

The UNESCO Recommendation on Education for Peace, Human Rights and Sustainable Development

An explainer

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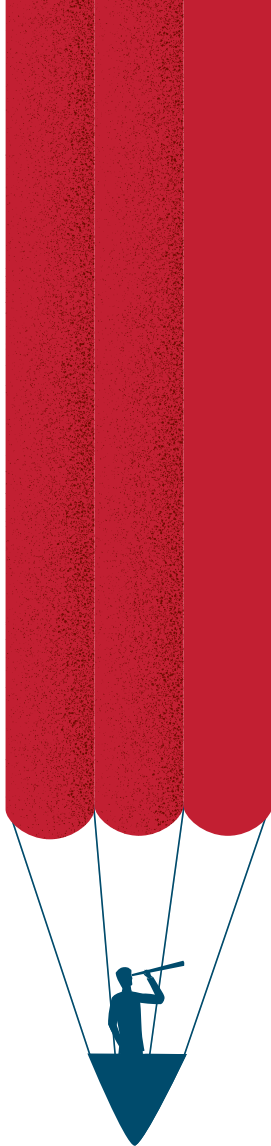
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Message from Stefania Giannini

UNESCO's work in education is rooted in the principle that education is everyone's right throughout life. As the world evolves and new challenges arise, our approaches to teaching and learning must also change. This is why the Recommendation on Education for Peace and Human Rights, International Understanding, Cooperation, Fundamental Freedoms, Global Citizenship and Sustainable Development is truly a milestone. Adopted by UNESCO's 194 Member States in November 2023, it is a testament to UNESCO's engagement in supporting everyone committed to improving education worldwide.

The Recommendation – commonly referred to as the *Recommendation on Peace, Human Rights and Sustainable Development* – provides a vision of education for humanity and peace. It continues the goals and aspirations of its predecessor, the “1974 Recommendation”, and acknowledges that peace is built not only through international negotiations but also in classrooms and sports fields, in communities and throughout life.

It provides concrete guidance to ensure that education in all its forms, dimensions and environments shapes how we see the world and treat others. It can, and should, be a pathway to constructing lasting peace.

The adoption of this text instils a message of hope. We look forward to working with, and supporting, Member States and civil society actors and all those who believe in education's transformative power to realize the full potential of this Recommendation – helping us all to build more peaceful, just, equal, equitable, inclusive, democratic, healthy and sustainable societies. Together.

Stefania Giannini

Assistant Director-General, Education
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Introduction



In November 2023, countries adopted at UNESCO the *Recommendation on education for peace and human rights, international understanding, cooperation, fundamental freedoms, global citizenship and sustainable development*.

Commonly referred to as the “Recommendation on Education for Peace, Human Rights and Sustainable Development”, it updates the previous “1974 Recommendation”¹ that almost 50 years ago united countries in positioning education as a key driver of peace and international understanding. (See Box 1). As such, the Recommendation provides the legal foundation for Target 4.7 of the Sustainable Development Goal 4 on Education.²

Today, it remains the only global standard-setting instrument that lays out how education can and should be used to bring about lasting peace and sustainable development.

Unique in this way, the Recommendation covers all aspects and dimensions of education. Informed by the UNESCO Futures of Education Report (2021) and the Transforming Education Summit (2022), which both call for a reimagining of education to meet the challenges of our time, it links different issues, from human rights, digital technologies and climate change to gender equality, health and well-being and cultural diversity.

It considers that achieving and maintaining peace is an active process that is reliant on the daily actions of each and every individual. It acknowledges that our world is increasingly complex, interdependent and interconnected and therefore, education too needs to be multi-disciplinary and holistic to ensure the full development of individuals and societies.

1 Full title of the text adopted in 1974: *The Recommendation concerning education for international understanding and cooperation and peace and education relating to human rights and fundamental freedoms*.

2 Target 4.7 of SDG 4 on Education inspired the drafting of the newly adopted Recommendation: “By 2030, ensure that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including, among others, through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture’s contribution to sustainable development.”

This newly adopted instrument fully aligns with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. It integrates advancements in human rights³, new evidence and lessons learned from over 50 years of development practice in formal and non-formal education – particularly global citizenship, peace and human rights education and other related fields. Accordingly, it recognizes and values the contributions of civil society actors and suggests avenues for greater collaboration between all sectors of society in view of encouraging a ‘whole-of-society approach’ to threats to international understanding, cooperation and peace.

This brochure introduces the updated Recommendation and outlines what it has to offer and how it can be used in a practical way by different stakeholders in education on a daily basis. To fully appreciate its value, readers should refer to the original text available here: [Recommendation concerning Education for International Understanding, Co-operation and Peace and Education relating to Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms - Legal Affairs \(on.unesco.org/1974Recommendation\)](https://on.unesco.org/1974Recommendation)

Box 1

How was the 1974 Recommendation implemented within countries?

