bolivia, Ecuador, Guatemala, Mexico and Peru) have the lowest overall educational participation rates for people of all ages. Indigenous groups in the Latin American region thus remain largely invisible in policy and governance frameworks. Tribal, ethnic and religious minorities as well as indigenous peoples living in the Asia-Pacific region tend to be very poor, unemployed and in poor health. Few participate in any form of education and often lack access to basic public services. As a result adult literacy rates are extremely low, especially in poorer countries.

4.3 Multiple and structural causes for low and inequitable access to adult learning and education

Unless consciously redressed through equity-oriented policies, formal educational systems tend to reinforce social inequalities (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1970; Shavit and Blossfeld, 1993). As Rubenson (2006) concludes, patterns of inequality in adult education mirror the distribution of social power and resources, and more precisely exemplify the degree to which justice, rights, responsibilities and entitlements prevail in a particular country. The Asia-Pacific Regional Synthesis Report (Ahmed, 2009) indicates a variety of economic, political, social and structural barriers that constrain women, the poor, older adults, ethnic minorities and indigenous groups from participating in adult education. Unequal participation rates have multi-faceted causes, ranging from those located at the level of the individual learner to those linked to institutional and cultural contexts. As far as more developed economies are concerned the following typology is useful. It distinguishes among three types of barriers that generate inequities in access and participation: institutional, situational and dispositional (Cross, 1981).

Institutional barriers include institutional practices and procedures that discourage or prevent participation, such as a lack of provision or opportunity (at the right time or location), high user fees, or entry qualifications. These have an impact on adults of all ages, but especially the poor and least educated.

Situational barriers arise from an individual's life situation at a given point in the family life-cycle (for example, care for children or parents) and working life (for example, sufficient time or resources for study). Family-related barriers tend to be most intense in early to mid-adulthood and particularly affect women. Place of residence and factors related to linguistic and ethnic minority status can also be situational in nature. Institutional and situational barriers are often inter-related.

Dispositional barriers refer to psychological factors that may impede an individual's decision to participate (for

example, perception of reward or usefulness of participation, self-perception and other attitudes). These barriers are particularly prevalent among poor, weakly literate or elderly populations. Such attitudes can often be rooted in ambivalent memories of initial education and training, but also by judgements that adult education has little relevance for improving one's life and job prospects. Although dispositional barriers are socio-psychological in nature, they too are interwoven with institutional and situational barriers and interact with them. Box 4.2 shows the profile of adult learners in Canada and identifies some impediments to participation in learning.

Box 4.2 Impediments to participation in learning

Analyses from the Adult Education and Training Survey (AETS) show that:

- "Canadian adults are more inclined to participate for job or career-related purposes than for personal interest.
- Participation in adult education is mainly instrumental. For example, even at age 55-64, job or career-related motives are still slightly stronger than personal interest.
- Women are slightly less likely than men to participate for job or career reasons, but they are twice as likely to enrol out of personal interest.
- Canadian adults that report job or career-related reasons are foremost looking to upgrade their skills for a current job. However, approximately one in two indicate the importance of study in order to find another job. Some of those upgrading for current, different or future jobs are also looking at possibilities for promotion.
- The follow-up question to those who participated for personal reasons reveals a quite complex picture. The two dominant motives – upgrading skills and personal development – often seem to go hand in hand.
- Institutional barriers are mentioned slightly more often than situational barriers.
- Among working Canadians, being too busy at work was the dominant reason for not starting a course. Only a small group saw lack of employer support as a barrier.
- Family responsibility was a substantially greater barrier among women than among men.
- High costs are reported as a major barrier particularly among young and low-income adults.
- The analysis of the profiles of the respondents who expressed 'needed' or 'wanted' training but did not participate suggests that a substantial segment of the workforce is working under conditions that do not stimulate their interest in participating in organised learning activities."

