



United Nations  
Educational, Scientific and  
Cultural Organization



UNESCO Institute  
for Lifelong Learning

# Conference report

## Inclusion – A principle for lifelong learning and sustainable cities

Fourth International Conference on Learning Cities

Medellín, Colombia

1–3 October 2019



**International  
Conference on  
Learning Cities**  
Medellín 2019



## **Published in 2019 by**

### **UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning**

Feldbrunnenstraße 58  
20148 Hamburg  
Germany

© UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning

The Institute undertakes research, capacity-building, networking and publication on lifelong learning with a focus on adult and continuing education, literacy and non-formal basic education.

Its publications are a valuable resource for educational researchers, planners, policy-makers and practitioners. While the programmes of UIL are established along the lines laid down by the General Conference of UNESCO, the publications of the Institute are issued under its sole responsibility. UNESCO is not responsible for their contents.

The points of view, selection of facts and opinions expressed are those of the authors and do not necessarily coincide with official positions of UNESCO or UIL. The designations employed and the presentation of material in this publication do not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of UNESCO or UIL concerning the legal status of any country or territory, or its authorities, or concerning the delimitations of the frontiers of any country or territory.

**Design:** Ulrike Köhn

**Photos on p. 4:** © City of Medellín



This publication is available in Open Access under the Attribution-ShareAlike 3.0 IGO (CC-BY-SA 3.0 IGO) licence (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/igo/>). By using the content of this publication, the users accept to be bound by the terms of use of the UNESCO Open Access Repository (<http://www.unesco.org/open-access/terms-use-ccbysa-en>).



Top: The Mayor of Medellín, Federico Gutiérrez, took conference participants on a tour of his city to showcase the transformations that have taken place.  
Bottom: Around 650 people from all UNESCO world regions – including 50 mayors – engaged in two days of knowledge sharing and networking.



## Overview of the conference

---

The *Beijing Declaration on Building Learning Cities* and the *Key Features of Learning Cities*, adopted at the first International Conference on Learning Cities (ICLC) in 2013 in Beijing, China, are testimony to the importance of learning cities' role in promoting social inclusion, economic growth, public safety and environmental protection. Learning cities are those that can effectively mobilize resources in every sector to promote inclusive learning from basic to higher education. Learning cities also revitalize learning in families, communities and the workplace throughout life. To expand learning opportunities for all learners in all contexts, learning cities make use of modern learning technologies. Developing quality in learning and nurturing a culture of learning throughout life are at the heart of learning cities. Guided by the principle of inclusion, in learning cities 'all citizens, regardless of ability, gender and sexuality, social background, language, ethnicity, religion or culture should have equal access to learning opportunities'.<sup>1</sup>

Building on the momentum of Beijing, the second ICLC, held in Mexico City, Mexico, in 2015, defined the role of learning cities in achieving sustainability and launched the UNESCO Global Network of Learning Cities (GNLC). The *Mexico City Statement on Sustainable Learning Cities* recommends that policies and strategies for building sustainable cities 'involve all citizens, especially vulnerable people such as indigenous groups, women, persons with disabilities, refugees and displaced people, and place them at the heart of learning city initiatives'.<sup>2</sup> Crucially, social, economic and political inclusion are at the core of learning cities, 'ensuring that all citizens, irrespective of age, sexual orientation or economic, cultural, religious or ethnic background, acquire the literacy and basic skills they need to assert their rights'.<sup>3</sup>

The third ICLC (2017), which took place in Cork, Ireland, gave further impetus to the cause of inclusion. The resulting *Learning Cities and the SDGs: A Guide to Action* underscores that 'responding to the learning needs of all groups in society fosters equity and inclusion'<sup>4</sup> and thus supports both Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG) 4 ('Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all') and SDG 11 ('Making cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable'). During this conference, attention was directed towards three areas in particular: green and healthy learning cities; equitable and inclusive learning cities; and decent work and entrepreneurship in learning cities.

To further advance progress made during the first three conferences, the fourth ICLC was dedicated to the theme of 'Inclusion – A Principle for Lifelong Learning and Sustainable Cities', and took place in Medellín, Colombia, from 1 to 3 October 2019. At the conference, the President of Colombia joined around 650 participants, including 50 mayors, as well as government representatives and experts from all UNESCO world regions, to learn how learning cities are investing in education that benefits everyone, including often marginalized groups such as youth-at-risk, migrants, older people, digitally excluded populations and persons with disabilities.

