

Expert meeting: Review of the *1976 Recommendation* on the Development of Adult Education

UIL, 10-11 July 2012

Synthesis of Main Results and Proposals

Objectives

- To explore and clarify the technical and legal aspects relating to the desirability of revising the *1976 Recommendation*;
- To discuss and reflect on the arguments in favour of or against the revision of the *1976 Recommendation*;
- To prepare a first draft of a summary report (“preliminary study”) on the technical and legal aspects relating to the desirability of revising the *1976 Recommendation*.

I Background

Resulting from a request put forward by the Third International Conference on Adult Education (CONFINTEA III, Tokyo, 1972), the *Recommendation¹ on the development of adult education* was put into force by the General Conference of UNESCO in 1976. Since then it represents the key normative framework concerning adult education on the international level that provides guiding standards for adult education policy and practice in UNESCO Member States. In its ten sections the document includes a definition, a range of principles, explanations and clarifications regarding the **why?** (objectives), **what?** (general content and specific areas) and **how?** (strategy, organisational structures, methods, means) **of adult education**, and the essential features of a **supportive environment** (infrastructure, financing, international cooperation). It is important to note that UNESCO Recommendations are not binding for Member States and, in contrast to Conventions, do not constitute specific rights or duties *per se*. Instead, they define principles and norms for the international regulation of specific issues and invite Member States to take appropriate legislative steps “in conformity with the constitutional practice” of each State. Consequently, the concrete impact of a Recommendation is fully dependent on the initiatives undertaken by Member States concerning its implementation. To assess its impact, concrete implementation of the *1976 Recommendation* by Member States is monitored closely by UNESCO, through the reports Member States are asked to prepare².

¹ For full information about UNESCO’s normative instruments and the key characteristics of *Recommendations* please see http://portal.unesco.org/en/ev.php-URL_ID=23772&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html

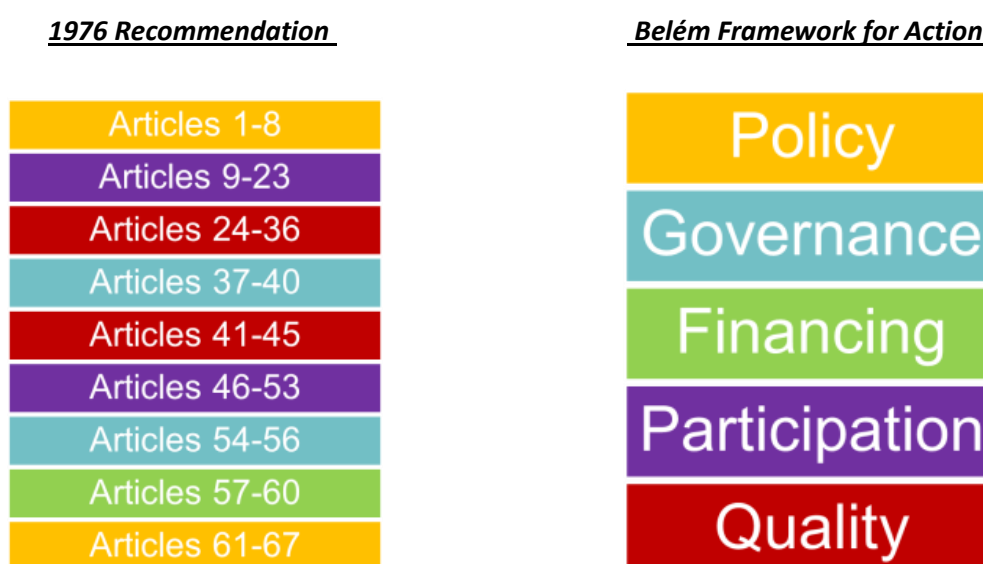
² As is the case with all normative instruments of UNESCO, the actual implementation of the *1976 Recommendation* in Member States is monitored by the Executive Board. This monitoring currently consists of two complementary strands: 1) Continuous reporting provided every six months by the UNESCO Secretariat on the basis of available data, 2) in-depth reporting in larger intervals, usually undertaken through special questionnaires. For the *1976 Recommendation* the continuous monitoring is provided by UIL in the form of short reports to each session of the Executive Board. In-depth reporting was undertaken twice, for the first time in 1993 and for the second time in 2010/2011. For the latter exercise no separate questionnaire was sent out to reduce reporting charges for Member States. Instead, the insights from the 2009 *Global Report on Adult Learning and Education (GRALE)* were used, based on 154 national reports.

