

## UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning Technical Note

# Lifelong Learning

### Message from DIR/UIIL

*Dear colleagues,*

*The UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL) is called upon to implement a significant and broad mandate, covering many challenging issues in lifelong learning in a diverse and fast-changing world. More than ever, we need to focus clearly and ensure greater cohesion in implementing this mandate. This Technical Note, developed by UIL, will facilitate programme delivery in support of lifelong learning.*

*I hope that the Technical Note will be useful in your daily work.*

**Arne Carlsen**

*Director*

### At a glance

- ▶ Lifelong learning is rooted in the integration of learning and living, covering lifelong (cradle to grave) and life-wide learning for people of all ages, delivered and undertaken through a variety of modalities and meeting a wide range of learning needs and demands.
- ▶ Lifelong learning is a priority issue in the United Nations' development agenda. In fact, the [Report of the High-Level Panel of Eminent Persons on the post-2015 Development Agenda](#) (United Nations 2013) proposed to “provide quality education and lifelong learning” (ibid., p. 16) as an overarching goal and core pillar for building more inclusive, sustainable and prosperous societies. In addition, the [Report of the Global Thematic Consultation on Education in the post-2015 Development Agenda](#) (UNESCO-UNICEF 2013), led by UNICEF and UNESCO has proposed “Equitable, Quality education and Lifelong Learning for All” as the overarching goal.
- ▶ UNESCO continues to play an important role in framing and promoting the idea and the practice of lifelong learning for all. Most recently, one of the Strategic Objectives raised in UNESCO 37 C/4 (UNESCO 2013a), 37 C/5 (UNESCO 2013b) is *to develop education systems to foster quality lifelong learning opportunities for all.*

- ▶ Through advocacy, research, capacity building and technical assistance, UNESCO supports Member States to strengthen their national capacities in their efforts to develop and implement holistic and sector-wide educational reforms within a lifelong learning framework.

## Defining the issue

Rooted in many cultures, societies and religions, the notion of lifelong learning has existed throughout recorded human history. Since the 1970s, UNESCO has played an important role in framing and promoting the discourse on lifelong learning. The Faure Report of 1972, entitled [\*Learning to Be\*](#) (Faure et al. 1972), recognised that education is no longer the privilege of an elite, or a matter for only one age group. Instead, it should be both universal and lifelong. The Delors Report of 1996, entitled [\*Learning: The treasure within\*](#) (Delors et al. 1996) saw learning throughout life as the ‘heartbeat’ of a society. It also saw lifelong learning as a principle which rests on four pillars – learning to be, learning to know, learning to do and learning to live together – and envisaged a learning society in which everyone can learn according to her or his individual needs and interests, anywhere and anytime in an unrestricted, flexible and constructive way.

In essence, lifelong learning is rooted in the integration of learning and living, covering learning activities for people of all ages (children, young people, adults and the elderly, girls and boys, women and men) in all life-wide contexts (family, school, community, workplace and so on) and through a variety of modalities (formal, non-formal and informal) which together meet a wide range of learning needs and demands. Education systems which promote lifelong learning adopt a holistic and sector-wide approach involving all sub-sectors and levels to ensure the provision of learning opportunities for all individuals.

## Context and trends

The relevance of lifelong learning is being strengthened in today’s increasingly interconnected and fast-changing world. The exponential growth in, and changing nature of information in the digital age, the difficulty of foreseeing the skills sets required for knowledge-based economies, demographic shifts and increased mobility, the growing concern for unsustainable patterns of consumption and production, are all underlining the relevance of lifelong learning as the conceptual framework and organising principle of all forms of education in the 21st century (UIL 2010).

Furthermore, equal access to learning opportunities is an indispensable condition for realising the right to education for all. Lifelong learning for all has the potential to offset initial and recurring social inequalities and to place the empowerment of learners at the centre. From a holistic life-course perspective, learning and education are not only for children, but also for young people, adults and the elderly. UNESCO’s second [\*Global\*](#)

[Report on Adult Learning and Education](#) (GRALE II; UIL 2013a) underlines the necessity to devote time and money to youth and adult education, both formal and non-formal, in order to contribute to the development and sustainability of thriving economies and societies.

UNESCO Member States are increasingly developing national policies and strategies which will equip citizens with the necessary competences and qualifications for the 21st century. This presupposes lifelong learning as the mainstream principle for educational reform as well as providing a strategic response to emerging socio-economic challenges. Yet today's education systems are still not in a position to offer quality lifelong learning opportunities for all. One of the acute challenges is that in many Member States there is still a discrepancy between policy-makers' acceptance of lifelong learning on the one hand, and a lack of workable policies and strategies on the other. Lifelong learning policy discourse would certainly benefit from further consolidation, but the priority in many Member States understandably rests on developing strategies for implementation.