---

<sup>1</sup> <http://uil.unesco.org/fileadmin/keydocuments/LifelongLearning/learning-cities/en-unesco-global-network-of-learning-cities-guiding-documents.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> <http://uil.unesco.org/fileadmin/keydocuments/LifelongLearning/learning-cities/en-mexico-city-statement-on-sustainable-learning-cities.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000260442/PDF/260442eng.pdf.multi>



## Opening ceremony

---

The President of Colombia, Iván Duque Márquez, officially opened the fourth International Conference on Learning Cities on 3 October 2019. In his opening remarks, he stressed the importance of learning cities as an engine of change in a broader socio-economic transformation process, and explained that equity is the main goal for both local and national governments. He also emphasized the significance of developing human capacities in order to promote economic progress and, pointing to the future, talked about how new challenges are emerging from technological transformations. These transformations need to be considered by cities as they develop policies. Positioned alongside these factors is the need to prioritize education with a humanistic perspective.

Mr Federico Gutiérrez, the Mayor of Medellín, described the power of education in transforming societies, using the changes that have taken place in his city by way of example. He acknowledged that transformative education relies on effective policies developed and negotiated by diverse groups of stakeholders, and said that it was the responsibility of local governments to anticipate future challenges and ensure local structures are well equipped to respond to these challenges. Today, local and regional leaders are becoming more influential and their tasks more significant, and so networks and conferences of cities increasingly have a role to play in transforming education.

Mr David Atchoarena, the Secretary-General of the Conference and Director of the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL), positioned inclusion and equity as key components of learning cities and spoke of how important lifelong learning is for sustainable development. He said the city of Medellín was an example of how these principles can be put into practice with the backing of city governments. Indeed, the Sustainable Development Goals demand local perspectives and implementation, meaning cities are the perfect place to realize the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The UNESCO GNLC, meanwhile, provides an inspiring platform for the sharing of best practice and expertise in inclusive lifelong learning – a prerequisite for improving local policies and programmes. As cities and local governments learn from one another, these best practice examples need to be adapted to local conditions.

Following these three welcome speeches, the focal point for the international exchange of learning cities was formally transferred from the City of Cork (host of the previous ICLC) to Medellín. Upon accepting this responsibility, Mayor Gutiérrez commented that becoming a part of the UNESCO Global Network of Learning Cities is a way to positively impact the educational opportunities of millions of people.

Finally, Mr Atchoarena initiated the official proceedings of the conference, which saw participants approve the agenda and the goals of the conference. They also confirmed the conference board and drafting committee for the Medellín Manifesto, which would be the outcome statement of the conference.



## Sessions and forums

---

*The conference consisted of three plenary sessions, with thematic forums running parallel. A mayors' forum and an outline of the UNESCO GNLC's future strategy rounded out the event. The following pages provide a brief overview of the outcomes of these sessions, forums and discussions.*

### Plenary Session I: Policies for inclusion at the local level

During the first plenary session, participants discussed the need for cities to be both architects and executors of strategies that foster lifelong learning and promote equity, inclusivity and sustainability. It was considered essential, therefore, to look for new ways in which cities can become more tolerant, open and socially inclusive so that the needs of the most vulnerable are met.

This requires **cities to pursue policies that facilitate equal access to learning opportunities for all citizens**. In the case of Medellín, Mayor Gutiérrez reported, efforts have been made to improve accessibility to formal education by extending school hours, organizing free public transport and providing nutritional breakfasts for disadvantaged children. Additionally, to make opportunities more accessible to people from poorer backgrounds, scholarships have been made available for technical training. These examples, he argued, show that comprehensive strategies are required to address public problems and, here, collaboration with different stakeholders was key.

Yet, there are several **challenges associated with promoting inclusion and equity**. Capturing a global trend, a presentation by the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL) explained how the importance of inclusion has been acknowledged for decades, yet we are still confronted with obstacles to making it a reality. As a city-specific example, Medellín has developed preventative measures to counter the recruitment of young people into criminal gangs, while high levels of migration place heavy demands on resources. Collaboration across government levels and between sectors — with a long-term perspective — is also challenging to achieve.

This session illustrated that, ultimately, **a shared understanding of inclusion and equity** is fundamental to inclusive policies. Delegates from the City of Cork highlighted the need to foster a shared understanding not only within the boundaries of a given city but also beyond, through the establishment of national and international networks and memoranda for cooperation with other cities. For the city of Medellín, equity means targeting vulnerable and underserved populations. A shared understanding of inclusion and equity further depends on the involvement of local citizens; to this end, a survey was carried out in Medellín to ask people where they feel unsafe. Further, operating on the notion of voluntary support and optional payments, 'trust' shops, libraries and buses give local people a shared sense of inclusion. The aim is to connect all people who live in the city, regardless of nationality or how long they have been there, a process supported by the decision to extend with immediate effect the city's successful 'Good Start' programme to the children of migrants.