An update of the *1976 Recommendation* has been proposed, specifically by the last two International Conferences on Adult Education (CONFINTEA):

The *Agenda for the Future* adopted by CONFINTEA V in 1997 included a request that UNESCO takes appropriate steps to update the *1976 Recommendation* (paragraph 57). The *Belém Framework for Action* (CONFINTEA VI, 2009) calls upon UNESCO to review and update the *1976 Recommendation* by 2012. Simultaneously UIL was tasked with monitoring the development of adult education through further issues of the first *Global Report on Adult Learning and Education (GRALE)*³.

In the context of monitoring the *1976 Recommendation* (see footnote 2), a report was prepared in 2011 on the basis of *GRALE* and submitted to UNESCO's Executive Board and to the 36th General Conference. The latter approved a resolution which paved the way for a review process of the *1976 Recommendation*.

The above-mentioned report synthesised *GRALE* in a manner that allowed the presentation of the situation of adult education in Member States in line with the ten sections of the *1976 Recommendation* through the lens of the *Belém Framework for Action* with its five areas.



Pursuant to the 36th General Conference, a plan of action for revising and updating the *1976 Recommendation* was adopted in 2012 by the Executive Board which foresees the following steps:

July 2012: Meeting of the Expert Group to prepare a first draft of the preliminary study of the technical and legal aspects relating to the desirability of revising the *1976 Recommendation*

³ In 2008, while preparing CONFINTEA VI, guidelines for preparing national reports on the state and development of adult education were sent to Member States by UIL. 154 national reports were submitted and synthesised in five thematic areas (policy, governance, financing, participation and quality) for *GRALE*.

Sept 2012: Online consultation involving a broad range of actors and stakeholders concerning the elements requiring a possible revision of the *1976 Recommendation*

Until **Spring 2013:** Finalisation of the preliminary study and the recommendation concerning a possible revision of the *1976 Recommendation*

October 2013: Consideration of the desirability of revising the *1976 Recommendation*, accompanied by the preliminary study and the Executive Board's observations and decisions thereon, by the 37th session of the General Conference

2014 (subject to the resolution of the General Conference): Drawing up of the draft revised text of the *1976 Recommendation* according to the resolution adopted by the 37th session of the General Conference with a possible category 2 meeting of governmental experts

2015 (38th session of the General Conference of UNESCO): Consideration and adoption of the draft revised text of the *1976 Recommendation* on the Development of Adult Education

II Arguments for revising the *1976 Recommendation on the development of adult education*

To prepare a first draft of the preliminary study of the technical and legal aspects relating to the desirability of revising the *1976 Recommendation*, an expert meeting was organized at the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL) in Hamburg from 10–11 July, 2012.

The expert meeting drew on the experience of five representatives from Africa, Asia and the Pacific, Europe and North America and Latin America and the Caribbean⁴ who discussed and reflected on the arguments in favour of or against the revision of the *1976 Recommendation*.

The expert group remarked that the *1976 Recommendation* is a visionary document which articulates a clear rights-based approach and continues to be relevant. While acknowledging its emancipatory spirit and its unique and crucial normative function for international regulation on adult education, the expert group agreed that after 36 years a restructured version is in fact necessary. The arguments for backing this decision were based on an analysis of those parts of the document which are outdated, causing the *Recommendation* as a whole to be no longer operational and relevant in the fast changing world/the times we are living in.

From this perspective, the arguments for revising the *1976 Recommendation* are as follows:

General:

1. After 36 years, the original definition of Adult Education needs to be re-formulated, taking into consideration the outcomes of CONFINTEA IV, V, and VI.