Source: Rubenson, 2001: 34

Table 4.4 reports the proportion of adults who have overcome different types of barriers to participation. In almost all countries, dispositional barriers are the most difficult to overcome, while situational barriers appear to be easiest to deal with. Generally, learners living in countries with more developed economies are most able to overcome barriers – with some notable exceptions (Luxembourg, with a high per capita income, scores lower than other countries in Group 2). Analysis suggests that overcoming situational and institutional barriers is linked to public intervention schemes such as family policy frameworks supporting childcare and release time for adults, especially women. On the other hand, workplace learning programmes, supported by employers, can help to break through some of the barriers, particularly for men. Situational barriers are more easily overcome where a broader range of welfare and labour market services exists (for example, in Nordic countries), whereas institutional barriers are more directly linked to adult education strategies, policies and programmes. Although useful for the country groupings discussed, the challenge of dealing with situational barriers might be more extreme in the low-income economies of the South.

Table 4.4
Proportion of population overcoming barriers to participation,
countries grouped by adult education participation rate,
multiple sources, 1994- 2003

| | | | | Proportion who overcome barriers to participation in adult learning and education (%) | | |
|---------------------------------------|----------------------------|--|---|---|------------------------|------------------------|
| | GDP per capita (PPP)* 2007 | Participation rate in adult learning and education (%) 1994-2003 | IALS functional literacy rate (%) 1994-1998 | Situational barriers | Institutional barriers | Dispositional barriers |
| Group 1 (close to or > 50%) | 39,414 | 56 | 62 | 58 | 53 | 52 |
| Denmark | 35,787 | 57 | 54 | 58 | 47 | 47 |
| Finland | 34,411 | 58 | 63 | 62 | 54 | 49 |
| Iceland | 37,174 | 69 | | 65 | 68 | 69 |
| Norway | 53,334 | 47 | 67 | 49 | 44 | 43 |
| Sweden | 36,365 | 51 | 63 | 56 | 50 | 49 |
| Group 2 (35-50% range) | 41,234 | 41 | 52 | 40 | 33 | 29 |
| Austria | 38,155 | 39 | | 40 | 31 | 22 |
| Australia | 34,882 | 36 | 53 | | | |
| Bermuda | | 47 | | | | |
| Canada | 35,729 | 37 | 53 | | | |
| Luxembourg | 78,985 | 38 | | 41 | 39 | 29 |
| Netherlands | 37,960 | 38 | 56 | 40 | 32 | 33 |
| New Zealand | 26,110 | 48 | 54 | | | |
| Switzerland | 39,963 | 42 | 46 | | | |
| United Kingdom | 33,535 | 45 | 48 | 40 | 29 | 32 |
| United States | 45,790 | 41 | 53 | | | |
| Group 3 (20-35%) | 31,950 | 28 | 43 | 28 | 22 | 21 |
| Belgium | 34,458 | 32 | 53 | 35 | 26 | 22 |
| Czech Republic | 23,194 | 26 | 46 | | | |
| France | 33,414 | 23 | | 21 | 20 | 16 |
| Germany | 33,154 | 35 | 51 | 35 | 24 | 22 |
| Ireland | 43,035 | 24 | 48 | 34 | 29 | 27 |
| Italy | 29,934 | 23 | 35 | 25 | 20 | 20 |
| Slovenia | 27,095 | 34 | 23 | | | |
| Spain | 31,312 | 27 | | 16 | 15 | 16 |
| Group 4 (below 20%) | 20,641 | 17 | 21 | 13 | 10 | 9 |
| Chile | 13,885 | 20 | 15 | | | |
| Greece | 33,074 | 17 | | 18 | 15 | 10 |
| Hungary | 18,679 | 20 | 23 | | | |
| Poland | 15,811 | 15 | 23 | | | |
| Portugal | 21,755 | 13 | 23 | 8 | 6 | 7 |
| Total | 34,333 | 36 | 45 | | | |

Notes:

1. International Adult Literacy Survey 1994-1998 (Columns 2-3); Eurobarometer 2003 (columns 4-6), World Bank data on GDP and population (column 1). Also see Rubenson and Desjardins (2009: 193 and 203-204) for an expanded table of sub-categories of situational, institutional, and dispositional barriers.