Finally, the first plenary session of the conference tied inclusive policies at the local level to **lifelong learning for vulnerable groups**. UIL's presentation positioned the concept of lifelong learning as inclusive by nature and explained that learning cities are intermediaries for the promotion of lifelong learning. Examples provided by delegates from Cork illustrated this point. They spoke of how prisoners and their partners are regarded as vulnerable groups and learning opportunities are provided for both through the vehicle of Learning Neighbourhoods, while older people are encouraged by the 'Senior Entrepreneurs' programme to engage in enterprise. Migrants who cannot speak English are offered enrolment onto 'Welcome English' language support programmes, and 'Music Generation' programmes are targeted at young people, including those with disabilities.

## Plenary Session II: Governance structures to support inclusive policy

Lifelong learning involves all areas of life, including health, environment, justice, family, citizenship, cultural participation and leisure. It can contribute to improved living environments, better health and well-being, more cohesive communities and enhanced civic engagement, as well as better employment outcomes and economic development. Limiting the focus of lifelong learning policy and planning to a single sector, to the formal education system or to skills related to work or employability, reduces its potential impact substantially. Cooperation within and across sectors is essential, as is local-level coordination, in order to achieve lifelong learning objectives. Implementation largely takes place at local level and thus requires local initiatives and structures to make lifelong learning a reality for all.

**Frameworks at the national level can be effective in setting up supportive structures for inclusive policies.** Efforts have recently been made in the Philippines to pass a Lifelong Learning Cities Master Plan, which would constitute a national strategy for lifelong learning in cities. In the Republic of Korea, the Lifelong Education Act establishes a legal framework by stipulating that state and local governments must promote lifelong learning. Complementing this legal structure, the National Institute for Lifelong Education (NILE) has its own organizational framework for the national promotion of lifelong learning. It has collaborated with the country's learning cities and Ministry of Education to increase the number of literacy programmes available.

Furthermore, as an example of **collaboration with national authorities to develop inclusive policies**, the Republic of Korea has shared the budget for literacy education programmes equally between local governments and the central government. There is a clear division of responsibilities between the two sectors: monitoring takes place at central level, planning at state level and implementation at the local level. In the Philippines, the governance system is based on national laws and regulation, but there is widespread acknowledgement of the importance of a community perspective in the context of national laws. As a good example of **multilevel governance frameworks to strengthen collaboration**, the city of Huejotzingo, Mexico, has an agreement with 11 neighbouring municipalities, as well as civil society and local people through citizenship participation committees, to find ways of addressing learning needs.

Huejotzingo also recognized the need to **involve all stakeholders** in order to mobilize resources, as the municipal government alone does not have sufficient funds to cover a comprehensive range of inclusive lifelong learning opportunities. In developing inclusive policies and initiatives, the municipal government therefore engaged with many stakeholders – including the private sector. Private companies, for example, have contributed to green initiatives, such as tree planting in schools. In Balanga, the Philippines, families and parents are also seen as important stakeholders. Mothers and fathers are encouraged to complete the 'Educhild' course, which has resulted in lower dropout rates of school-aged children.





## Plenary Session III: Monitoring mechanisms for learning cities

Addressing the need for **mechanisms at the city level for monitoring lifelong learning**, the City of Shanghai reported on a pilot monitoring project at the city, district and town level. Measures have also been established to monitor the supply of lifelong learning opportunities to local people. Simultaneously, the city is attempting to develop monitoring indicators for lifelong learning that complement initiatives at the national level.

Efforts to collect data – from beneficiaries as well as data about lifelong learning programmes (that is, both supply and demand) – have also been made in Singapore, where initiatives to **monitor people's understandings of and engagement with lifelong learning** have been implemented. UIL's 'six columns of lifelong learning' tracks long-term changes in lifelong learning in Singapore, while a short-cycle survey is used to gather information about people's perceptions of lifelong learning. Singapore also presented its 'Skills Future' initiative, designed to support skills-oriented learners by creating flexible learning pathways.

The UNESCO **Key Features of Learning Cities** are being successfully implemented by the city of Sønderborg, Denmark, through its '4 : 17 : 42' initiative. The name of the initiative reflects the city's '4' political commitments (environmental, economic, social and cultural), and commitment to the '17' UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the '42' features included in the UNESCO GNLC's *Key Features of Learning Cities*. A practical example of the implementation of the key features in Sønderborg is the financing of 50 centres for active citizenship activities.

