Bundesministerium
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KULTUSMINISTER
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General Agreement on the National Decade for Literacy and Basic Skills

2016-2026

Reducing functional illiteracy and raising the level of basic skills in Germany

I. Preamble

Acting upon the significant results from the leo.- Level One survey on the scale of functional illiteracy in Germany's adult population in 2011 the German Federal and State Governments (*Bund und Länder)* took the initiative to launch a joint "National Strategy for Literacy and Basic Skills of Adults in Germany" (2012-2016). Various interest groups joined this strategy: the German Federal Literacy Association (*Bundesverband für Alphabetisierung und Grundbildung)*, the Representative of the Council of the Evangelical Church in Germany *(der Bevollmächtigte des Rates der Evangelischen Kirche in Deutschland)*, the German Institute for Adult Education (*Deutsches Institut für Erwachsenenbildung)*, the German National County Association (*Deutscher Landkreistag*), the German Adult Education Association (*Deutscher Volkshochschulverband*), the Commissariat of German Bishops (*das Kommissariat der deutschen Bischöfe)*, the German Reading Foundation (*Stiftung Lesen)*, the Federal Employment Agency (*Bundesagentur für Arbeit*), the German Trade Union Confederation (*Deutscher Gewerksschaftsbund*), the Association of German Cities (*der Deutsche Städtetag)* and the German Association of Towns and Municipalities (*Deutsche Städte- und Gemeindebund*).

The collaboration between the partners has drawn wider public attention to the subject of literacy and basic skills and ensured that it is more firmly anchored at national, federal and regional (municipal) political level. The 2015 report on the implementation of the joint National Strategy states: "Now we need to transfer, perpetuate and build on what has been achieved, strengthen and widen existing networks and cooperation as well as develop new initiatives." By transferring the National Strategy into a National Decade for Literacy and Basic Skills (2016–2026) the partners of the strategy are highlighting their intention to intensify and expand on this positive development, pursuing further fields of action and calling for further partners for the National Decade.

The Federal Government and the Länder presented the joint National Decade for Literacy and Basic Skills (National Decade) to the wider public on September 8th, 2015, the World Literacy Day. This initiative sets the topics literacy and basic skills at the top of the education policy agenda.

Over the next ten years the Federal Government and the Länder plan to collaborate closely with all partners of the National Strategy and all other interested social groups in order to considerably reduce adult functional illiteracy in Germany and to raise the level of basic skills in general.

They are therefore calling on all relevant social groups to form a broad alliance.

Only in a joint effort will it be possible to raise public awareness for this long-neglected topic, to offer new chances for their professional career as well as for their everyday life to those concerned and create key impetus and new possibilities for business and society.

Key point for all further measures and initiatives is the common conviction that literacy and basic skills are an essential requirement for a self-determined living, lifelong learning as well as active social and professional participation. Acquiring adequate basic skills (including reading and writing competences) and improving them in adult life increases the chances of an independent performance of everyday tasks, a further professional qualification and also improves social participation. For all parties involved in the National Decade it is important to reach out to as many citizens as possible so that they can improve their reading and writing skills through suitable education offers. Through in-house trainings or in form of external educational offers enterprises are given the possibility to train low-skilled workers, help them to prepare for changes at the work place (in particular for an increasing digitalisation at the work place) and thus prevent a future shortage of qualified work force. Countering adult functional illiteracy it is also crucial to take preventive measures as well as to raise awareness for this issue among the wider public and the key political and social stakeholders in order to motivate them to take action.

The term basic skills in this context includes competencies in the basic dimensions for an independent cultural and social participation, including literacy, numeracy, digital skills, health education, financial and social competences. Basic skills are thus focusing towards the practical application of literacy in professional and social everyday life. The teaching of skills and competences to cope with everyday life shall thereby also always lead to an improved understanding of meaning when reading and writing. Workplace-oriented literacy and basic skills offers for employees are a well-tested and successfully proven instrument to sustainably improve their basic competences.