The previous version of the Recommendation (1974) led to the implementation of numerous activities within countries and to international initiatives. In the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, for example, “World Studies” programmes were launched across the country strengthening global awareness. Türkiye and Czechoslovakia carried out experimental projects in teacher training. Human rights curricula were introduced in schools in Germany and Egypt. The 1974 Recommendation also fostered the teaching of international human rights in the United States of America and the development of education for international understanding in Japan, Finland and Lebanon. In Zimbabwe, new disciplines were added to the curriculum to promote education for peace and human rights.

3 Since 1974, the international community has adopted numerous legal instruments directly relevant to the Recommendation on education for peace, human rights and sustainable development. For example, the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, the United Nations Declaration on Human Rights Education and Training and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, to name just a few.



Why was this Recommendation adopted?

Inspired by the outcomes of the UNESCO International Commission on the Futures of Education (2020-2021), the Recommendation was developed with an underlying sense of urgency.

In the face of global challenges threatening global peace and human existence, we can either continue on an unsustainable path of development or radically change course. Our current path implies the continued destruction of the environment and its biodiversity. It means condoning increasing inequalities, the rapid spread of hateful ideologies and the erosion of fundamental freedoms, which are known to be drivers of violent conflict.

This Recommendation provides a roadmap to guide our societies towards more just, healthy and peaceful futures for all.

It has been formed to help countries ensure that their education systems are “fit for purpose” in the 21st century. This means guaranteeing that learners – of all ages and throughout life – are empowered with the knowledge, skills, values, attitudes and behaviours needed to take individual and collective action towards achieving this common future.

What is a “Recommendation”?

“Recommendations” are non-binding legal international documents that formulate principles and norms for the international regulation of any particular question of interest to countries⁴. “Recommendations” are adopted by UNESCO’s supreme governing body – the General Conference. They invite Member States to take whatever legislative or other steps – in conformity with their constitutional practice and the nature of the question under consideration – to apply these principles and norms.

The full list of UNESCO’s Recommendations can be found here:

<https://www.unesco.org/en/legal-affairs/standard-setting/recommendations>

⁴ According to Article 1.b of the Rules of Procedure concerning recommendations to Member States and international conventions covered by the terms of Article IV, paragraph 4, of the Constitution available here: <https://www.unesco.org/en/legal-affairs/rules-procedure-cr?hub=66535>

Who is the Recommendation for?

The Recommendation can be used by both individuals and groups of professionals working in the field of education and in other related areas. Interested readers will include lawmakers, policy-makers, professionals in ministries of education, teachers and education personnel, curriculum developers, school leaders, learners, tradition bearers, non-formal education trainers, community leaders, families and caregivers, individual experts, researchers and academics, representatives of civil society organizations and unions.

The Recommendation will also interest people involved in the prevention of violence and violent extremism, those engaged in peace-building efforts and post-conflict reconstruction and those promoting social justice, human rights and sustainable development more broadly.



How can this Recommendation support change?

The Recommendation is a call to action as well as a tool for advocacy and benchmarking:

AS A CALL TO ACTION

it can inspire all those interested in, or engaged in the field of education.

AS AN ADVOCACY TOOL

it can influence policy formulation or change.

AS A BENCHMARKING TOOL

it can be used to measure progress and the extent to which education systems are preparing learners to become active and responsible agents of change.



What is so unique about the Recommendation?



It provides concrete guidance, grounded in human rights, on how education can support lasting peace, address the multiple and deep-rooted causes of conflicts and violence and provide people with the knowledge and skills to build more just, healthy and sustainable societies.



It covers all forms, types and levels of education, throughout life - expanding beyond schooling.



The guidance covers all aspects of the education system (i.e., curriculum development, assessment, teacher development, teaching materials, school policies, etc.) as well as learning provided outside traditional learning environments.



It speaks to a wide range of education stakeholders – government and civil society actors.

What does the document contain?

The document contains a “Preamble” and “operative paragraphs”, as well as an Appendix. More specifically, the document contains the following:



A small number of **definitions**, adopted by UNESCO’s General Conference. This means that UNESCO’s Member States have agreed upon, and accepted by consensus, the meaning of these definitions.



14 guiding principles to inform all aspects of education systems in order to ensure learning experiences are truly transformative for individuals and for education systems themselves.



A non-exhaustive list of **learning objectives** to guide curriculum design and all learning activities.



A list of action areas describing what can be done by individuals and groups to ensure education systems are conducive to building lasting peace, international understanding and cooperation, human rights, global citizenship and sustainable development.