There are promising practices being developed to help monitor lifelong learning. In the process, cities are creating systems and indicators, but are also faced with the challenge of measuring the vast, holistic concept that is lifelong learning, one that is difficult to quantify. **At the local level, there is a need for more evidence on the impact of lifelong learning on people's lives.**

## Parallel Thematic Forums

---

### Parallel Thematic Forums 1: Theme 1 – Green and healthy learning cities

As a way to **promote sustainable development in cities**, the city of Ybycuí, Paraguay implemented the following slogan: 'A Child is Born, A Tree is Born'. As a symbol of lifelong bond between people and their environment, every time a child is born, a new tree will be planted. Since the city is surrounded by vegetation, municipal institutions for lifelong learning have been set up to teach people from early childhood on to look after the environment – this involves working closely with kindergartens and other institutions. However, the same city considered it challenging to strike a balance between the development of the local economy through tourism to green areas and environmental protection. This needs to be conveyed to learners. The city of Aswan, Egypt, implemented another way to promote sustainable development in cities with a programme teaching young people the functioning of solar panels, their manufacturing and maintenance. Fifteen schools in the city have been designated as environmentally friendly.

**Challenges to becoming green and healthy** through lifelong learning were encountered in Morocco, where it is difficult to convince large financial institutions to fund small community actions that collectively create green and healthy learning cities. In some cases, local efforts to promote green and healthy learning cities may be undermined by other priorities of national governments. Another obstacle to attempts to encourage the planting of trees is a scarcity of water, which in turn can be a reason for (forced) migration.

**Local action plans to implement lifelong learning** included partnership with civil society in Morocco, where local people are educated about environmental protection. Sub-divisions of the urban environment have been created to support the implementation of waste collection and recycling systems. In association with universities, efforts have been made in Ybycuí, Paraguay, to engage with young people to secure their engagement in planting trees. This initiative has also been supported by a local NGO.

## Parallel Thematic Forums 1: Theme 2 – Employment and entrepreneurship in learning cities

The UNESCO GNLC member city Swansea, in the UK, has made employment and entrepreneurship the focus of its learning city initiative. Current figures call for an active response and the adoption of strong measures: 94% of companies employ fewer than ten people, whereas public sector employment is high – 10.2% compared to the UK average of 8.5%. Youth unemployment, at 19.3%, is also higher than the UK national average (18.6%). Economic inactivity is high too – 26.3%, compared with 22.2% for the UK. Actions are therefore being taken at all levels of education, from primary school to higher education and learning at work. Furthermore, community-led social enterprises provide education and training, and there is support for business start-ups in isolated post-mining communities and inner-city deprived communities. The city supported and reinforced the impact and importance of its Learning Festival and its cooperation with UNESCO **to develop and to promote employment and entrepreneurship**.

A good example of an entrepreneurship initiative for social and urban integration is the Barrio 31 neighbourhood of Buenos Aires, Argentina, where less than 2% of the population has received formal education and women are twice as likely to be unemployed as men. The integrated plan comprised the relocation of public offices such as the Ministry of Education into the area, and labour inclusion through the Centre for Entrepreneurship. The latter convinced companies to employ people from the neighbourhood and also persuaded residents to obtain formal education. Evidence was gathered to understand companies' experiences with the Centre of Entrepreneurship, but also to learn from participants' perceptions of the programme. One of the interesting conclusions drawn was that workers lacked understanding and information on company contracts (hours of work, duration). It became clear that **employment works as a vehicle for social inclusion**.

Gdynia, Poland, is in the process of developing employment and entrepreneurship opportunities. The main elements of the **local action plan for lifelong learning for employment and entrepreneurship** are education, employment support programmes and innovative approaches to the relationship with inhabitants (e.g. decision-making processes). Employment support programmes monitor closely the trends of the local labour market and try to fully exploit individuals' capabilities. The city believes that the combination of education, lifelong learning and an inclination to entrepreneurship will enhance the quality of life.



## Parallel Thematic Forums 1: Theme 3 – Learning city planning and management

When it comes to **city planning and the implementation of inclusive lifelong learning policies**, cities are confronted with various challenges: for instance, local governments have only limited available evidence (case studies, comparative research) to promote better planning practices. In particular, more research is needed to promote policy learning, considering the very different contexts observed across learning cities.

There is no single or manifestly superior model for the planning and management of a learning city, and it is difficult to identify generalizable better practices. However, some member cities of the UNESCO GNLC – Osan, Republic of Korea, and Clermont-Ferrand, France, demonstrate the design of a flexible planning system with the aim of guaranteeing every citizen an opportunity to learn. Flexibility allows the adaptation of different programmes to respond to specific conditions of the population, like age or experience. It consolidates a demand-based planning system. Clermont-Ferrand has adopted an approach where every learning opportunity is considered a chance to promote inclusion and citizenship. Its orientation is towards promoting popular education. It encourages a participatory planning model, where citizens, not the government, decide orientations and goals.

