

# How can a lifelong learning perspective enhance the relevance and impact of the 1974 Recommendation?

## Thematic paper

This document, prepared by UNESCO Institutes for Lifelong Learning (UIL), is part of several thematic papers developed by UNESCO to inform the Revision of the [1974 Recommendation concerning education for international understanding, co-operation and peace](#).

These papers focus on topics that are not currently covered in the Recommendation but that require greater attention in the revised version in view of ensuring it addresses contemporary challenges to lasting peace.

For more information on the revision visit the dedicated [website](#).



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Published in 2022 by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 7, place de Fontenoy, 75352 Paris 07 SP, France

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# How can a lifelong learning perspective enhance the relevance and impact of the 1974 Recommendation?

## Executive Summary

Lifelong learning is rooted in the integration of learning with participation in society. It includes learning activities for people of all ages, in all life-wide contexts and spaces (family, school, community, workplace and more), and through a variety of modalities (formal, non-formal and informal).

The purpose of this background paper is to propose ways in which the significance of lifelong learning can be reflected in the revision of the 1974 Recommendation concerning Education for International Understanding, Cooperation and Peace and Education relating to Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms. It does this by recalling previous international contributions to the promotion of lifelong learning, including the landmark publications *Learning to Be: The World of Education Today and Tomorrow* (Faure et al., 1972) and *Learning: The Treasure Within* (Delors et al., 1996), which show the benefits of lifelong learning not only for employment but for the whole life of an individual and their participation in society.

Moreover, because adult learning and education (ALE) is a core component of lifelong learning, this summary acknowledges the Belém Framework for Action (BFA), the outcome document of the sixth International Conference on Adult Education (CONFINTEA VI), which recognizes lifelong learning as ‘an organizing principle of all forms of education, based on inclusive, emancipatory, humanistic and democratic values’ (UIL, 2010, p. 5). Other key international documents for further developing a lifelong learning culture include the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which calls on countries to ‘ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all’ (UNGA, 2015, p. 14), and the Recommendation on Adult Learning and Education 2015 (UNESCO and UIL, 2015), adopted during the 38th UNESCO General Conference, which defines ALE as the core component of lifelong learning and identifies three key fields of learning: literacy and basic skills; continuing education and vocational skills; and liberal, popular and community education and citizenship skills.<sup>1</sup>

Current political, social, economic, technological, climate and environmental realities demand new, wider and more complex competences to understand, anticipate and cope with both the enormous potential and the growing risks, uncertainties and disruptions that our rapidly changing world presents. Bearing these changes in mind, and in the framework of the 2030 Agenda, the following recent international contributions also emphasize the importance of lifelong learning for sustainable development: the Berlin Declaration on Education for Sustainable Development (UNESCO, 2021a), adopted on 20 May 2021; UNESCO’s Recommendation on the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence (UNESCO, 2021b), adopted by Member States at the 41st General Conference in November 2021; the Rewired Global Declaration on Connectivity for Education (UNESCO, 2021c), launched in December 2021; and, last but not least, the recent report of The International Commission on the Futures of Education, *Reimagining Our Futures Together: A New Social Contract for Education* (International

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<sup>1</sup> RALE defines ALE as comprising ‘all forms of education and learning that aim to ensure that all adults participate in their societies and the world of work. It denotes the entire body of learning processes, formal, non-formal and informal [and] involves sustained activities and processes of acquiring, recognizing, exchanging, and adapting capabilities. Given that the boundaries of youth and adulthood are shifting in most cultures, in this text the term “adult” denotes all those who engage in [ALE], even if they have not reached the legal age of maturity’ (UNESCO and UIL, 2016, p. 6).

Commission on the Futures of Education, 2021). These interventions recognize the critical role lifelong learning plays in enabling individuals and societies to find solutions to and take actions towards current and future challenges, both locally and globally. They stress the importance of lifelong learning as a precious public good and a powerful tool for changing mindsets, advocating global sustainability and contributing to a more peaceful future.

As adult learning and education is a core component of lifelong learning, some findings from the Global Report on Adult Learning and Education (GRALE), first published in 2009, are also presented. GRALE represents an opportunity to remind national governments of the importance of developing comprehensive lifelong learning policies. Nevertheless, recent reports have shown that, even if there has been an increase in women's participation in ALE, the participation of vulnerable groups such as migrants, refugees and persons with disabilities remains very low. Moreover, despite increasing recognition of the value of ALE, investment in ALE programmes remains insufficient.