An **Appendix** that includes documents on topics related to the Recommendation. Among them are international Conventions, Declarations, United Nations Resolutions, as well as plans of action which users can refer to if they wish to learn more.

Guiding principles for transformative education



Education policies, programmes and activities oriented towards the aims of this Recommendation should be transformative and of good quality. This implies embedding the 14 guiding principles in every dimension of education (whether formal, non-formal or informal), i.e., in educational laws, policies and strategies, curriculum and pedagogy, teacher development, assessment, teaching and learning materials and learning environments, etc.

Human-rights based	Life-long, continuous and transformative
Accessible and of good quality (education as a public and common good)	Promoting the co-creation of knowledge
Non-discriminatory	Upholding freedom of thought, belief, religion and expression and banishing advocacy of all forms of hatred
Instilling an ethic of care, compassion and solidarity	Participatory, notably through the ethical and responsible use of technologies
Advancing gender equality	Applying an international and global perspective, underlining connections between the local and the global
Equitable, inclusive and respectful of diversity	Promoting dialogue between cultures and generations
Ensuring the safety, health and well-being of learners, teachers and education personnel	Instilling an ethic of global citizenship and shared responsibility for peace, human rights and sustainable development for the benefit of all

Learning objectives to develop knowledge, skills, values, attitudes and behaviours

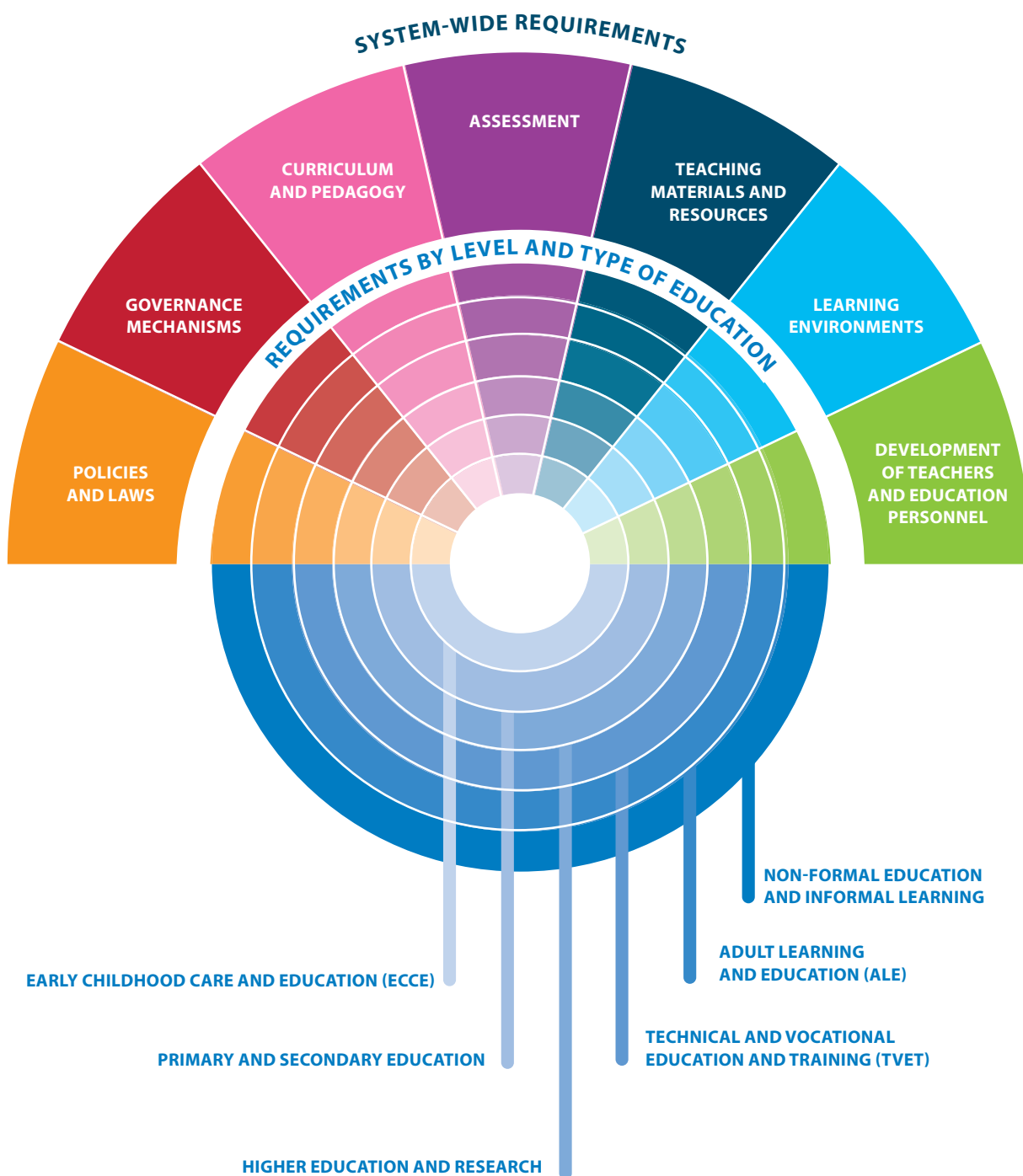
To attain the goals of the Recommendation (see paragraphs 2 to 5), educational activities and programmes should be geared towards the achievement of the following learning objectives:



Acquiring these skills involves using a range of teaching and learning approaches that make full use of cognitive, social and emotional and behavioural learning.