## Parallel Thematic Forums 2: Theme 1 – People living in deprived neighbourhoods

**Cities represent inclusive learning environments across different learning modalities:** formal and, in particular, non-formal and informal learning provide quality lifelong learning opportunities for people living in deprived neighbourhoods. There is an obligation to pay fees for primary education in Haiti, considering the high percentage of private schools (85%); here, governance clearly needs reinforcement. There is also a need to guarantee education in emergency situations and provide services close to vulnerable communities. In Tunisia, a concept from 2018 advocates equality and social justice with the aim of integrating all sectors of the Tunisian population – including the marginalized ones living in deprived areas. In Puebla, Mexico, a large number of non-formal education initiatives have been launched in marginalized areas, with a focus on basic skills. Special summer programmes are increasing the rate of participation.

**Cities support diverse kinds of knowledge and skills.** In places like Haiti, non-formal life skills programmes, especially in literacy, are offered to drop-out students and people over the usual age for formal education. In Tunis, there are non-formal education programmes that seek to combat delinquency, crime and drug trafficking while simultaneously introducing the concept of the right to life and offering corresponding opportunities in the areas of education, culture and sport. The learning needs of people living in slums and deprived neighbourhoods are addressed in accordance with national and local resources. Meanwhile, some of the main challenges affecting access to lifelong learning in Haiti include lack of transport and limited parental education and school lunch programmes. In contrast, in Tunis, special services are provided to deprived citizens, such as welcoming children from marginalized communities and enabling their parents to achieve financial stability.

## Parallel Thematic Forums 2: Theme 2 – Populations with disabilities

The issue of **accessibility for persons with disabilities** was addressed in the context of São Paulo, Brazil. The Digital Accessibility Seal was highlighted; this initiative certifies sites and electronic portals that comply with nationally and internationally established accessibility criteria. Those responsible for websites and electronic portals may request the Digital Accessibility Seal from the Municipal Secretariat, and the secretariat, together with the Permanent Accessibility Commission, will evaluate the accessibility of the submitted pages. Applicants whose sites or electronic portals comply with such criteria will be awarded the Digital Accessibility Seal. In Atlixco, Mexico, programmatic activities in relation to disabled populations include school theatre, workshops on the issue, courses on the protection of the rights of children and adolescents, and the offer of capacity-building during traditional festivities.

There is a strategy for urban development in the city of Pécs, Hungary. The Learning City-Region Forum and its Learning Festival Programme provide opportunities for all citizens of Pécs to engage in lifelong learning. In order to be able to support and also address the concerns of persons with disabilities, the City of Pécs, as an active member of the UNESCO GNLC, has promoted learning activities connected to specific topics and in accordance with the needs of its vulnerable populations and learning communities. There have been a number of collaborative actions based on intergenerational partnerships with institutions and organizations with direct **goals to raise participation in lifelong learning**.

## Parallel Thematic Forums 2: Theme 3 – Other groups, including older people and the imprisoned population

Cities address the learning needs of vulnerable groups in different ways. The city of Chengdu, China, has developed **a system to support its elderly population** based on five components and orientations:

1. Regulation to support local plans;
2. A clear political commitment;
3. Creation of a learning service network across government levels;
4. Targeting the rural population;
5. Showing results to inspire younger generations.

In Villa María, Argentina, strategies have been developed to foster learning environments for **incarcerated populations**. For example, the Culture in Prisons Programme is carried out by the Ministry of Justice and Human Rights together with the agency Córdoba Culture. Through this programme, inmates are given the opportunity to attend workshops led by experts and work towards the completion of a cultural or artistic project. Earlier this year, a group of inmates in Penitentiary Establishment No. 5 of Villa María produced an album of eight songs inspired by the experiences and emotions of incarceration.

In both Argentina and Portugal, it was reported that, through collaboration with authorities from different public agencies and the promotion of a participatory approach, cities managed to support and recognize under-served populations and improve living conditions in their communities. The challenges that the cities experienced principally concerned funding and guaranteeing continuous support to these policies and activities. It was clearly indicated that the **lack of relevant research and evidence** is becoming an additional challenge in addressing these groups.



