

Recommendation on Adult Education (2015)

Preamble

The General Conference,

Recalling the principles set forth in Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, in Article 13 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, and in Article 10 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, and the principles contained in the Convention Against Discrimination in Education;

Reaffirming that in the context of lifelong learning, adult education is a fundamental dimension of the right to education which enables adults to exercise other economic, social and cultural rights, and which should meet the key criteria of acceptability, adaptability, availability and accessibility;

Acknowledging that we live in a rapidly changing world where governments and their citizens are facing simultaneous challenges of demographic shifts, employment, migration, cultural diversity and social cohesion, health and nutrition, scientific and technological advances, climate change and human security;

Recognising that adult education equips learners with capabilities (in terms of knowledge, skills and attitudes) which empower them to actively participate in the transformation of their communities and societies, especially with regard to improving their well-being, supporting social mobility, and facilitating intergenerational learning;

Further recognising that literacy is the foundation of continuing adult education and that presently 774 million people, the majority of them women, are deprived of this foundation;

Identifying the joy of learning as a constantly renewable but underexploited resource;

Reiterating the key role of adult education in supporting the United Nations agenda for sustainable development in the context of the world's quest for justice, peace and democracy;

Acknowledging both the achievements made in the development of adult education since 1976, as discussed during the 1985, 1997 and 2009 International Conferences on Adult Education (CONFINTEA IV, V and VI) , as well as the need to further strengthen adult education, as documented in the 2009 and 2013 Global Reports on Adult Learning and Education (GRALE);

Underlining the relevance of improving technical and vocational education and training as expressed in the latest UNESCO Recommendation on Technical and Vocational Education and Training;

Having decided in its 37 C/Resolution 16 that the *1976 Recommendation on the Development of Adult Education* should be revised to reflect contemporary educational, cultural, political, social and

economic challenges, as set out in the *Hamburg Declaration* and the *Belém Framework for Action*, and to give renewed momentum to adult education;

Considering that this Recommendation sets out general principles, goals and guidelines that each Member State should apply according to its socio-economic needs and available resources, with a view to enhancing the status of adult education at national, regional and international levels

and **having examined** document 38 C/XX and the draft Recommendation on Adult Education annexed thereto,

1. Adopts the present Recommendation on Adult Education, which supersedes the 1976 Recommendation, on this xx day of November 2015;
2. Recommends that Member States should apply the following provisions by taking appropriate steps, including whatever legislative or other steps may be required, in conformity with the constitutional practice of each State, to give effect within their territories to the principles of this Recommendation;
3. Also recommends that Member States bring this Recommendation to the attention of the authorities and bodies responsible for adult education and also of the various organizations carrying out educational work for the benefit of adults; and
4. Further recommends that Member States report to it, at such dates and in such manner as shall be determined by it, on the action taken by them in pursuance of this Recommendation.

I. Definition and Scope

1. Adult education is a core component of lifelong learning. It denotes the entire body of organized learning processes, formal and non-formal, whereby those regarded as adults by the society in which they live develop and enrich their capabilities for living and working, both in their own interests and those of their communities and societies. Taking place in formal, non-formal and informal settings, adult learning involves sustained activities and processes of acquiring, exchanging, creating and adapting capabilities. Given that the boundaries of youth and adulthood are shifting in most cultures, provision for young adults in non-formal settings is duly considered.
2. In this context, lifelong learning involves people of all ages in all life-wide contexts (family, school, community, workplace, and others) and a variety of modalities (formal, non-formal and informal), meeting a wide range of learning needs and aspirations.
3. Literacy as a component of adult education constitutes a continuum of capabilities and provides the indispensable foundation that permits learners to engage with a world that is increasingly dependent on written communication and the use of information and communication technologies. It denotes the ability to identify, understand, interpret, create, communicate and compute, using printed and written materials.
4. Technical and vocational education and training, as a component of adult education, is a fundamental element in a continuum of learning that equips adults with capabilities to more fully participate in rapidly changing societal and working environments.
5. Adult education also includes various learning opportunities that allow citizens to actively engage with social issues such as poverty alleviation, intergenerational solidarity, social mobility, justice, equity, exclusion, violence, environmental protection and climate change.