The most recent GRALE report, GRALE 5, which will be launched at CONFINTEA VII in June 2022, shows that most countries continue to pursue a limited interpretation of ALE in the framework of lifelong learning, focusing primarily on its value in terms of employability and economic growth (UIL, forthcoming). This neglects the huge potential of ALE to help create peaceful, just and sustainable environments, redress social inequality and exclusion, and fight extremism and violence. It is for these reasons that the revised 1974 Recommendation should distinctly refer to the benefits of lifelong learning, its interdisciplinarity, and the importance of flexible learning pathways for ensuring inclusive, high-quality, equitable learning opportunities.

This background paper closes by underlining the significance of the seventh International Conference on Adult Education (CONFINTEA VII), scheduled to take place in June 2022, to the development of lifelong learning as a human right. Concrete suggestions on how lifelong learning can be considered in the revision of the 1974 Recommendation are made in the Annex of this paper.

## Introduction

This paper provides information to inform the discussions of the international expert drafting group (IEG), who will advise the UNESCO Director-General on the revision of the 1974 Recommendation prior to the submission of the revised text to UNESCO Member States. The objective of this paper is to make clear the need to prioritize the role of lifelong learning in the revision.

As part of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, world leaders committed to providing lifelong learning opportunities for all with an aim to ensure that 'no one will be left behind' (UNGA, 2015, p. 3). The 1974 Recommendation continues to be recognized as a key tool for promoting the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and Targets 4.7, 12.8 and 13.3 in particular. Yet the world has changed drastically since 1974 – the emergence of new developments, challenges and threats to global peace and sustainability make evident the need for a revised Recommendation.

This background paper considers these shifts in the global and educational landscape, the terms of the 2030 Agenda – and, more explicitly, Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4 – as well as other recent international commitments and UNESCO flagship publications. Moreover, because ALE is a major component of lifelong learning, this paper presents the latest developments in the field based on information from GRALE 5 and highlights the significance of CONFINTEA VII to the development of lifelong learning as a human right. The Annex offers concrete suggestions for including lifelong learning principles in the revision of the 1974 Recommendation.

Promoting lifelong learning means creating systems that realize the right to education for people of all ages and providing opportunities to unlock their potential – for their personal development and for the sustainable economic, social, cultural and environmental development of society. Education

systems should promote lifelong learning, adopt holistic and intersectoral approaches to learning, and impart the competences and values that enable individuals to take more responsible actions, support responsible citizenship and champion sustainability.

As far back as 1948, through the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the United Nations called for 'everyone [to have the] right to education' (UNGA, 1948, Article 26). Many other international contributions have since advocated for lifelong learning, including the 1974 Recommendation, which applies to 'all stages and forms of education' (UNESCO, 1974, p. 148). Later, in the Faure (Faure et al., 1972) and Delors (Delors et al., 1996) reports, UNESCO acknowledged lifelong learning as one of the guiding and organizing principles of educational action and reform, as well as an integral component of participatory human life. In recognizing the knowledge and competences acquired outside formal education, lifelong learning, UNESCO argued, equips people with the tools they need to tackle and anticipate the challenges they will face throughout their lives. So, while acknowledging the value of lifelong learning for employability, UNESCO, through these publications, highlights the social and personal benefits for individuals and their societies.

Another key contribution to the promotion of lifelong learning is the Belém Framework for Action (BFA), which considers ALE to be a core component of lifelong learning and recognizes the latter as fundamental for addressing global education issues and challenges. The BFA defines lifelong learning as 'an organizing principle of all forms of education, based on inclusive, emancipatory, humanistic and democratic values' (UIL, 2010, p. 5). Even if the BFA is not a binding agreement, it is seen as a 'guide' for and 'commitment' of Member States in 'harnessing the power and potential of adult learning and education for a viable future for all' (ibid.). Five years later, the Recommendation on Adult Learning and Education (RALE), adopted at the 38th UNESCO General Conference in November 2015, defined ALE as a 'core component of lifelong learning' (UNESCO and UIL, 2016, p. 6) and identified three key fields of learning: literacy and basic skills; continuing education and vocational skills; and liberal, popular and community education and citizenship skills.

That same year, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development enjoined countries to 'ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all' (UNGA, 2015, p. 14). The aim of SDG 4 is clear: to empower people of all ages to develop the knowledge, skills, attitudes and values that are needed to address current and future global challenges such as exclusion, poverty, gender inequality, violence and conflict, unemployment, demographic shifts, rapid technological change, political polarization, social inequalities and the existential threat of climate change. Target 4.7 explicitly links global citizenship education, Education for Sustainable Development and lifelong learning and suggests that the way to balance the needs of the planet, people and prosperity is by fostering through education the kind of citizenship that will allow our most truly human and humane values – of care and responsibility – to emerge.