## Parallel Thematic Forums 3: Theme 1 – Youth at risk

### **Cities are creating inclusive learning environments that support quality lifelong learning opportunities for youth at risk.**

They are providing safe environments that enable the promotion of respect between different communities, and foster learning to live together. They emphasize the importance of inclusive, participatory, conservation processes. They seek a diverse culture, and support sports and educational activities and events. In addition, they encourage learning opportunities and job creation. They also promote and enhance environments and opportunities that improve the general quality of life. Another significant approach is the targeting of vulnerable groups and prioritizing actions towards them, which goes hand-in-hand with developing holistic policies. They support second-chance schools and vocational training, and at the same time, address inequalities, while seeking to enhance 'life chances' depending on the neighbourhood, social and cultural background. Creating inclusive learning environments, moreover, requires reaching out to disadvantaged youth and offering integrated, inclusive inter-governmental spaces.

**The knowledge and skills learning cities** support consists of helping youth to better integrate into educational structures, supporting social activities such as scholarships and financial aid in exchange for youth's contribution to social community solutions. In addition, cities provide counselling and monitoring services for educational opportunities and career orientation. They also have a leading role in fostering sports, arts and culture and encouraging democratic processes and responsible citizenship. It lies in their sphere to provide all citizens with access to knowledge, to support collaborative actions and to encourage innovation and creativity.

### **Lifelong learning policies help foster youth engagement in educational and training opportunities**

by empowering the youth to become actors and implementers of change, rather than reducing their role to mere consumers of services. Such policies provide youth with opportunities to contribute to community life in their cities, for instance by putting in place integrated learning centres, offering free education and learning opportunities, and integrating youth into the municipal council. These policies offer the chance to co-create and encourage leisure activities, but also co-construct policies and actions, consequently giving youth a voice and a chance to identify what they need to learn.

## Parallel Thematic Forums 3: Theme 2 – Refugees and Migrants

This forum included a presentation on the *2019 Global Education Monitoring Report*<sup>5</sup> with its assessment of progress towards Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4). The 2019 report focuses on migration, displacement and education. The number of international migrants has more than tripled: from around 75 million in 1964 to 258 million in 2017, but it has been nearly stable as a percentage of the global population. In recent years, Melitopol, Ukraine, has witnessed an increase in migration through forced displacement. It has been difficult to obtain information on migrants and refugees, as data collection is fragmented. It was identified that **provisions for language courses are badly needed**. Countries differ in the way they define migrants and refugees, which poses a problem. In addition, there is often a whole family context behind one single migrant. Cities' efforts are found at all education levels for all ages, and feature the involvement of many different kinds of actor – both private and public. The idea of setting up a one-stop shop for refugees was valued positively.

---

<sup>5</sup> See <https://en.unesco.org/gem-report/report/2019/migration>



Melton, Australia, a suburb of Melbourne, became more diverse at a faster rate than other growing local council areas, resulting in a need to be very careful in navigating such changes as **promoting supportive and cohesive communities that celebrate diversity**. Current initiatives were showcased: Central Community Hubs were created in two suburbs of Melbourne, Melton and Kurungjang. Lifelong learning is fixed in a community vision of the city in 2036. Both suburbs entered into a partnership with the State Government of Victoria. An inclusive learning environment was created by integrating adult education and community education with settlement support. Office accommodation was granted for settlement support, youth, legal, and other organizations willing to commit to the city of Melton. The focus of the Kurungjang hub is on a healthy living curriculum, and community education and courses. Representatives of the local council show intent through numerous efforts to support the community.

In Heraklion, Greece, the Migrant Integration Centre has helped over 2,000 migrants since its initiation. The centre has developed a **wide network of partners implementing actions in collaboration** with school communities (parents' associations) to raise students' awareness and acceptance of diversity. In addition, the municipality of Heraklion is cooperating with the Directorates of Education in implementing inclusion programmes for migrant children and refugees in formal education, and is encouraging their participation in these programmes. Over 3,000 students have visited the municipal library, archaeological museum and the municipality's information point as part of out-of-school extracurricular programmes for immigrant children.

## Parallel Thematic Forums 3: Theme 3 – Digitally excluded populations

**Challenges faced by cities when developing and implementing lifelong learning policies and practices for the inclusion of digitally excluded populations** include the lack of phone coverage despite the wide spread of mobile phones. Also, the mastering of a regional language as a first language constitutes an immediate barrier. A negative reaction to technology and change persist, particularly within vulnerable and marginalized groups. A further challenge is the disempowerment in controlling data gathered by new technologies. Nevertheless, the challenges can be overcome by, for example, building digital lifelong learning centres within walking distance, as is the case in Yeonsu-gu, Republic of Korea. Another solution features assisting young people in dealing with fears of cyberbullying and advising on online data protection.