II. Joint responsibility of Federal Government and Länder

The Federal Government and the Länder take a joint responsibility for the National Decade in a spirit of trust and cooperation. The federal division of competences between the Federal Government and the Länder is the guideline for this cooperation. The Federal Government and the Länder will each take appropriate measures and initiatives in their respective fields of responsibility. The Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF) holds the leading position for the National Decade within the Federal Government and cooperates closely with other federal ministries which are to be involved. The Länder participation is organised through the working group “Further Education” within the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs of the Länder (KMK) in Germany.

III. Partners of the National Decade

Within the framework of the National Decade for Literacy and Basic Skills an alliance has been forged between the Federal Government, the Länder and other social interest groups as partners to promote literacy and basic skills of adults in Germany. The partners declare their willingness to actively support the implementation and fulfilment of the common goals of the National Decade. New partners are invited to actively support the shaping of the National Decade. All partners operate jointly to address functional illiteracy as an overall challenge to society with a broad and strong alliance. They commit to promote the goals of the National Decade within their respective organisations, as well as in public. Shaping the National Decade the Federal Government, the Länder and all further partners collaborate within the framework of an Advisory Board and an annual decade conference with actions based on a work programme which is to be elaborated. The work programme is guided by the objectives and recommendations for action of the National Decade. The Coordination Point for the National Decade for Literacy presents a draft version of the work programme to the Federal Government and the Länder, which then jointly coordinate and agree on the content of the work programme.

The Advisory Board, in which the Federal Government, the Länder and the partners of the Decade are represented, consults on the content of the work programme. The Scientific Board takes part in meetings of the Advisory Board. Consequently, the Federal Government and the Länder pass the final version of the work programme, which will be regularly updated.

The members of the Advisory Board and other partners gather at an annual conference to discuss the implementation of the work programme. To address its thematic priorities working groups (including representatives of the partners) and competence networks (including external experts) can be set up. Furthermore expert conferences can be organised. New partners are to be involved in the activities of the National Decade, in particular from the areas of employment, economy and social affairs, family, youth and school, healthcare, sport and culture.

The members of the Scientific Board are appointed by the Federal Government in consultation with the Länder. With its specific expertise in research, the Scientific Board contributes to the shaping of the Decade for Literacy and Basic Skills and consults the partners of the Decade.

The Coordination Point for the National Decade for Literacy is set up by the BMBF and takes over the coordination of the Decade. It collaborates with the coordination points for literacy and basic skills of the Länder.

IV. Objectives and recommendations for action

The Federal Government, the Länder and all further partners of the Decade agree to the following objectives and recommendations for action to be pursued jointly and within the respective institutes and organisations:

1. **Improve competences**: All partners are aiming at a sustainable improvement of reading and writing skills as well as of the general level of basic skills of adults in Germany. This is to be pursued through an increased participation in educational offers. In 2011 the leo.- Level One study revealed some 14 per cent of the German population aging 18 to 64 years to be classed as functional illiterates, equating to an absolute number of 7.5 million adults. Primary target groups to the joint effort of an increased level in literacy and basic skills are German native speakers (who account for 58 per cent of those concerned, according to the Leo study) as well as migrants who have been living in Germany for a longer period of time. On a medium term perspective refugees shall also be addressed. In this context the National Decade aims at the development of suitable didactic methods and material to be used to equally address all mentioned target groups which have mastered a certain basic level of language proficiency.

2. **Intensify public relation activities**: In order to overcome the still to some extend remaining taboo and also to tackle existing prejudices a primary objective of the

joint activities is to increase awareness for the importance and necessity of literacy and basic skills amongst the general public and the immediate environment of the persons concerned. This is essential in order to increase the willingness of relatives, friends and colleagues to support those concerned, and to improve their motivation to participate in learning opportunities. This includes accepting and facing the problem in the first place, acknowledging the situation of the person concerned and actively supporting improvements. A change of public opinion needs to take place, for instance within public bodies, companies and leisure clubs. The joint use of a number of public relation instruments next to effective approaches to those concerned shall foster this general rethinking during the National Decade. The inclusion of prominent ambassadors is particularly helpful in this regard. Services aiming at the initial contact to and the initial consultation of those concerned and their immediate environment are to be improved and new channels to address these target groups to be identified. A joint internet portal, www.alphadekade.de, will serve as a platform for information and the exchange of experience.

