

Programmes supporting literacy and basic education for adults

POLICY DEVELOPMENT

PRACTICAL MEASURE/INITIATIVE

 GERMANY

Timeline

2015 Implementation	2016 Implementation	2017 Implementation
2018 Implementation	2019 Implementation	2020 Implementation
2021 Implementation	2022 Implementation	2023 Implementation
2024 Implementation	2025 Implementation	

ID number 28142

Background

The world of work increasingly demands that employees have comprehensive skills, including literacy and other key competences, even for basic jobs. To support people who lack these essential skills, the Federal State and Federal Governments joined forces and launched a national strategy for literacy and basic education for adults.

Objectives

The strategy aims to support people who lack essential literacy skills and to anchor awareness of the issue sustainably in society and among stakeholders.

Description

In 2016, the national strategy for literacy and basic education for adults was followed by the Decade for literacy 2016-26, which provided EUR 180 million for the funding of related projects. A yearly monitoring report is published by AlphaDekade on behalf of the education ministry on the progress done. The first report covered the funding years 2016/17 (published in 2019).

The tasks of the AlphaDecade coordination office (BIBB) include the identification, conception and implementation of funding priorities, the technical and administrative monitoring of federal measures, the transfer and sustainable dissemination of good practice examples, cooperation with the Decade bodies and the promotion of the exchange of experience at European level. Due to the federal structure and the responsibility of the Federal States for continuing education, the exchange and cooperation with the coordination offices at Federal States level are of particular importance. In addition, the coordination office maintains contact with interest groups such as associations, foundations, employer/employee initiatives as well as self-help groups of people with low literacy. The recruitment of new partners for the implementation of the Decade is an essential goal of the Federal Government; the Federal States, and the coordination office

help to shape this process. Publicising and disseminating project results, concepts and products on literacy and basic education is another focus of the work.

In 2017, the learning portals *I want to learn* and *I want to learn German* were upgraded and updated for mobile use. The information campaign *Be brave! (Nur Mut)* was carried out.

In 2018, guidance services were introduced over the phone (see policy development on Telephone guidance service) and through the Alfa mobil team, which provides information on literacy and basic education on demand throughout the country. The following information was also published on literacy and basic education for adults:

- (a) English translation of the general agreement on the National decade for literacy and basic skills 2016-26 – Reducing functional illiteracy and raising the level of basic skills in Germany;
- (b) 10-point programme of the *Länder* for the National decade of literacy and basic education (resolution of the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs of the *Länder* of 15.02.2018);
- (c) publication of brochures on the funding programme in 2018-19.

2015 Implementation

2016 Implementation

2017 Implementation

2018 Implementation

2019 Implementation

In 2019, the BMBF funded 47 projects: nine transfer projects (e.g. *ABCplus*, *Alpha.5*, *AlphaGrund II*) are located in the area of workplace-oriented basic education. The remaining transfer projects are located in the area of developing offers for teachers and learners. In 2019, 20 projects were also funded under the funding guideline Lifeworld-oriented literacy and basic education. Similarly, the *Basic health education project (HEAL)* was continued in 2019. In addition, further projects for the development of offers for teachers and learners (e.g. *AQUA*, learning portal *ich-will-lernen.de*, learning portal *ich-will-deutsch-lernen.de*), as well as the *ALFA-Telefon2* project, were continued or started in 2019. In the area of raising public awareness, the Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF) is funding outreach counselling in the *ALFA-Mobil* and *iCHANCE* projects. In addition, three purely scientific projects or research projects (*REACH*, *LEO II*, *GeLiNu*) were funded within the framework of the AlphaDecade.

2020 Implementation

Selected activities in 2020:

In August 2020, a new call was published for funding projects in the priority area of workplace-oriented literacy and basic education.

The campaign portal Reading and writing – my key to the world (*Lesen Schreiben, mein Schlüssel zur Welt*) was relaunched on International literacy day on 8 September 2020.

The AlphaDekade website documents new funded projects, including workplace-oriented literacy projects (e.g. 'alphagrund' and 'dgb-mento') or projects at the workplace Care for the elderly.

2021 Implementation

In March 2021, at the halfway point of the Decade for literacy 2016-26 strategy, the Federal State and Federal Governments reviewed the strategy's progress at the AlphaDecade conference. Data from a total of 73 projects were evaluated in a monitoring report. In 2021, a total of 806 programme offers were made, which is 349

offers less than in the previous year. A total of 9 319 participants were reached across all target groups. The number of participants has thus decreased by 41% compared to the previous year. The monitoring report also shows that new approaches and concepts, innovative solutions for reaching hitherto difficult-to-reach subgroups of low-literate learners, and a variety of teaching and learning materials have been developed.

In July 2021, 14 research projects on literacy and basic education started, funded by the BMBF. The research projects examine the living environment of adults with poor literacy and possible ways of addressing its limitations. In addition, the quality and success factors of teaching and learning in learning opportunities and the effectiveness of structures and investments in literacy and basic education work are being examined.

The BMBF is funding the ALFA-Mobil project for another 3 years (2022-24). The project is planning around 140 high-profile events per year for the new funding phase.

2022 Implementation

In 2022 numerous activities have been launched and organised, e.g. AlphaDecade Conference. Furthermore, the monitoring report of the project funding for the year 2020 was published and a total of 49 projects have been funded.

2023 Implementation

In 2023, 9 development projects in work-oriented literacy and basic education, 12 projects in life-oriented literacy and basic education and 14 research projects in this field were funded with a total volume of EUR 13.7 million. In addition, the learning portal of the adult education centres (*Volkshochschule*, VHS) and the VHS learning centres were further developed in 2023 with total funding of EUR 5.1 million.