Addressing digitally excluded groups requires the **participation of institutions and sectors in the planning and implementation of lifelong learning policies**. Accordingly, the City of Cork, Ireland, has acknowledged the necessity of including the city council, universities, the private sector and wider community, as well as the establishment and inclusion of lifelong learning centres. Additionally, in the city of Yeonsu-gu, Republic of Korea, community media partners, including radio and film companies, are supported in reaching out to the digitally excluded population and developing media literacy. In Iran, finding solutions in the workplace was identified as a relevant strategy, suggesting the need to involve workers in co-creating and upskilling. Further contributions drew attention to libraries as safe centres, especially those within the public sector. On the one hand, public sector libraries can provide support and assistance to all citizens, and on the other hand, libraries in the private sector play a leading role as providers of online learning.

**'Smart cities' have the ability to engage with digitally excluded groups.** Cities are actively engaging in research on issues related to digital development and inclusion; as a result they highlight the importance of



including all actors and stakeholders. This has translated, for instance, into the creation of partnerships with data centres that are committed to inclusion, transparency and removing disempowerment. Further policies include committing to the principle of empowering citizens by introducing technology to enable co-creation, establishing smart and learning cities – not just smart cities – and identifying people holding key roles for helping all citizens engage with new and essential technologies for person-to-person communication.

## Mayors' Forum: Future strategy of the UNESCO Global Network of Learning Cities

---

The Mayors' Forum was opened by the Mayor of Medellín, Federico Gutiérrez, and UIL Director David Atchoarena. The forum provided the opportunity for discussions between mayors and public authorities of different regions and cities on best practice, challenges and the future work plan of the UNESCO GNLC. Participants were able to discuss lifelong learning and its role in addressing challenges faced by the most vulnerable groups, and shared promising practices in their individual contexts around learning opportunities, cognitive development and more. These included:

*Villa María, Argentina:* The Argentinian learning city offers early childcare starting from the age of 45 days to 3 years in over 50 schools along the periphery of the city. These schools are not only specialized in early cognitive stimulation but also teach parents by offering literacy campaigns in evenings and afternoons. Furthermore, childcare nutrition resources have been created for this age group. Other activities include promoting cultural and sports events. The City of Villa María is a strong advocate of lifelong learning and, applying results of research linking successful primary school experiences to a reduction in dropout numbers, has placed significant emphasis on the early years.

*San José, Costa Rica:* The city shared Villa María's interest and willingness to focus on the early years and described positive experiences using a comprehensive approach to sports and arts for children to encourage the choice of extra-curricular activities. The focus is on non-formal education, and San José continues to work with the city of Medellín, an example in Latin America in developing key initiatives for lifelong learning.

*Cork, Ireland:* The city reported on a programme aimed at children under 5 years of age. The programme serves to enhance literacy in terms of speech and language development, empowers parents with their own education, and provides education opportunities around health in collaboration with health services. Additionally, there is a joint home-school liaison programme in which each school has an officer to educate parents, utilizing maths projects and literacy programmes. The aim of the initiative is to create a coordinated approach for children and parents to eventually eliminate fear of education.

*Chefchaouen, Morocco:* The city underlined the importance of structuring the way we experience cities. Initiatives around counselling for children and women on sustainable energy have been put in place. This continues to help local citizens to better grasp the SDGs and how they may take part in enacting them in their daily life.

The discussion between mayors provided the opportunity to highlight common existing approaches in lifelong learning, including:

- Starting young: Lifelong learning starts in the early years, through early childhood education, supporting children from a very young age through speech development, cognitive development and parent education;
- Empowering parents from low-income backgrounds and with low educational backgrounds (often single mothers) and giving them a role in their own and their children's education;
- Providing 'fear-free' learning spaces for learners;
- Providing extra-curricular activities such as sport and arts for learners of all backgrounds;
- Creating nutrition projects to help ensure that children are physically and mentally able to learn;
- Guaranteeing a culture of respect for successful learning outcomes.

Feedback was also given on higher education, specifically about technical and vocational education and training (TVET), and the entry of young people into the rapidly changing world of work. Simultaneously, most cities reported on the importance of vocational education and training and highlighted the success of linking with the private sector, industries and universities to guarantee the skills needed at the workplace. Different policies and social support can ensure participation and success, although involvement and support of parents or carers are essential pillars. Given that students will most likely seek or develop new job profiles and change jobs at various times throughout their career, rather flexible learning structures and curricula seem to be essential.

*Puebla, Mexico:* The city explained that dual vocational education is now in place in public universities of technology. This addresses the necessity for skills matching. Students get training on career opportunities, and this training corresponds to the needs of (mainly automotive) industries in the region. The city reported on collaboration agreements between industries, universities and companies and the need and demand for education in skills.