2. IALS functional literacy rate is defined as the percent of adults aged 16 to 65 who score at proficiency Level 3 or higher on the prose literacy scale as measured in the International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS).

3. Data collected on barriers in the Eurobarometer Survey (2003) are grouped as follows.

Situational barriers:

"My job commitments take up too much energy; My employer would not support me; My family commitments take up too much energy; My family would not support me; I would need some equipment that I do not have (computer, etc.)."

Institutional barriers:

"I have not the necessary qualifications to take up the studies / training course I would like to; There are no courses that suit my needs; There are no courses available nearby, I could not get to them; I would not want to go back to something that is like school (double constraint)."

Dispositional barriers:

"I have never been good at studying; I would not like people to know about it in case I didn't do well; I think I am too old to learn; I would not want to go back to something that is like school; I do not know what I could do that would be interesting or useful; I would have to give up some or all of my free time or leisure activities; I have never wanted to do any studies or training."

Sources: Calculations based on following databases: Statistics Canada (1994-1998), IALS Survey; Eurobarometer (2003); World Bank (2007)

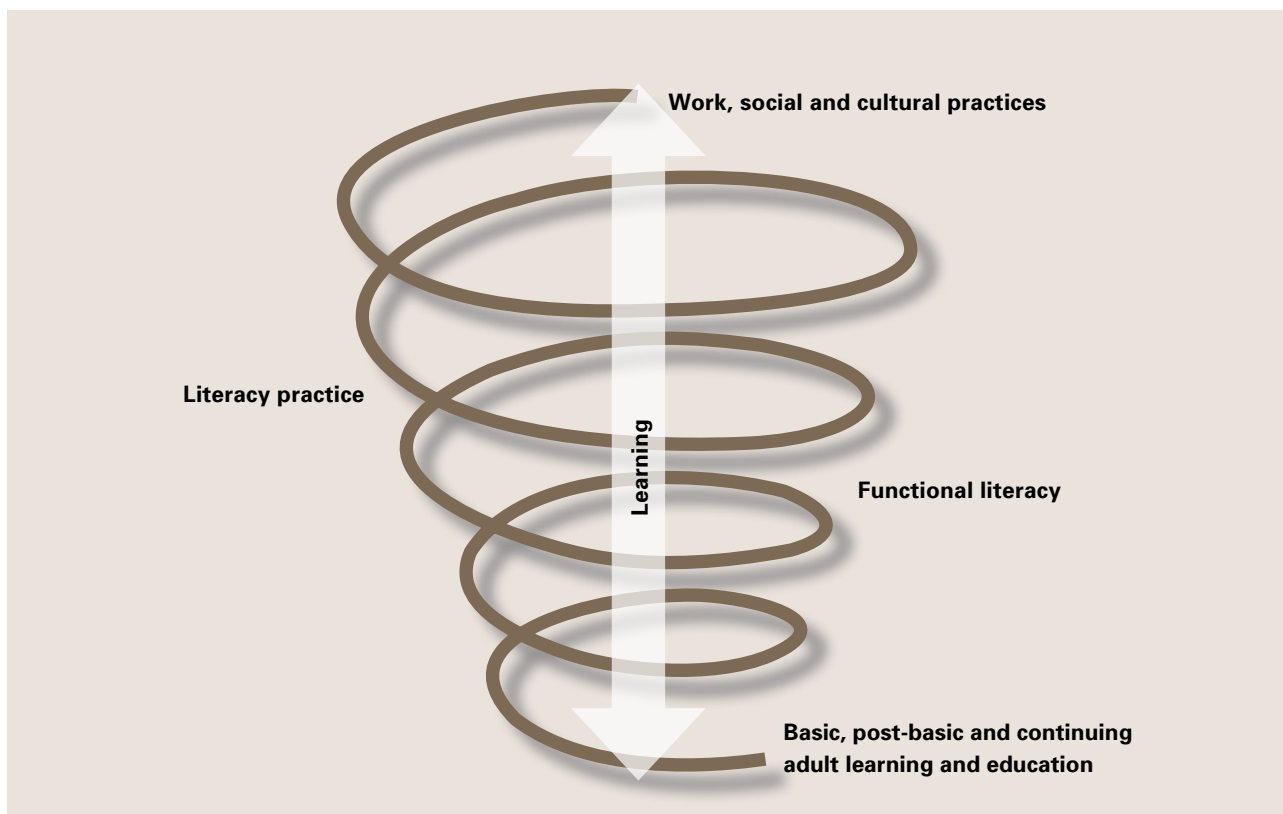
The available data on who participates reveals a consistent pattern across a wide range of countries and regions: those who have acquired more education tend to get more and those who do not, find it difficult to receive any at all. However, enabling participation can break this cycle, leading to an upward spiral of achievement for those becoming involved in education as adults.