II. Objectives

6. In general, adult education provides a means of equipping people with the necessary capabilities to exercise and advance their rights and take control of their destinies. It promotes personal and professional development, thereby supporting more active engagement by adults with their societies and communities. It should have the flexibility required to offer the changing skills needed by adults throughout their working lives, in formal and informal (or paid and unpaid) contexts, and in both young and aging societies. It is therefore a crucial tool in alleviating poverty, improving health and building equitable, gender-just, tolerant and sustainable learning societies.
7. Its objectives are (a) to develop the autonomy and the sense of responsibility and solidarity of people and communities; (b) to reinforce the capacity to deal with and shape the developments taking place in the economy, in culture and in society as a whole; (c) to promote coexistence, tolerance and the informed and creative participation of citizens in their communities and societies; and (d) to foster resilience from young to senior adults in post-conflict and post-disaster contexts.

III. Areas of Action

8. Efforts to improve adult education practice are conditioned by considerations of policy, governance, financing, participation, and quality, as outlined in the *Belém Framework for Action*. Consequently, these areas are critical to enhance the further development of adult education in Member States. These areas of action will also benefit from regional and international co-operation.
9. One of the main global challenges in education is to ensure equity and inclusion. Therefore, disadvantaged groups (e.g., those with low levels of literacy, vulnerable youth, migrant workers, unemployed workers, members of ethnic minorities, indigenous groups, the physically or mentally challenged, prisoners, the elderly, people affected by conflict, the stateless, and displaced persons) should be given priority. In addressing their needs and aspirations, adult learning approaches should be based on people's own heritage, culture and values.
10. Each area of action is explained in terms of its goal, its underlying principles and the specific interventions recommended.

A. Policy

11. To enable adult education to play a critical role in transforming societies, a favourable and forward-looking policy environment should be nurtured. Particular attention should be given to developing and implementing **comprehensive, inclusive, and integrated** policies from a lifelong and life-wide learning perspective that are flexible and able to address emerging challenges and developments.
 - a. **Comprehensive** policies address learning in a wide range of spheres, from economic, political, social, cultural to environmental.
 - b. **Inclusive** policies need to meet the learning needs and aspirations of all adults by providing equitable access to learning opportunities, without restriction on grounds of sex, age, ethnicity, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth, disability or other status.

- c. **Integrated** policies denote sector-wide and inter-ministerial approaches.
12. Member States should strengthen their commitment to the development of adult education through legislation and institutions, and the formulation and implementation of international, regional and sub-regional agreements and commitments. This should be achieved through the following means:
- a. Development of comprehensive, inclusive and integrated policies implies:
 - i. creating and strengthening existing inter- and intra-ministerial forums to understand and recognise the role of adult education within a lifelong learning framework, and its contribution to the development of societies;
 - ii. taking measures to involve all relevant stakeholders – from public authorities, (institutions or bodies engaged in education), to civil society (e.g., workers’ organizations, learners’ associations, non-governmental organizations) and the private sector (e.g., employers’ organizations, chambers of commerce and industries) – as partners in policy design; and
 - iii. providing sustainable structures and mechanisms that will ensure the institutionalization of the concerns of adult education.
 - b. Advocacy for the indispensable function of adult education implies:
 - i. developing an advocacy strategy that highlights the contribution of adult education to sustainable development, and its wider benefits, for example in terms of social cohesion;
 - ii. raising awareness of adult education as an essential component of the right to education;
 - iii. taking measures to improve the public recognition of adult education; and
 - iv. collecting, analysing and disseminating effective practices and lessons learnt.
 - c. Implementation of these policies, backed by national ownership and commitment, reliable and sustainable financial resources, and people-centred and multi-stakeholder partnerships entails:
 - i. creating structures and fostering participatory processes that facilitate the implementation of policies with respect to principles of “good governance” (see section B below);
 - ii. allocating significant financial investment (see section C below);
 - iii. securing appropriate provision and infrastructure to support enhanced participation (see section D below);
 - iv. ensuring quality in adult education provision (see section E below).
 - d. Monitoring and evaluating policies and programme outcomes implies:
 - i. establishing mechanisms and/or structures that apply appropriate criteria and standards, subject to periodic review;
 - ii. taking appropriate measures to follow up on the results of the monitoring and evaluation,
 - iii. collecting, analysing and disseminating timely, reliable and disaggregated data