Moreover, although it is SDG 4 that explicitly advocates for lifelong learning, it is an essential ingredient that is needed to meet the other goals. It is a prerequisite for poverty reduction (SDG 1); health and well-being (SDG 3); gender equality (SDG 5) and reduced inequalities (SDG 10); gainful employment and decent jobs (SDG 8); inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable cities (SDG 11); just, peaceful, inclusive and violence-free societies (SDG 16); and for climate action (SDG 13). Lifelong learning is therefore vital for meeting our sustainable development commitments and is central to dealing with the challenges and rapid changes that we are experiencing.

## Changes since 2015 and their implications for education: Risks and opportunities

The 1974 Recommendation offers an interdisciplinary perspective that remains unique among UNESCO's normative instruments in education; however, given the urgency and complexity of contemporary trends and threats to global peace and human survival, more elaborate and new responses than those prescribed in the 1970s are necessary. Today's political, social, economic, technological, climate and environmental realities in both developed and developing countries demand new, wider and more complex competences. The 'right to education' must therefore be broadened to a 'right to lifelong learning' to equip people of all ages with the tools to understand, anticipate and deal with both the enormous potentials and the growing risks, uncertainties and disruptions that they are experiencing.

The following, more recent, international recommendations, declarations and publications stress the significant role of lifelong learning for the development of peaceful, just, inclusive and sustainable frameworks:

The Berlin Declaration on Education for Sustainable Development, adopted on 20 May 2021 at the UNESCO World Conference on Education for Sustainable Development, commits to integrating 'ESD into all levels of education and training and ensuring lifelong and life-wide opportunities for sustainable development' (UNESCO, 2021a, p. 2).

Today's rapid technological advances require not only digital access but also the knowledge to safely use digital means and be an ethical user. Consequently, digitalization plays a significant role in lifelong learning and requires that learning is expanded on to foster responsible digital uses. Accordingly, UNESCO's Recommendation on the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence, the first-ever global standard on the ethics of artificial intelligence, was adopted by Member States at the 41st General Conference in November 2021. It recommends that Member States work towards eliminating the digital divides by ensuring access to all (UNESCO, 2021b).

The Rewired Global Declaration on Connectivity for Education (UNESCO, 2021c), launched in December 2021 at the RewirEd Summit in Dubai, establishes a new roadmap for the digital transformation of education. The declaration puts forward principles and commitments to ensure that connected technologies advance aspirations for inclusive education based on the principles of justice, equity and respect for human dignity.

Finally, UNESCO's flagship publication, the Reimagining Our Futures Together: A New Social Contract for Education report, reasserts that:

Education is both lifelong and life-wide. ... Any planning for education across life must focus on serving those most marginalized and on settings that are most fragile, helping to equip learners with the knowledge, concepts, attitudes and skills they need to realize opportunities and face present and future disruptions (International Commission on the Futures of Education, 2021, p. 152).

The abovedocuments, among many others, recognize the fundamental role of lifelong learning for empowering individuals and societies to find solutions and take action in response to current and future challenges, both locally and globally, including threats to peace and democracy, issues relating to the digital divide, the climate and environmental crisis, as well as the changing nature of work and economies. They recognize that values and competences, such as caring for ourselves, each other and our planet, are needed to achieve sustainable development. They stress the importance of lifelong learning as a precious public good and a powerful tool for changing mindsets and promoting global sustainability and a more peaceful future.

It is for these reasons that the 1974 Recommendation should explicitly refer to lifelong learning, the importance of recognizing flexible learning pathways and the urgent need for interdisciplinary approaches.



## GRALE: 12 years on Lifelong learning as a human right

CONFINTEA VI closed in 2009 with a mandate for UNESCO to regularly monitor Member States' efforts to promote ALE as stipulated in the Belém Framework for Action (BFA), the conference's outcome document. Published regularly since then, the Global Report on Adult Learning and Education (GRALE) provides baseline information on the state of adult learning and education globally, with a view to informing debate among policy-makers, professionals and the wider community. Since 2015, GRALE reports have been drafted in the framework of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

To underscore the significance of ALE in the framework of lifelong learning as well as the integrality of citizenship education in lifelong learning (relevant to the 1972 Recommendation), findings from previous and upcoming GRALE reports are provided below.

**Progress in ALE is uneven.** GRALE consistently demonstrates that ALE has a positive impact on learners' life chances in terms of health, well-being and employment. In addition, it contributes to active citizenship, political voice, social cohesion, gender equality, diversity and tolerance (UIL, 2016). Nevertheless, only one-third of countries responding to the GRALE 3 survey reported having an interdepartmental or cross-sectoral coordinating body promoting ALE for personal health and well-being. Moreover, 35 per cent of countries acknowledged that poor interdepartmental collaboration prevents ALE from having greater benefits on health and well-being (UIL, 2016, p. 13).