Following Gray's (1956) analysis, Figure 4.3 below illustrates how this polarising tendency (the so-called 'Matthew effect') operates as initial formal education, adult education and literacy practices in work, social and cultural life become mutually-reinforcing. Literacy is a foundational skill which is a prerequisite for continuous learning in our increasingly written environment. In modern society, functional literacy represents a fundamental capability that individuals need to convert resources in ways that enable them to achieve their goals. Functional literacy enables adults to engage in a wide range of literacy and

learning practices – textual, visual and digital – at work, home and in the community (see OECD and Statistics Canada, 1995; 2000; 2005; UNESCO-OREALC, 2007).

It is important not to see participation in learning as separate from other aspects of life. The nature of work environments and the social and cultural practices embedded in daily life are equally important in securing personal development. In fact, as Figure 4.3 illustrates, systematic learning opportunities are at the centre of a spiral. Workplaces rich in literacy practices and conducive to learning reinforce the upward development of knowledge and competence. By extension, embedding literacy and learning practices in everyday work practices not only fosters functional literacy but also shapes opportunity and life chances (Desjardins, 2004; Reder, 2009). The same can be said about social and cultural practices. Diverse and nurturing learning experiences raise awareness of complex social processes and interactions

Figure 4.3
The upward spiralling effect of learning, literacy and literacy practices



(Adapted from Gray, 1956: 24)

(Pring, 1999), creating a greater interest in participating actively in social life and contributing to change.

Given the chance to learn, people have the potential for continued growth. In contrast, few or limited opportunities can lead to stagnation, decline, entrapment and isolation. This applies to communities as well as to individuals. Opportunities to learn are socially, culturally and economically bounded, and are thus distributed via complex societal mechanisms which are both explicit and implicit. In most societies today, awarding recognised educational qualifications which are acquired through basic, post-basic and/or continuing adult education is a very common way to structure life chances. It is therefore important to understand how qualification systems function and, more generally, the extent to which systems that validate prior learning and experience (via non-formal and informal learning) are equally accessible to all. Werquin (2007) pointed out that the Matthew effect applies to the validation of prior learning too: individuals who already have recognised qualifications are more likely to obtain further validation of their knowledge and skills.

4.4 Increasing participation rates and addressing inequity

This chapter has documented low levels and social inequalities in access to, and participation in, adult education – both between and within countries and world regions. Disadvantaged adults, especially those with multiple disadvantages, are least likely to participate in adult education. They tend not to perceive the benefits to be derived from participation, and they believe that little is to be gained personally from such investments. In addition they are more likely to find themselves in living and working environments that are not conducive to learning. The potential of adult education to help realise social and economic development and sustainable well-being has yet to be realised in most countries.

Using targeted policies to tackle barriers to participation

Policies are needed to address the double challenge of low participation and high inequality in adult education – in particular by reducing structural barriers to participation and combating individual scepticism about the benefits of adult learning. Such policies need to address institutional, situational and dispositional barriers in integrated ways. Table 4.4 earlier identified, for countries with available data, the significance of these barriers in depressing participation and distinguished between countries that are more or less successful in overcoming these obstacles. Learning from good practice is vital to progress in this area.