- iv. documenting and sharing effective and innovative practices of monitoring and evaluation.

B. Governance

- 13. To ensure good governance, Member States should establish mechanisms and manage institutions and processes at the local, national, regional and global levels that are transparent, accountable, democratic, and effective, and foster multi-stakeholder partnerships.
 - a. Transparent and accountable governance entails informed and constructive involvement of all relevant stakeholders in policy and programme development.
 - b. Democratic governance means representation by and participation of all stakeholders, in order to guarantee responsiveness to the needs of all learners, in particular the most disadvantaged.
 - c. Multi-stakeholder partnerships should include public authorities, civil society organizations and the private sector.
 - d. Ensuring good governance further entails creating mechanisms and processes at national and local level that are flexible, responsive and decentralized.
- 14. Member States should foster good governance by offering an enabling environment. This means:
 - a. involving all relevant actors in adult education requires comprehensive mapping of stakeholders in public authorities, civil society organizations and the private sector (specifically from ministries, civil society, learners' associations, media, private foundations, chambers of commerce and industries, international and regional organizations, volunteer groups, local authorities, parliaments, trade unions, research institutes and academia);
 - b. enhancing constructive cooperation and decision-making among involved actors, the exchange of plans, budgets and expenditures is encouraged. In this regard, it is essential to work towards improved access to information and communication technologies, especially broadband networks and services;
 - c. ensuring fruitful co-operation that allows for equitable use of resources among all stakeholders effective coordination mechanisms (e.g., through a coordinating body such as a board, council or committee) should be created and strengthened. The success of these mechanisms depends on assigning clear roles and responsibilities. In this regard, sustained and regular interaction among relevant stakeholders should be encouraged.
 - d. complementing and facilitating effective translation of adult education policies into concrete action the establishment and use of countries' decentralization processes and regional frameworks should be encouraged. To that end, learning cities and regions should be promoted.
 - e. To strengthen democratic processes, especially in the context of decentralization, capacities of all stakeholders, from inter-ministerial to local and national levels, should be enhanced. The importance of the contribution of civil society organizations as well as the voice of the individual should be recognized.

C. Financing

15. To realize the right of adults to education and to ensure quality provision, sufficient financial investment is essential, recognizing the fundamental role of governments and respecting the principle of shared responsibility. Literacy as basic education is the key condition for realizing the right to education and therefore should be provided free of charge. The necessary measures should be taken to use the resources available in a sustainable, effective, efficient and accountable way.
 - a. All efforts should be made to mobilize resources across all government departments and from different stakeholders.
 - b. For the individual learner, lack of funds should not be an obstacle to participation in adult education programmes. Investment in continuing adult education should be prioritized.
 - c. Inter-ministerial articulation and coordination between areas of action (e.g., employment, health, etc.) is essential in optimizing the use of resources (cost-effectiveness and cost-sharing) and maximizing learning outcomes.
 - d. The allocation and use of resources should be made transparent and should reflect the priorities that have been established.
16. Member States should mobilise and allocate sufficient resources in accordance with national needs. This implies the following:
 - a. Public investments in adult education should fully reflect its vital contribution to social, cultural and economic development, as recognized by each Member State endorsing this Recommendation.
 - b. To generate and use convincing evidence to facilitate stakeholders' investment in adult education, the wider benefits of learning (in areas such as health, security, economic development and democratic participation) should be communicated to different government departments to demonstrate that investment in adult education can save costs and improve outcomes in other policy areas.
 - c. To mobilise sufficient funding for adult education, a variety of sources should be considered and pursued: (a) public authorities; (b) employers, private and civil society organizations; (c) learners themselves, according to their financial capacities; and (d) multilateral and bilateral partners. Private providers of education should be regulated, so that the social value of education is not sacrificed to private profit.
 - d. Effective and flexible funding mechanisms should be used, including (a) partnerships and cost sharing; (b) tax deduction; (c) paid and unpaid educational or training leave; (d) vouchers; and (e) loans.
 - e. New and diversified sources of funding and incentives should be explored, while respecting the principles of equity and inclusion.
 - f. Funding for adult education should cover costs of: (a) provision of suitable facilities or adaptation of existing facilities;(b) production of necessary learning materials;(c) ensuring decent working conditions, adequate and timely remuneration of qualified educators, and their further training; (d) research and information expenses;(e) guidance and counselling; (f) tuition; (g) information and communication technologies; and (h) indirect costs, including those incurred at local level, and, where necessary and if possible, accommodation and travel costs of trainees.