On 30 August 2023, the Federal Cabinet adopted the Federal Government's second report on the *Implementation of the National Decade for Literacy and Basic Education*. The report also provides an overview of pilot projects on basic education in the workplace.

The brochure *Reading and writing opens up worlds* published in November 2023 provides information about people who have difficulties with reading and writing. Based on real stories, it presents the causes and effects of reading and writing difficulties, the advantages of learning to read and write in adulthood and where to find information about regional programmes.

In 2023, the campaign *Reading and writing - my key to the world* (*Lesen Schreiben, mein Schlüssel zur Welt*), as well as the guidance services on literacy and basic education over phone and by the ALFA mobil team continued their numerous activities.

2024 Implementation

The AlphaDecade Coordination Centre's monitoring report for 2022 was published in March 2024. The annual report summarises the key results of the 633 offers (with 6 474 participants) funded in 2022 by the AlphaDecade programme.

The Federal Conference on Basic Education 2024 took place in Essen on 3 and 4 June. The German Adult Education Association (*Deutschen Volkshochschul-Verbandes*, DVV) has now published the documentation. The theme of this year's conference was 'Higher, broader, more inclusive - thinking literacy forward'.

Between August and October 2024, 10 new regional collaborative projects and a nationwide competence centre were launched in the *Basic education pathways* funding priority of the AlphaDecade programme. They will be working over the next few years to expand regional structures for basic education.

In 2024, the campaign *Reading and writing - my key to the world* (*Lesen Schreiben,*

mein Schlüssel zur Welt), as well as the guidance services on literacy and basic education over phone and by the ALFA mobil team continued their numerous activities.

2025 Implementation

The AlphaDecade Coordination Centre's monitoring report for 2023 was published in March 2025. The annual report summarises the key results of 45 projects and their 741 offers (with 8 947 participants) funded in 2023 by the AlphaDecade programme. Here are two examples of ongoing projects:

a) GrubiKomNRW is a joint project of the state association of Adult education centres of North Rhine-Westphalia, *Arbeit und Leben* (work and life) North Rhine-Westphalia and the educational institute of North Rhine-Westphalia *Wirtschaft* (economy). The objectives are: networking and cooperation with relevant actors in basic education and development of basic education pathways to close gaps in provision. The target groups are young adults with a migration background in integration courses without school qualifications and prospects for the future and semi-skilled or unskilled adults with a migration background in the field of care/education.

b) The Berlin Cooperation network for work-oriented basic education (BerKo) aims to strengthen the role of basic education in employment promotion and in-company training. Together with labour market promotion, administration, counselling and educational institutions, and companies, the project identifies gaps in pathways for adults with low literacy/qualifications and semi-skilled/unskilled adults who are looking for work, in training or in employment, and explores possible solutions.

In 2025, the campaign Reading and writing – my key to the world (*Lesen Schreiben, mein Schlüssel zur Welt*), as well as the guidance services on literacy and basic education over phone and by the ALFA mobil team continued their numerous activities.

Bodies responsible

- Federal Ministry for Education, Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth (BMBFSFJ) (since 2025)
- Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF) (until 2025)
- Federal States (Länder)
- Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training (BIBB)

Target group

Learners

Learners with migrant background, including refugees

Adult learners

Low-skilled/qualified persons

Learners from other groups at risk of exclusion (minorities, people with fewer opportunities due to geographical location or social-economic disadvantaged position)

Thematic categories

Supporting lifelong learning culture and increasing participation

Promotion strategies and campaigns for VET and lifelong learning

Ensuring equal opportunities and inclusiveness in education and training

Subsystem

CVET

Further reading

[Web portal Alpha Decade \(2016-26\)](#)

[General agreement on the national decade for literacy and basic skills 2016-26](#)

[Monitoring reports on AlphaDecade funded projects](#)

[AlphaDecade funding priorities](#)

[Reading and Writing - my key to the world \(Lesen Schreiben, mein Schlüssel zur Welt\)](#)

[Guidance over phone on literacy and basic education](#)

[Guidance on literacy and basic education offered by ALFA mobil team](#)

Related policy developments

2025 Implementation

Lifelong vocational guidance for young people and adults

Building upon the results of its pilot project Continuing education and training guidance, the Federal employment agency launched in 2017 a more comprehensive Lifelong vocational guidance project. The project targets both young people and adults. In 2018, it was piloted at four locations.

 GERMANY

Type of development

Practical
measure/Initiative

Subsystem

IVET CVET

2023 Discontinued

Telephone and online guidance service

The Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF) offers a telephone information and guidance service supporting individuals who are considering their further education and qualification options.

 GERMANY

Type of development

Practical
measure/Initiative

Subsystem

IVET CVET

2025 Implementation

Integrating migrants and refugees in VET and work

Since 2015, in line with the federal ESF integration guideline, the IvAF integration programme (Integration of asylum seekers and refugees) has contributed to the sustainable integration of asylum seekers, asylum applicants and refugees in training and employment through comprehensive counselling

 GERMANY

Type of development

Practical
measure/Initiative

Subsystem

IVET CVET

2025 Implementation

National Skills Strategy

In November 2018, the Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (BMAS) and the Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF) launched a committee to develop a National continuing education strategy (*Nationale Weiterbildungsstrategie*).

 GERMANY

Type of development

Strategy/Action
plan

Subsystem

CVET

“ ” Cite as

Cedefop, & ReferNet. (2026). Programmes supporting literacy and basic education for adults: Germany. In Cedefop, & ReferNet. (2026). *Timeline of VET policies in Europe* (2025 update) [Online tool].

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