Given the trends of globalisation, urbanisation and decentralisation, the influence of cities, sub-national regions and communities on national and world affairs has increased considerably in recent years. A growing number of cities, sub-national regions and communities are developing innovative strategies which allow their citizens – of all ages – to learn new skills and competences throughout life, thereby transforming their cities into ['learning cities'](#), 'learning regions' and 'learning communities'. In a large number of countries, the development of learning families, cities, regions or communities effectively embodies the practical philosophy of lifelong learning, seeking to render learning a more prominent part of citizens' everyday lives.

## UNESCO key priorities and future direction

UNESCO is fundamentally committed to a humanistic, rights-based and holistic view of education and lifelong learning, and this is fully embodied in the *UNESCO's 2014–2021 Medium-Term Strategy*, in particular **Strategic Objective 1: Developing education systems to foster quality lifelong learning opportunities for all**. While UNESCO's regional bureaux and field offices have endeavoured to translate the principle of lifelong learning into programmes, some specialised UNESCO institutes have promoted research, advocacy and capacity development in building lifelong learning systems. Within this context, lifelong learning is the focus of the [UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning \(UIL\)](#) which plays a key role in supporting Member States in the development of lifelong learning policies. UNESCO will continue to support Member States along the following lines:

- ▶ **Promoting the transformation of existing education systems into a structure based on lifelong learning**

UNESCO promotes formal education provided by primary, secondary and higher education institutions in Member States to foster foundational, transversal/transferrable and technical, vocational skills, as well as values and attitudes which will enable people to become lifelong learners, contributing effectively to the creation of peaceful, equitable and sustainable societies. UNESCO pursues better quality education by promoting a paradigm shift from teaching to learning, from teacher-centred approaches to learner-centred ones, and from the mere acquisition of information and knowledge to the development of transversal skills and competences. Furthermore, UNESCO fosters the development of a learner-friendly environment in which learners have ownership of their own learning; and encourages the provision of support to learners with special needs, in particular those with learning difficulties.

#### **► Advocating for non-formal and informal learning, especially for youth and adult learning and education**

Lifelong learning covers the full provision range of learning opportunities, from early childhood through schools to further and higher education. However, it extends beyond formal education to non-formal and informal learning for young people and adult citizens. Learning in non-formal and informal settings should have equal value to formal schooling. Non-formal and informal learning is important in particular for those young people who are not in education, training or employment ('out-of-school youth') and for adults who are either unemployed, working in the informal economic sector, retired or are taken up with family responsibilities.

Recognising that literacy is a human right and a foundation of lifelong learning, UNESCO supports Member States in addressing their youth and adult literacy challenges by integrating literacy and basic skills into national lifelong learning policies, strategies and programmes. Based on a critical review of Education for All (EFA), the education-related Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), and the conclusions of GRALE II (UIL 2013a), UNESCO advocates for the inclusion of comprehensive, inclusive and integrated adult learning and education policies within a lifelong learning perspective.

#### **► Developing synergies between various learning systems**

In 2012, UNESCO introduced the *Guidelines on the Recognition, Validation and Accreditation (RVA) of the Outcomes of Non-formal and Informal Learning* (UIL 2012). These guidelines propose principles and mechanisms for developing and improving structures and procedures for recognising the outcomes of all forms of learning, howsoever achieved. In facilitating the implementation of these Guidelines in Member States, UNESCO remains committed to collecting, analysing and disseminating best practices at different stages in the development of RVA systems and national qualification frameworks; facilitating policy dialogue; networking and sharing of experiences between Member States;

facilitating studies on different RVA systems, mechanisms, instruments and tools; and providing technical assistance and capacity-building support to key national stakeholders and practitioners.

► **Facilitating the development of national policies and strategies for lifelong learning for all**

UNESCO facilitates the development of national policies or legislation to enhance lifelong learning for all as integral to national social and economic development and as a key component in the post-2015 Development Agenda. This involves establishing lifelong learning systems which provide alternative and flexible pathways including formal, non-formal and informal learning opportunities. Since funding is closely related to policy and legislation, UNESCO encourages Member States to increase financial resources in compliance with policy and legislation and allocate an equitable share of investment across sub-sectors of education.

► **Developing capacities for effective lifelong learning policies and practices**

The capacity of policy-makers and researchers in Member States has a direct bearing on the development of lifelong learning policies. Responding to Member States' call to develop the capacity of policy-makers and researchers, and through organising workshops and peer learning activities, UNESCO assists Member States in promoting a sound conceptual understanding of lifelong learning, enhancing capacity in evidence-based policy-making, and supporting Member States in developing and implementing more accessible, relevant and effective lifelong learning programmes.