⁴ Several representatives from the Arab States were invited to the meeting; however none of them could finally join the meeting for different reasons. Special efforts will be undertaken to include the perspectives of the Arab States to the preliminary study through the subsequent online consultation.

2. The issues on relationship of Adult Learning and Education (ALE) to lifelong learning, literacy as a continuum, youth and basic life skills, technical and vocational training and the cross-sectorial nature of ALE deserve special attention.
3. The articulation of ALE within the rights-based approach needs to be highlighted.

Language:

4. The language used in the *1976 Recommendation* includes jargon and outdated terminology. Some terms are today politically incorrect and not gender-sensitive.

Missing:

5. Important topics with high relevance in the ALE arena are not included or sufficiently dealt with in the *1976 Recommendation*. Among these are basic skills, prison education, aging in the context of actual demographic changes, use of information and communication technologies and environmental issues.
6. Also missing in the *1976 Recommendation* are relevant areas related to ALE such as health, environmental protection, security, food, democratic participation and economic and social productivity.
7. Another aspect missing in the *1976 Recommendation* are new developments related to changing contexts like: globalisation, climate change, information and communication technologies, culture of peace.

Monitoring:

8. The *1976 Recommendation* is rather long and unwieldy. For it to be effective as a standard setting instrument it should be shorter, more precise and therefore easier to monitor.

According to the advice of UNESCO's Office of International Standards and Legal Affairs (LA), the legal aspects for revising the *1976 Recommendation* are not in contradiction with the intention of the expert group, and examples such as the revision of the *2001 Technical and Vocational Education training (TVET) Recommendation* or the *Preliminary Study on Cultural Diversity* (2003) could be taken into consideration as possible guidelines. Based on the experiences of the LA unit, revising recommendations is a relatively easy procedure, because unlike conventions they are not legally binding for Member States.

III Starting points to revise the *1976 Recommendation* per Chapter

After the principal advice to revise the *1976 Recommendation*, the expert group discussed and provided some specific advices in the way to proceed with the revision of the document. Considering the ten sections of the *1976 Recommendation* the group suggested the following amendments:

To add a **PREAMBLE**

This should include:

- An explanation of the importance of revising the document
- An explanation as to which principal recipients (policy makers) the document is addressing
- Clarification on its relation with other international commitments, e.g. the Dakar goals, Millennium Development Goals

I. DEFINITIONS

- The definitions of Adult Education and Lifelong Learning need to be re-formulated, taking into consideration the outcomes of CONFINTEA IV, V, and VI, as well as other recent strategic documents.

II. OBJECTIVES AND STRATEGY AIMS/PRINCIPLES

These should include:

- The Right to education/to learn “Education is a fundamental human right and occupies a central place in Human Rights since it is a right in itself and indispensable for the exercise of all other human rights. As an empowerment right, education is the primary vehicle by which marginalized children, youth and adults can lift themselves out of poverty, and obtain the means to participate fully in their communities”. (Education Sector Technical Notes. The Right to Education, 2012).
- To provide a particular set of basic ALE specificities, including the pillars of learning from the Delors Report
- Special emphasis should be placed on the relationship between ALE and lifelong learning, literacy as a continuum, information and communication technologies, learning societies/learning cities

III. CONTENT OF ADULT EDUCATION AREAS OF ADULT LEARNING AND EDUCATION & PARTICIPATION

These should include:

- Relevant areas related to ALE such as health, environmental protection, security, food, democratic participation, employment, economic and social productivity popular and poverty education
- New developments related to wider issues such as: globalisation, climate change, information and communication technologies, the right to education, culture of peace
- The new and emerging challenges of the Technical and Vocational Education Training

IV. METHODS, MEANS, RESEARCH AND EVALUATION QUALITY

(This section should be collapsed with section VI) This should include:

- The importance of empowering learners, placing them at the centre of the process
- Quality related to relevance, content, context, authenticity, equity and inclusion
- Relevant areas related to ALE such as information and communication technologies and climate change
- New ways of Monitoring & Evaluation