- g. To prove that all funding is used appropriately, coordination, monitoring and evaluation mechanisms should be put in place. Outcomes and impacts for individuals and societies at the global and country levels should also be measured. Presentation and documentation of the costs versus benefits of investment in adult education is highly encouraged.

D. Participation

- 17. To promote access and broader participation by adult learners, effective educational responses should be developed, especially to address equity and inclusion issues. Particular attention should be given to specific target groups with a view to acknowledging their contribution to societal development while respecting cultural and other forms of diversity.
 - a. There should be no exclusion on the basis of age, gender, ethnicity, migrant status, language, religion, disability, rurality, sexual identity or orientation, poverty, displacement or imprisonment. It is particularly important to address the effects of multiple disadvantages.
 - b. Special attention should be given to programmes that support gender equality.
- 18. Member States should guarantee equitable access to adult education and promote broader and sustained participation by fostering a culture of learning and by eliminating barriers to participation. This implies that they:
 - a. explore the factors that inhibit or prevent participation by identifying and mapping barriers for different target groups (i.e., those with low levels of literacy, vulnerable youth, groups with multiple disadvantages, migrant workers and refugees, unemployed workers, members of ethnic minorities, indigenous groups, the physically or mentally challenged, prisoners, the elderly, the stateless, and displaced families), for example through periodic surveys, and monitoring of learner participation and by developing and applying appropriate indicators.
 - b. put in place mechanisms to ensure active participation of learners in decision-making at all stages of programme design and implementation, including analysis of needs, curriculum development and evaluation.
 - c. enhance motivation and access for all, adult education practice should always be based on the needs and aspirations of the participants and draw on their experiences. Additional supporting services such as transportation and childcare may be offered to ensure equitable and consistent participation.
 - d. provide guidance, counselling and other supportive services as a continuous process spanning the entire education system, and directed towards helping all adult learners to make conscious and positive educational and occupational choices. Particular attention should be given to guidance that is gender-transformative and covers the whole range of education and training opportunities with a view to the world of life and work.
 - e. offer sufficient learning opportunities through the establishment and strengthening of multi-purpose community learning spaces and centres, museums, and libraries. Activities that foster a culture of learning, such as learning festivals or campaigns as practiced in learning cities and regions, should be conducted, and information and communication technologies should be used to maximum effect to promote participation.

- f. integrate adult education components to relevant programmes on health, employment, environment, sustainable development, food security, human security, active citizenship, peace, multiculturalism and other issues, and broaden adult education messages and targets.
- g. enable learners to acquire further qualifications in order to pursue their learning pathways within the education system. The UNESCO Guidelines for the Recognition, Validation and Accreditation of the Outcomes of Non-Formal and Informal Learning should be applied to that end.
- h. increase access to learning opportunities through innovative didactics and ICT-based approaches, including Open Educational Resources (OER).
- i. design a monitoring framework that serves the purposes of national policies (see above section A) and governance structure (see above section B). Such monitoring frameworks should ideally include a wide range of providers and be compatible with global or regional frameworks. To promote and support this process, further strengthening of statistical and analytical capacity in adult education should be provided through regional and international cooperation.