In the last decade, many countries have acknowledged the need for targeted policies to address inequalities in participation in adult learning. Much targeting focuses on the specific barriers that face adults in accessing education and training. Such initiatives can release time for participation in adult learning, remove monetary constraints and reduce institutional barriers. In practice, changing course formats, increasing distance and flexible learning options, offering monetary incentives and developing flexibility around entrance requirements have all been useful.

Measures can be implemented through direct targeting, compensating for market failures and for increased reliance on markets, mobilising contributions from all stakeholders through appropriate incentives (especially for NGOs and civil society organisations) and developing social and legal infrastructures for building and sustaining learning cultures.

There is a need for strong public equity policies which emphasise adult learning as a tool. These require the involvement of civil society organisations since the capacity for flexibility and vitality of such practitioners has been shown to be successful in targeting disadvantaged and rural populations.

Situational constraints on participation in adult learning and education can also be addressed by targeted policies. Policy options include improving access to health and social services, including childcare

(OECD, 2006); establishing measures to release time and subsidise participation in adult education, especially for disadvantaged groups; developing support for single-parent and child allowances to overcome family-related barriers. In Chad, for example, UNICEF established day-care facilities at community centres of adult education. Work-life balance issues – namely, flexible working hours, educational leave schemes and employer co-financing models – fall into a similar category for action. Active labour market measures that combine re-training and employment subsidies are also relevant elements of comprehensive adult education policies.

facilities such as childcare can, and should, be considered in order to prevent income being an insurmountable barrier to adult education.

Establishing mechanisms to foster personal interest and motivation can help to break through dispositional barriers, especially if targeted among disadvantaged groups. While potentially costly, these measures are probably crucial for the poorest countries, where stimulating demand is essential to secure the levels and kinds of literacy needed to keep pace with cultural and economic modernisation. Also important are policies that generate the production and distribution of diverse print media for new readers, by forging partnerships with publishers and newspaper producers. Flexible programmes run by NGOs or local community organisations are an important means for attracting 'new' adult learners. Employers, unions and community organisations also have an important role to play in promoting literacy development in everyday working, social and cultural practices. Dispositional barriers can be weakened by mass awareness-raising and outreach campaigns, especially in conjunction with a mix of other strategies as, for example, in Gambia (see Box 4.3).

The need for targeted policies does not entail a 'one-size-fits-all' solution for a given target group. There is value in meeting heterogeneous needs through diverse means. The range of policies found in the Nordic countries exemplifies how countries can address the diverse needs of their populations. This helps account for the relatively high participation levels among older adults (over 45) in this sub-region.

Developing programmes focusing on specific groups

Alongside generalised policies there is a need to address the specific problems and needs of particular groups within countries. This kind of targeting is apparent from many National Reports. A notable tendency in low- and lower-middle income countries is the targeting of women and young people/young adults. However, only in a few countries are indigenous groups, rural areas and the elderly targeted, even though these are commonly among the most excluded from provision.

Box 4.3

Measures to mobilise adult learners in Gambia of adult education in the previous year, population aged 16-65

In Gambia strategies used by different providers in mobilising adult learners to participate include:

- Income-generating programmes and provision of micro-credit facilities to beneficiaries
- Skills training
- Home visits to inactive participants
- Linking access to loans with regular attendance
- Community sensitisation
- Involving (male) opinion leaders in planning literacy projects
- Providing grants
- Training of literacy participants to serve as development agents (nurse attendants, facilitators to work in their own communities, and so on)
- Prize-giving ceremonies
- Use of resource persons
- Employment opportunities

Source: *Gambia National Report, 2008: 16*

Lack of funds is but one element which clearly restricts participation in adult education. If family circumstances allow little time away from employment and work-related activities, then adults from poorer households will continue to be excluded from educational opportunities, unless learning can be linked with income-generating activities. Among others, measures to improve working conditions and pay, to waive fees and provide free

Box 4.4**Improving equity: examples of measures to improve participation in adult education**

Afghanistan's Constitution obliges the state to devise and implement effective programmes for balancing and promoting education for women, improving the education of nomad groups and eliminating illiteracy.