*Miraflores, Peru:* This city takes a more social approach to entrepreneurship, believing that small businesses should respond to local needs and have a local impact. Their approach is one that seeks to develop skills that raise social awareness. The city has recently concluded an agreement with an association working with elderly people, whereby their staff receives certified training at university level.

*Larissa, Greece:* Both the financial crisis and the refugee crisis have impacted Greece severely; however, it is through these crises that the city's lifelong learning approach grew. Larissa encourages active citizenship and effective communication, and promotes social inclusion.

*Cork, Ireland:* Roma populations and other nomadic groups receive extra support and resources as the dropout rates for Roma adolescents are very high. The aim is to keep them involved in education and help them to overcome school phobia. This is done by working with students and parents and higher education institutions. The city, students and parents, and institutions insist on flexible learning methods opposed to rigid approaches.

*Chiang Rai, Thailand:* This city developed a programme for secondary schools in which high school students are provided with a career path by universities (coaches and counsellors) taking into consideration the needs of the labour market. Furthermore, students and parents learn together in small workshops about future job requirements. This promising practice has attracted the interest of other Thai provinces.



## GNLC future strategy

The Mayor's Forum provided the opportunity to discuss the GNLC's **strategy** for the next two years. The intention with this new approach is to focus activity around topics identified as priority areas by the member cities. Before the fourth International Conference on Learning Cities, a survey was conducted within the UNESCO GNLC to identify seven key priorities for a future work plan:

- Education for Sustainable Development;
- Global Citizenship Education;
- Educational planning – monitoring and innovation;
- Health and well-being;
- Literacy;
- Entrepreneurship;
- Equity and inclusion (combining different groups of vulnerable populations including: youth at risk, gender equality, elderly people, migrants and refugees, digitally excluded people).

Each theme is coordinated by two cities with the support of UIL and, in some clusters, technical partners also help to facilitate and guide the coordination process. Tools developed as a result of the cluster work and promising practices are shared between the participating learning cities. Such exchanges will aid the development and reinforcement of policy strategies on lifelong learning for each thematic area.

This strategy, which was endorsed by mayors during the conference, represents an important step forward for the UNESCO GNLC, six years after its creation. The establishment of thematic clusters aims to foster closer cooperation between cities with similar interests in a given theme (as listed above). The strategy will be supported by a multi-donor funding modality, a pooled fund designed to finance diverse activities.

Coordinating cities for the thematic clusters are as follows:

1. **Education for Sustainable Development:** Hamburg (Germany) and Shanghai (China) – 60 cities participating.
2. **Global Citizenship Education:** Larissa (Greece) and Yeonsu (Republic of Korea) – 36 cities participating.
3. **Educational planning, monitoring and evaluation:** Goyang (Republic of Korea) and Huejotzingo (Mexico) – 45 cities participating.
4. **Health and well-being:** Cork (Ireland) and Osan (Republic of Korea) – 29 cities participating.
5. **Literacy:** Santiago (Mexico) and Villa María (Argentina) – 29 cities participating.
6. **Entrepreneurship:** Chengdu (China) and Limerick (Ireland) – 34 cities participating.
7. **Equity and inclusion:** Melton (Australia), Wuhan (China) and Mantes-La-Jolie (France) – 59 cities participating.

The thematic clusters, supported by the multi-donor trust fund, together form the core of the UNESCO GNLC future strategy. Their respective activities are forecast to fall under four work areas, with each area corresponding to a specific objective:

1. **Policy and practice exchange:** Sharing information on existing strategies and best practice for lifelong learning in cities.
2. **Capacity-building and training:** Building UNESCO GNLC member cities' capacities to advance the thematic areas from a lifelong learning perspective.
3. **Knowledge production and sharing:** Facilitating knowledge production to inform policy-making, strategy formulation and project implementation at the local level.
4. **Communication:** Providing a platform for regular communication between UIL, the cluster coordinators and members of the cluster in line with the above priority areas.

The strategy, together with the multi-donor trust fund, will ensure full ownership of the UNESCO GNLC and can develop transversal functions as well as the sharing of tools. Furthermore, in line with these developments, existing video tutorials will be expanded and learning modules will be created to help further develop the concept of becoming and being a learning city.







## Get in touch

UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning  
Feldbrunnenstraße 58  
20148 Hamburg  
Germany

Tel: + 49 (0) 40 44 80 41 - 0

Fax: + 49 (0) 40 41 077 23

Web: [www.uil.unesco.org](http://www.uil.unesco.org)

Email: [uil@unesco.org](mailto:uil@unesco.org)



[unesco.uil](https://www.facebook.com/unesco.uil)



[@uil](https://twitter.com/uil)



[UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning](https://www.linkedin.com/company/unesco-uil)