3. **Expand research:** All partners of the Decade agree on the need to improve the overall situation of research on adult literacy and basic skills. This regards the following topics in particular:
    - causes and spread of functional illiteracy within certain population groups
    - the prevention of functional illiteracy
    - learning obstacles, learning motivation, measures to enhance learning, and successful addressing of functional illiterates
    - target group specific didactics in learning offers according to their needs
    - adequate didactic methods for learning offers tailored to serve both German native as well as non-native speakers
    - evaluation of learning offers
    - measuring the impact of individual pilot projects to assess their potential of a regional and national implementation.

4. **Expand learning offers:** The common goal is to develop new learning offers as well as to disseminate successfully tested approaches elaborated in previous funding programmes. The partners of the Decade strive to develop and expand tailor-made learning offers for different target groups embedding other basic skills areas (e.g. topics as finance, health, politics, etc.) and to elaborate suitable measures of approach. Best practice initiatives and results in adult literacy and basic skills will be continued and disseminated. According to previous experiences

and results workplace-oriented basic skills can constitute one main focus of these learning offers. Another focus shall lie on informal and low-threshold learning offers as well as on new forms of self-organised learning, taking into particular account the integration and use of newly developed digital tools. Furthermore, diverse teaching material is to be elaborated and disseminated and concepts for the evaluation and monitoring of learning progresses are to be developed.

5. **Professionalisation of staff in further and continuing education and training:** All partners of the Decade agree that an appropriate qualification of training staff is an essential prerequisite for the striven high quality of learning offers. The qualification of teaching staff in the field of adult literacy and basic skills is therefore to be expanded with regard to the use of specific teaching and learning material focusing adult learners, as well as to new approaches in didactics and methodology tailored to this target group. As part of this process, the application of and alignment with minimum standards shall be tested.

Stronger than before the actual needs of adult functional illiterates shall build the core of newly implemented learning offers. Teaching staff needs to be qualified accordingly.

In particular, the aim is to broaden the knowledge about the teaching of heterogeneous learning groups as well as about the range of internally differentiated training options enabling individualised sequences of training. The further development of teacher qualifications is to be accompanied and supported by research results and exchanges of best practice. In addition, literacy and basic skills topics shall increasingly be taken into account within the initial and further qualification training of personnel teaching in schools, as well as in the education of young people and adults. With regard to initial and further teacher qualification corresponding details will be discussed in and among the different KMK committees.

6. **Establishing, developing and disseminating structures:** The implementation of the preceding National Strategy for Literacy and Basic Skills has shown that a sustainable impact in the field of literacy and basic skills can only be achieved through embedding into existing structures and the (further) development of suitable new structures. In particular this means:

   - to sustainably anchor literacy and basic skills as an interdisciplinary topic in public administration bodies of the Federal Government, the Länder and the municipalities following an interdepartmental coordination approach,

- to include literacy and basic skills topics as interdisciplinary objectives in funding programmes of other policy areas, considering and according to each's areas of competence
- to disseminate offers available at the basic skills centres of the Länder and to strengthen (regional) literacy and basic skills networks,
- to expand the approach of outreaching educational offers as a part of literacy education,
- to integrate the topics of literacy and basic skills in the regular programmes of providers of further and continuing education and training
- to make use of the consultancy and assessment competence of the Federal Employment Agency to identify deficits in literacy and basic skills,
- an increased use of the existing interlink of preceding literacy elements with the acquisition of basic competencies within the continuing vocational training, according to the legislative amendment of Book III of the German Social Code from August 1st, 2016 (Unemployment Insurance and Continuing Education Support Act, *Arbeitslosen-versicherungsschutz- und Weiterbildungsstärkungsgesetz*, AWStG),
- to cooperate with the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (BAMF) on topics regarding literacy and basic skills of refugees, e.g. by interlinking existing literacy and basic skills offers with offers for refugees. Further possible fields of cooperation can be joint courses, the assessment of learning processes and teacher qualification (see point IV.1.),
- to review the overall position of literacy education throughout life.

7. **Measuring the impact:** At midterms of the National Decade a joint review by all partners based on a monitoring will evaluate its implementation measures and the success of the initiative.

V. Coming into effect

The Alliance for the National Decade will become effective on its adoption at the first joint decade conference on November 28th-29th, 2016.