~~V. THE STRUCTURES OF ADULT EDUCATION~~ GOVERNANCE

This should include:

- The Inter-sectorial and inter-ministerial approach
- The process of implementing decentralisation of ALE
- The integration, cooperation and networking of the many actors participating in ALE
- Accessible information on mass media on the available educational programmes

~~VI. TRAINING AND STATUS OF PERSONS ENGAGED IN ADULT EDUCATION WORK~~

→QUALITY

~~VII. RELATIONS BETWEEN ADULT EDUCATION AND YOUTH EDUCATION~~ →AREAS OF ADULT LEARNING AND EDUCATION & PARTICIPATION

~~VIII. THE RELATIONS BETWEEN ADULT EDUCATION AND WORK~~ →AREAS OF ADULT LEARNING AND EDUCATION & PARTICIPATION

~~IX. MANAGEMENT, ADMINISTRATION, COORDINATION AND FINANCING OF ADULT EDUCATION~~

FINANCING should cover:

- A rationale for increasing investment in ALE, especially for the most vulnerable
- Innovative and effective mechanisms for mobilising financial resources

X. INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION

This should include:

- International agencies (ILO, WHO, FAO, UNDP, UNEP, UNICEF, UNWOMEN, WB, UNFPA)
- A description of UIL's role

IV Conclusion and Next Steps

As already pointed out, the main outcome of the meeting consists of the proposal to revise the *1976 Recommendation*. To arrive at a revised version, subsequent activities will follow the action plan mentioned above by using suitable communication means. The overall aim is to use the revision process to advocate and mobilise actors for the further development of adult learning and education in all regions.

1) Finalisation of the "Preliminary Study"

The key arguments for a revision of the *1976 Recommendation* will be compiled into a Preliminary Study to be submitted to the Executive Board according to UNESCO's Rules and Procedures. This Study basically consists of Parts I to III of this report. To arrive at a final draft, the report will be distributed to the group members for their comments and amendments, and finalised by UIL.

2) Online Consultation

The Draft Preliminary Study will be further refined and enriched through an online consultation planned for September 2012. The consultation (in English, French and Spanish) will seek comments and proposals from a wide range of stakeholders in the field of adult learning and education from all

regions. A core group of potential participants consists of those individuals and representatives of institutions and networks who were already involved in the 2010 consultation on the Monitoring of the *Belém Framework for Action*. Further participants shall be attracted through different elements of the following communication strategy.

3) Communication Strategy

It is expected that the revision of the *1976 Recommendation* will present a good opportunity to mobilise stakeholders for the sake of further developing adult learning and education worldwide in conjunction with the CONFINTEA Follow-up activities. For this purpose it is imperative to reach a wide variety of actors, especially policy makers, researchers and practitioners interested and active in the field of adult learning and education. The whole process will take at least until the General Conference in 2015, a focal date with many other opportunities for public discourse on the future of adult learning and education, especially with regard to EFA and MDG timelines.

For this purpose appropriate communication channels will be available:

- 1) The existing UIL web page on the “Monitoring and Reviewing the ‘Recommendation on Adult Education’ (Nairobi, 1976)” within the CONFINTEA Portal will be enriched with all relevant background documentation and could serve as the basic reference point.
- 2) UIL’s web news, its Newsletter *Nexus* and the *CONFINTEA Follow-up Bulletin* reach several thousand addressees, including National UNESCO Commissions and Permanent Delegations
- 3) Specific e-mail messages can be sent to individuals, institutions and networks through UIL’s mailing lists

Further efforts need to be undertaken in order to

- go beyond “preaching to the converted”, e.g. by addressing institutions and networks that are actually providing learning opportunities without being explicitly adult learning institutions
- reach further education specialists and networks, the larger UN environment, international organisations and networks (e.g. World Trade Union, UNESCO Chairs, institutions from the fields of health and environment, etc.)
- reach representatives from specific Member States, e.g. Members of the Executive Board
- use effectively the possibilities of the web 2.0, especially social networks