► **Facilitating partnerships among government agencies, civil society organisations and the private sector**

Lifelong learning policy development and implementation activities do not fall exclusively within the domain of Ministries of Education. Furthermore all sectors of society – not least organised civil society – have key roles to play in developing lifelong learning systems. Therefore, UNESCO facilitates the establishment of inter-sectoral coordination mechanisms to involve governmental and non-governmental organisations and the private sector, to develop bilateral or multilateral partnerships between sectors and stakeholders in order to share resources and increase the availability of learning opportunities. Furthermore, UNESCO encourages all stakeholders to provide diverse and accessible learning opportunities and to make their own unique contribution to lifelong learning for all.

► **Promoting the development of learning cities, learning regions, learning communities, learning villages and learning families**

Following up on the main outcome of the first International Conference on Learning Cities – the [Beijing Declaration on Building Learning Cities](#) (UIL 2013b) – UNESCO will establish a global network of learning cities to support and accelerate the practice of lifelong learning in the world’s communities. In addition, the [Key Features of Learning Cities](#) (2013c) will serve as a comprehensive checklist of action points to help municipal governments and other stakeholders of cities in their efforts to build learning cities that promote lifelong learning for all. UNESCO will promote policy dialogue and peer learning among member cities, forge links, foster partnerships, provide capacity development, and develop instruments to encourage and recognise progress. In addition, UNESCO will promote the development of learning environments in rural communities and support a culture of learning in families to simultaneously work across generations.

### ► **Enhancing the use of modern learning technologies**

Information and communication technologies (ICT) – particularly the Internet – have opened up new possibilities for learning and education, in particular to those excluded from, and left behind by, traditional education practices. Lifelong learning systems strive to enable all learners to use these technologies for learning and self-empowerment. UNESCO supports Member States in the development of policy environments favourable to the use of ICTs in learning. This includes advice on how to train administrators, teachers and educators to use technologies which enhance learning, how to expand learners’ access to ICT tools and learning programmes; and how to develop quality e-learning resources.

### ► **Supporting research in lifelong learning policies and practices**

Building a lifelong learning system is not a simple matter. This is because it challenges strongly-held views, established practices, institutional power and traditional conceptions of knowledge and conceptions of how education and learning should be organised. Most importantly, individual, social and economic demands pose ever-changing challenges for education and training: shaping lifelong learning systems is a constant endeavour. Therefore, UNESCO supports applied research and analysis on national lifelong learning policies and strategies, the development of monitoring and evaluation mechanisms, as well as the development and monitoring of appropriate indicators and benchmarks on the effectiveness of policies, strategies and programmes.

## **Target groups and key partners**

Stakeholders for promoting lifelong learning for all include Member States, multilateral agencies and organisations, civil society, the professional educational world (academics and practitioners) and the private sector.

### **Member States**

The governments of UNESCO Member States are indispensable in developing national lifelong learning policies and strategies. Within the government, in addition to ministries of education, other ministries such as agriculture, industry, health, employment and social affairs are also important partners. Given the trends of decentralisation, the influence of cities and sub-national regions will become more and more important in providing lifelong learning opportunities.

### **Multilateral agencies and organisations**

UNESCO's close collaboration with other multilateral agencies and organisations are of critical importance. These agencies and organisations include the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the International Labour Organization (ILO), the World Health Organization (WHO) and the World Bank.

### **Civil society**

UNESCO recognises the role of civil society and collaborates with numerous organisations in promoting lifelong learning for all.

### **The professional educational world**

To facilitate research, UNESCO seeks support from UNESCO Chairs related to the field of lifelong learning as well as from relevant professional networks and universities.

### **Private sector**

To keep abreast with social and economic changes, and to mobilise support, UNESCO cooperates with corporations and philanthropic foundations, professional and economic associations.

## **Key resources**

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## Advocacy messages

▶ A society will not be peaceful and sustainable unless it becomes a learning society.

▶ Lifelong learning for all is the most appropriate philosophy, conceptual framework and organising principle for learning, education and training in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

▶ UNESCO places lifelong learning for all at the heart of all its work to promote every individual's right to education and to build inclusive knowledge societies.

▶ To foster foundational skills, values and attitudes which enable people to become lifelong learners, existing education systems must be transformed by a paradigm shift from teacher-centred approaches to learner-centred ones.

▶ Lifelong learning covers formal, non-formal and informal learning in all settings of study, work, social and community engagement and leisure.

▶ The recognition, validation and accreditation of the outcomes of non-formal and informal learning are a key lever in making lifelong learning a reality.

▶ The development of 'learning cities', 'learning regions', 'learning communities' and 'learning villages' goes to the heart of UNESCO's work in lifelong learning, to provide women and men with tools to make the most of change, and to create more inclusive, prosperous and sustainable societies.