Eritrea's adult literacy programmes target youth and adults aged 15-45 of both sexes who did not benefit from formal education in their childhood and early youth.

Lesotho seeks to reach herders, domestic workers, senior citizens, those living with disabilities, out-of-school youth, adults who have never to school and vulnerable communities touched by poverty, rural isolation and HIV/AIDS.

Madagascar's literacy programmes target out-of-school children and young people, women, prisoners, military personnel and elected officials

Malawi in particular wants to reach illiterate adults of both sexes, elderly people, those who are poor, unemployed people aged 15 and older; in addition, its programmes target orphans, displaced people, people living with AIDS and disabled people.

Mongolia prioritises (1) out-of-school children, youths, adults, those who have left school early and vulnerable and disadvantaged groups, and (2) children and adults who want to study via extension programmes and other alternative pathways.

Pakistan sets first priority on reducing illiteracy and in particular for rural people, the poor and disadvantaged, ethnic minorities, nomadic groups and tribal populations, refugees, those living with disabilities, girls and women, street children and child workers, tithed agricultural workers and domestic workers. Limited resources have led Pakistan to prioritise the following target groups: out-of-school youth and those who have left school early aged 10-14; the young illiterate aged 14-15 years of both sexes; illiterate adults aged 25-45, especially women.

The Philippines see distance learning as an alternative delivery mode that reaches out to learners – including children and young people – in underserved, high-risk and disadvantaged areas, especially those affected by conflict.

Thailand's adult education has developed discrete provision to serve the following target groups: (1) 6-14-year-olds who are not in school, (2) 15-59-year-olds in general and (3) those aged 60 and older. Special target groups with special financial support include the disabled, street children, the hill tribes and minority ethnic groups.

Zambia targets vulnerable groups who are most likely to be illiterate: women, out-of-school youth and unemployed adults, particularly in rural areas.

Source: National Reports prepared for CONFINTEA VI

Box 4.4 notes selected examples of specific target groups in countries of the South. These typically include women, out-of-school youth, street children, unemployed youth, indigenous groups, rural residents and, increasingly in recent years, disabled, migrant and refugee populations, as well as nomadic groups and prison inmates. Many Asia-Pacific countries have undertaken

innovative programmes to encourage the participation of tribal, ethnic and religious minorities, not least through first-language adult literacy and basic education programmes. The aims and priorities shown in Box 4.4 are ambitious; actual implementation continues to lag far behind policy intentions (see Chapter 2).

Targeted initiatives exist in many countries, and examples of good practice can be identified (see Box 4.5). Closing the gender gap in literacy programmes is an important focus. Many sub-Saharan African countries now compile gender-specific participation data to better design projects and programmes specifically for women. They involve ministry departments responsible for women's affairs more closely in implementing educational policies and, on paper at least, their governments and administrations subscribe to the principle of equal opportunities for women and men.

Active policies to bridge urban-rural participation disparities do appear to have positive impact (see Box 4.6). The use of traditional and modern technologies can be instrumental for stimulating demand and reaching people in rural areas. Radio has been an effective tool for decades, but now audio-visual media present viable options. The E-Mexico initiative is a leader in Latin America and the Caribbean with

Box 4.5

Women's Literacy and Empowerment Programme, Sindh Education Foundation, Pakistan

The Women's Literacy and Empowerment Programme (WLEP) works towards providing disadvantaged women with educational and self-development opportunities and contributes to their empowerment. It operates through 40 Women's Literacy and Empowerment Centres (WLECs) which ensure provision of learning facilities. Teachers are hired from within the community and are provided with both training and ongoing pedagogical support by the WLEP team. Regular meetings with community members ensure their participation, involvement and ownership. Awareness-raising sessions on health, nutrition, early childhood development, cleanliness and hygiene are conducted with the learners, as well as with the community at large. To organise women and harmonise efforts for programme sustainability, women's organisations have been established in each centre.