**Despite increasing recognition of the value of ALE, investment remains insufficient.** While investment in ALE has increased, subsequent GRALE reports have revealed that progress appears to have stalled and remains low. More needs to be done to achieve the level of investment required to facilitate the contribution of ALE to the realization of the 2030 Agenda. On top of that, more emphasis needs to be placed on the needs of the most marginalized and disadvantaged.

**Participation in ALE remains too low and unequal.** In 2018, GRALE 4 showed that participation in ALE was insufficient and uneven. Disappointingly, in the upcoming GRALE 5 (to be published in 2022), over 60% of countries reported no improvement in participation by minorities and migrants. Almost a quarter (24%) of countries reported that the participation of rural populations in ALE had declined since 2018. This can be seen as a wake-up call for Member States given the increase in migrant flows during the last GRALE cycle.

Moreover, while women are reportedly participating more in ALE, they tend to take part less in programmes for professional development. This constitutes a concern for their engagement in the labour market.

Overall, GRALE has shown that it is not enough to merely make ALE offerings available – they must be accessible, gender-responsive and relevant to the broadest possible spectrum of the population. GRALE 4 (UIL, 2019) recommended that Member States and the international community do more to enhance participation by investing more resources and developing effective policies that draw on best practice around the world, particularly in reaching the least advantaged. The GRALE 4 survey also revealed that active citizenship and community cohesion were largely ignored by policy-makers; a key recommendation for Member States in that report was therefore to invest more in active and global citizenship. The thematic chapter in GRALE 5 will focus on citizenship education.

**Education systems are starting to transition to lifelong learning systems.** GRALE 5 (UIL, forthcoming) demonstrates that most countries continue to pursue a limited interpretation of ALE, focusing on its value in terms of employability and economic growth. This ignores the potential of lifelong learning to promote peaceful, just and sustainable environments, redress social inequality and exclusion, and fight extremism and violence. Nevertheless, even if there is still a long way to go, education systems are starting to transition to lifelong learning systems; this is also evidenced in

increased global policy mechanisms for flexible learning pathways such as national qualifications frameworks (NQFs) and systems for the recognition, validation and accreditation (RVA) of non-formal learning. In GRALE 5, 61 per cent of low-income countries report progress in developing RVA systems compared to 68 per cent of high-income countries (ibid.). Establishing flexible learning pathways is key to allowing mobility between different educational programmes and systems.

**Shared governance models are on the rise.** GRALE 5 also reveals that ALE is increasingly shared between different national ministries, local authorities and other stakeholders. Consequently, almost three-quarters of countries reported progress in governance, a trend most pronounced in low-income and upper middle-income countries and in the sub-Saharan Africa and Asia-Pacific regions. Countries reported a strengthening of partnerships and cooperation between several ministries, the private sector and civil society, and confirmed the well-established trend towards decentralization. Challenges remain, however, including weak monitoring and evaluation and persistent data gaps. (ibid.).

## A final word about lifelong learning belongs in the revision of the 1974 Recommendation

GRALE 5 asserts that lifelong learning is fundamental to achieving UNESCO's founding vision to build peace 'in the minds of men and women' (GRALE 5, forthcoming; UNESCO, 2022). The principle of lifelong learning should be embedded in the revision of the 1974 Recommendation because it fosters human rights, inclusion, justice and sustainability. Moreover, lifelong learning calls for an intersectoral approach at the national, regional and global levels. Stakeholders should therefore be encouraged to collaborate actively in lifelong learning policy implementation. The Recommendation could drive Member States to commit to ensuring policy implementation and international cooperation on lifelong learning to realize the 2030 Agenda and beyond. Suggested changes related to the role of lifelong learning can be found in the Annex at the end of this background paper.

## Conclusion

### Towards CONFINTEA VII and a culture of lifelong learning

Lifelong learning is key to addressing myriad threats to humanity – from wars, violence and extremism and the climate crisis to demographic and technological changes and, of course, those posed by crises such as COVID-19 and the inequalities it has exacerbated. To meet these challenges, it is important for Member States to establish lifelong learning policies based on inclusion and interdisciplinarity.

The seventh International Conference on Adult Education (CONFINTEA VII) will take place in Marrakech, Morocco, from 15 to 17 June 2022. A primary aim of the conference will be to renew a call to action for lifelong learning in order to realize the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and beyond.

CONFINTEA VII will reflect on data from GRALE, the Global Education Monitoring Report and Reimagining Our Futures Together: A New Social Contract for Education, among others, as well as global efforts from the international community in promoting lifelong learning.

Through its outcome document, the Marrakech Framework for Action, CONFINTEA VII will endeavour to enjoin Member States to put in place regulatory frameworks to develop flexible opportunities and skills for living in and promoting a lifelong learning culture.



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