E. Quality

19. To ensure quality in adult education and its potential for transformation in all relevant spheres, attention should be paid to the four dimensions of relevance, equity, effectiveness and efficiency. Special attention should be given to promoting flexible and permeable learning pathways.
 - a. Relevance means that provision through contextualized and learner-centred programmes is aligned with the needs of all stakeholders, including those of the labour market, so as to achieve personal, sociocultural, economic and educational goals.
 - b. Equity is about fair access to and sustained participation in adult education, without discrimination.
 - c. Effectiveness expresses the capability of the programme to achieve the desired objectives.
 - d. Efficiency concerns both the capacity of a system to achieve its aims and the relationship of financial and other inputs to benefits.
20. Member States should foster an environment where high-quality adult education is provided. This means:
 - a. developing appropriate content and modes of delivery, including use of ICT and mother-tongue-based language of instruction, and learner-centred needs assessment;
 - b. Elaborating and applying quality criteria for curricula, learning materials and teaching/learning methodologies in adult education programmes, taking account of learning processes, outcomes and impact measures;
 - c. providing appropriate infrastructure, including safe learning spaces;
 - d. improving training, capacity-building, employment conditions and the professionalization of adult educators, for example through the establishment of partnerships with higher education institutions, teacher associations and civil society organizations;

- e. enabling learners to acquire and accumulate learning, experiences and qualifications through intermittent participation. Qualifications obtained in this way should be equivalent to those granted by formal education to allow for continued education;
- f. responding to the internationalization of skills development, in particular with regard to mobility of learners and workers;
- g. fostering and strengthening systematic interdisciplinary and practitioner-oriented research in adult education covering all dimensions and allowing for synergies by connecting different sets of data. Knowledge management systems for the collection, analysis and dissemination of data and good practice should be established. The latest evidence from various fields, including cognitive neuroscience, should be taken into account and translated into educational practice;
- h. building in systematic monitoring and evaluation of adult education activities at all levels, and mutual accountability mechanisms for all stakeholders.

F. International Co-operation

- 21. To promote the development and strengthening of adult education, Member States should increase sustained co-operation, whether on a bilateral or multilateral basis.
 - a. Sustained international co-operation means promoting and stimulating development within the countries concerned through the establishment of appropriate institutions and structures adapted to the particular circumstances of those countries.
 - b. To create a climate favourable to international cooperation with a view to capacity-building in developing countries, in different areas of adult education, mutual cooperative assistance between all countries should be encouraged regardless of their state of development. Mechanisms of regional integration are essential to facilitate and strengthen this process. International agreements such as the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness provide principles and guidelines to that end.
 - c. Care should be taken to ensure that international co-operation do not merely involve transfer of structures, curricula, methods and techniques which have originated elsewhere.
- 22. Member States, as part of the international community, should share their experiences, increase mutual cooperative assistance and help build each other's capacities in adult education. This implies:
 - a. fostering the regular exchange of (1) information, documentation, and materials, on policies, concepts and practices and relevant research; (2) adult education professionals at national and regional levels. The use of new information and communication technologies should be maximized and the mobility of learners between Member States should be facilitated;
 - b. enhancing South-South, North-South and triangular co-operation, giving priority to countries where the education deficits are the widest;
 - c. collecting and presenting data on adult education, through UNESCO and the established mechanisms to produce the Global Report on Adult Learning and Education (GRALE).

- d. encouraging governments and development co-operation agencies to support the enhancement of local, regional and global co-operation and networking.
- e. exploring how regional and global funding mechanisms for literacy and adult education could be established and how existing mechanisms can support international, regional and national efforts mentioned above.
- f. incorporating specific clauses relating to adult education in international agreements concerned with co-operation in the fields of education, science and culture, and promoting the development and strengthening of adult education work in the United Nations and UNESCO, and in the attainment of the United Nations development goals.