Source: Pakistan National Report, 2008: 57

Box 4.6

Education at distance centres in rural areas, Poland

This project is designed to create about 1,150 centres throughout the country, located in rural areas only. They will contribute to reducing the disparity between villages and cities. The centres appear mainly in localities where, due to demographic changes, small schools are closed or threatened by closure. The centres are provided with internet-enabled computer equipment with educational software. The project also provides support from competent instructors, in the form of both remote consultations and short-term, direct instruction. For inhabitants of small localities, the centres offer non-formal education and an opportunity to improve qualifications. Thus, the centres can contribute to promoting the concept of learning throughout life, by increasing access to all levels of education, from post-gymnasium to the continuing education of adults.

Source: Poland National Report, 2008: 30

respect to using IT tools. Programme or community tele-centres or info-centres are especially important in promoting post-literacy programmes and sustaining functional literacy (as in Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador and Peru). In Eritrea radio programmes are broadcast in four local languages to support literacy, post-literacy, agricultural and health programmes as well as targeting teachers.

Language issues are paramount when designing more inclusive adult education initiatives. Effective programmes enable adults to overcome language barriers by using appropriate languages as a medium of instruction (see Box 4.7). In Spain, the National Plan for the Social Integration of Immigrants provides Spanish language classes for adult immigrants; organises awareness campaigns and fosters cultural tolerance; and trains intercultural mediators and facilitators at regional and local levels (Keogh 2009: 21). In some European Union countries special programmes target the social and vocational integration of their

Box 4.7 Addressing language

Ulpan for Ethiopian migrants, Israel

In Israel a special programme uses migrants' native language. The Ulpan for Ethiopian Immigrants introduced a novel approach to second language instruction, offering basic educational instruction in Amharic, with Ethiopian-born teachers. Hebrew language and literacy are taught by a veteran Israeli teacher, assisted by an Ethiopian translator. The approach has met with significant success and is widely used in ulpan classes for Ethiopian immigrants. The 'Open Door to Employment' Programme for Ethiopian immigrants, which provides elementary learning and prepares learners to enter the labour market, is another success story.

Source: *Israel National Report, 2008: 12*

The Karen Po project, Thailand

This tribal group has its own spoken language, but no written form. The project, therefore, tried to match the sounds of Po language to Thai and develop an alternative alphabet. This method is used as the principle measure for teaching Thai to other tribal groups, and has been used to produce supplementary reading materials to promote bilingual learning as well as the management of informal education programmes for adults.

Source: *Thailand National Report, 2008: 68*

Box 4.8 "Second Chance" Project, Montenegro

The "Second Chance – Literacy and Professional Development for Social Integration" project is intended for illiterate settled Roma people older than 15 in two towns (Podgorica and Nikšić), which have the largest numbers of Roma.

It is based on the national programme of elementary functional literacy, which in addition to elementary ability to read, write and calculate, involves mastering minimum knowledge and skills necessary for successful and quality implementation of various activities in work, family and social environments.

Upon completion of the programme, learners have a chance to enrol in the professional development programme for occupations which are in demand on the labour market. Completion of the IT literacy programme and driving courses improves their competencies and employment opportunities and social integration.

Source: *Montenegro National Report, 2008: 34*

scattered Roma populations (see Box 4.8). Increases in life expectancy are prompting many governments to view age as a dimension of unequal participation – especially in the rapidly 'ageing societies' of Europe, North America, Australia, New Zealand and Japan. In Canada, the Targeted Initiative for Older Workers is a federal-provincial/territorial cost-shared

initiative providing support to unemployed older workers in communities affected by significant downsizing or closures (Keogh, 2009). Important initiatives are emerging elsewhere: for example, the 'Help Age Ghana', project is designed to encourage the participation of older adults in education.

