**UNESCO**

**Contribution to the X Session of the UN Open-Ended Working Group on Ageing**

**“Protecting the right to lifelong learning and education for older persons”**

12 February 2019

1. The “full development of the human person” is a key objective of the right to education, assigned to it by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Protecting the human rights of older persons includes promoting their right to learn. Lifelong learning from a rights perspective can be understood as being integral part of the right to education.
2. The **UNESCO Convention against Discrimination in Education** (1960) lays down the obligation of States with regard to continuing education. It defines the term ‘discrimination’ as ‘depriving any person or group of persons of access to education of any type or at any level’. In Article 4c it obliges states parties ‘to encourage and intensify by appropriate methods the education of persons who have not received any primary education or who have not completed the entire primary education course and the continuation of their education on the basis of individual capacity’.
3. According to General Comment 13 on Article 13 of the **International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights** (1966) the right to fundamental education extends to all those who have not yet satisfied their ‘basic learning needs’ and its enjoyment includes older persons. Fundamental education, therefore, is an integral component of adult education and lifelong learning.[[1]](#footnote-1) Additionally, technical and vocational education ‘provides retraining for adults whose current knowledge and skills have become obsolete owing to technological, economic, employment, social or other changes’[[2]](#footnote-2) .
4. The **UNESCO 2015 Recommendation on Adult Learning and Education** calls upon Member States to promote access and broader participation to lifelong learning. ‘Lifelong learning is rooted in the integration of learning and living, covering learning activities for people of all ages in all life-wide contexts through a variety of modalities (formal, non-formal and informal) that together meet a wide range of learning needs and demands’. This implies ‘tolerating no discrimination on any grounds, **including age,** gender, ethnicity, migrant status, language, religion, disability, illness, rurality, sexual identity or orientation, poverty, displacement, imprisonment, occupation or professional’. Furthermore, it implies ‘devoting special attention and action to enhance access to quality learning for disadvantaged of vulnerable groups such as individuals with low levels of, or no, literacy and numeracy and schooling, vulnerable youth, migrant workers, members of ethnic minorities, indigenous groups, individuals with disability, prisoners, **the elderly,** people affected by conflict or disasters, refugees, stateless or displaced persons.’ It also recommends Member States to develop, according to their specific conditions, governing structures and constitutional provisions, comprehensive, inclusive and integrated policies for adult learning and education in its various forms.[[3]](#footnote-3)
5. In this respect, it is important that States develop a normative and policy framework that reflects the right to education, learning and training. Everyone, including older persons, needs to be guaranteed equal opportunity for lifelong education and guarantee, support, and promote comprehensive, quality, lifelong education for all, facilitating continuing education, through lifelong learning services and initiatives.
* Persons above compulsory school age who require primary and secondary education have the right to such education and the education shall be adapted to individual needs;
* Literacy and basic practical education comprises reading, writing, counting and learning knowledge of basic practical skills, vocational and professional occupational skills that shall be provided in a balanced and equitable manner for the deprived adults, who are left behind from educational institutions;
* The objective of the literacy and basic practical education are: - provide grounds for reading, writing, counting and acquiring knowledge in basic practical and vocational skills for illiterate and less literate and prepare them for continuing education, and provide the opportunity for continuing education for adults and older persons;
* Lifelong professional training gives every person the right, all throughout their life, irrespective of their status, to acquire and upgrade their knowledge and competencies in support of their professional or personal development and qualifications, and to re-orient their paths in accordance with their personal needs or in line with the changing environmental, technological and social environment.
1. The **UNESCO 2015 Recommendation concerning Technical and Vocational Education and Training**, aims ‘to empower individuals and promote employment, decent work and lifelong learning’. It recommends that Member States ‘should take measures to ensure that all youth and adults have equal opportunities to learn, develop and enhance their knowledge, skills and competencies by transforming and expanding TVET in all its forms to address the great diversity of learning and training needs’[[4]](#footnote-4).
2. Older persons have multiple challenges with regard to the enjoyment of all levels of quality education, training, lifelong learning and capacity building services. Ageing often intersects with other forms of vulnerability and social exclusion such as illness, disability and poverty. Older persons may face physical barriers to learning due to location, transportation and accessibility and often lack the skills needed to benefit fully from digital and online lifelong learning opportunities.
3. As an integral part of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, SDG4 commits Member States to ‘ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all’. Indeed, the **Education 2030 Framework for Action**, explains that ‘the right to education begins at birth and continues throughout life; therefore, the concept of lifelong learning guides SDG4-Education 2030.’ It promotes lifelong learning as a strategic approach to achieve SDG4-Education 2030.
4. The next **International Conference on Adult Learning** (CONFINTEA VII) will take place in 2022. Held every 12 years, this milestone event will provide strategic guidance for the global development of adult learning and education from a lifelong learning perspective and show the contributions adult learning and education make to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Through CONFINTEA, UNESCO Member States commit to strengthen adult learning and education and to monitor and report on national progress on a regular basis.
5. In 2019 UNESCO’s Section of Education Policy and the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning are preparing a joint report on ‘Lifelong Learning: Policy Implications’.
1. General comment 13 - Right to education, ICESCR, para.22-24 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. General comment 13 - Right to education, ICESCR, para.16 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. 2015 Recommendation on Adult Learning and Education, Para. 11. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. 2015 Recommendation concerning Technical and Vocational Education and Training [↑](#footnote-ref-4)