Establishing learning communities

While learning is inherently an individual activity, it takes place in sub-cultures that reflect different ways of life. Community education, learning cities, learning festivals and other collective efforts that extend individual learning into the realm of community and societal learning can contribute substantially to the promotion of adult learning and education. For example, Saudi Arabia's 'illiteracy-free society' programmes are models of good practice with a number of innovative features. Learning cities and regions in Europe and Asia or 'Education Cities' in Southern Europe and Latin America make for a new learning ecology in which the entire city actively participates as a provider of adult learning opportunities and activities.

4.5 Conclusion

The information received from National Reports and Regional Synthesis Reports on the issues of participation and equity has revealed the intransigence of the problems facing those who believe that adult learning provides a critical tool in the fight against poverty and exclusion. It is not enough merely to persuade governments and policy-makers of the vital role that adult learning plays in improving life chances and social justice, although this is a critical first stage. An equally momentous task is enabling those who would profit most from adult learning programmes to believe in themselves and see how adult learning offers a key to economic, personal and societal development. The case for adult education has to be directed at both

Box 4.9 Adult learners' festivals

Since the early 1990s, literacy celebrations, adult learners' weeks and lifelong learning festivals have been mounted at local, national and/or regional levels worldwide to mobilise for adult learning and non-formal education. These promotional campaigns have created visibility and support for adult and lifelong learning.

At CONFINTEA V, delegates committed themselves to promoting the "development of a United Nations Week of Adult Learning". UNESCO, on the initiative of a coalition of several UNESCO member states (notably the United Kingdom, Jamaica, Australia and South Africa), took up the issue, adopting a resolution in November 1999 launching International Adult Learners' Week, which would "enrich International Literacy Day and strengthen its links to the larger adult learning movement to which it contributes".

On behalf of UNESCO, the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning coordinates International Adult Learners Week, linking national campaigns which are currently carried out in approximately 45 countries around the world. Addressing policy-makers, providers, cultural institutions, adult educators and adult learners alike, they have also helped to build cooperation, networks and synergies, and have provided arenas for adult learners to articulate their aspirations and to emerge increasingly as partners in policy dialogue.

funderson and policy-makers and to potential participants. This requires adult educators to target multiple audiences as they wrestle with the issues involved. In order to move forward it is important to gain ground in a number of key areas.

First, and as a basis for action, more data on participation is needed for middle- and low-income countries. It is difficult to argue without facts and figures and the levers and insights that comparative data provides. The lack of information from the South leads to the risk that inappropriate solutions from higher-income countries may suggest, and lead to wasted efforts just where funding is lowest and efficacy most necessary. In data collection the need is for simple data accounts that can be easily collected rather than diverting vital resources to a bureaucratic struggle for sophistication. However, even in high-income countries there is scope for improvement in what is available: complex issues of definition and scope continue to muddy the water and undermine arguments for needed resources.

A striking pattern emerges from the National Reports concerning the intransigence of many of the participation and equity issues in adult education. In essence, those who have least education continue to get least. This is the "wicked issue" that adult education policy must attack. It is clear that generalised policy will not redress the balance, although a commitment to universal access must be maintained. Substantial resources, however, must be concentrated on those who have least. Improving the participation of disadvantaged groups must form the heart of any adult education policy. Policies here must take account not merely of the need for provision but also for the huge task of motivation and attitudinal change.

Lastly, and turning to the development of practice, the roles of government and other players – both from the private sector and from civil society – will need to be clearly defined and understood if resources are to be used effectively. Government can combat institutional barriers by giving sufficient resources to make a difference.

The private sector can be persuaded to enhance learning in workplaces. However, practice with excluded groups needs the kind of flexibility that NGOs offer and the ways into communities that are their special skill. If targeting is to succeed, resources need to be available to these players (with appropriate controls and accountability) so that their skills are used to ensure the availability of cost-effective and quality provision to the most marginalised.

Ensuring access to, and participation in, adult education goes beyond increases in the quantity of participants. It is also about striving to improve and assure quality, to which the next chapter turns.