Key action areas

In addition to guiding principles and learning objectives, the Recommendation describes a series of actions (or technical recommendations) to be taken at different levels of education, thereby ensuring a system-wide and holistic approach. These recommended actions concern every level and type of education (non-formal and formal) and dimension of the education system. See below.



Examples of actions to be taken



The Recommendation calls for the implementation of a wide range of actions such as:



Ensuring that textbooks are anti-racist and checked for biases and stereotypes



Incorporating culture and the arts into educational practices for a better understanding of cultural heritage



Integrating multiple and diverse perspectives into history teaching



Ensuring teachers' freedom of expression and opinion, and their access to information



Developing safe and inclusive digital learning systems and environments, accompanying digital tools by measures protecting personal and sensitive data



Ensuring assessments are accessible and adapted to individual needs, inclusive and free from bias



Strengthening school systems to promote physical and mental health and well-being



Using the outdoors as learning spaces to teach about sustainability and climate change



Funding education programmes that promote global citizenship and sustainable development



Investing in school infrastructure to improve sustainability and to prepare for the impacts of climate change

How can you use the Recommendation?

TEACHERS can use the Recommendation to ...



- ▶ teach about global citizenship or sustainable development
- ▶ advocate for more and better opportunities for teacher development
- ▶ self-assess their teaching approaches

SCHOOL LEADERSHIP can use the Recommendation to ...



- ▶ develop school policies
- ▶ advocate for reforms on school boards
- ▶ design innovative school initiatives

POLICY-MAKERS can use the Recommendation to...



- ▶ find inspiration when drafting policies and developing curricula
- ▶ guide agenda-setting processes and identify priorities
- ▶ advocate for increased prioritization of peace and human rights education, education for sustainable development and global citizenship education

LEARNERS (including young people) can use the Recommendation to ...



- ▶ develop school community projects
- ▶ advocate for policy change in their schools and universities

PARENTS can use the Recommendation to ...



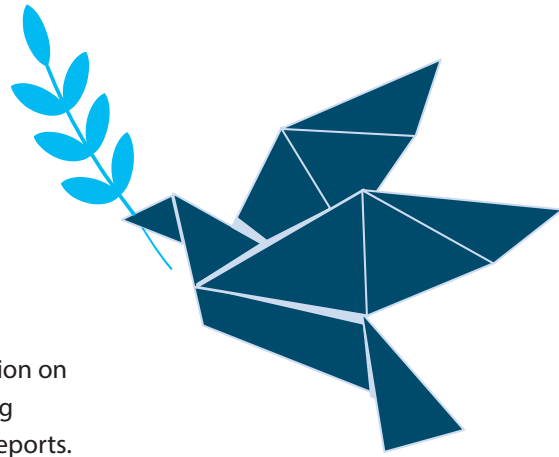
- ▶ participate more fully in school meetings with teachers and policy-makers
- ▶ make personal choices about their own continuous education
- ▶ find the best options for their child's education and holistic development

CIVIL SOCIETY ACTORS can use the Recommendation to ...



- ▶ help shape agendas for reform
- ▶ design their activities in support of education development
- ▶ develop their advocacy materials

Follow-up and monitoring



Every four years, UNESCO organizes⁵ a global consultation on the implementation of the Recommendation by inviting its Member States to submit country implementation reports.

The Recommendation underlines the importance of involving a variety of civil society actors in the reporting process.

Between the reporting cycles, UNESCO facilitates policy-learning between countries and concerned stakeholders. UNESCO is also developing guidance to help interested parties implement the Recommendation.

5 In accordance with its Specific multi-stage procedure for the monitoring of the implementation of UNESCO Conventions and Recommendations for which no specific institutional mechanism is provided available here: <https://www.unesco.org/en/legal-affairs/standard-setting/specific-cr-monitoring-procedure?hub=66535>

UNESCO – a global leader in education

Education is UNESCO's top priority because it is a basic human right and the foundation for peace and sustainable development. UNESCO is the United Nations' specialized agency for education, providing global and regional leadership to drive progress, strengthening the resilience and capacity of national systems to serve all learners. UNESCO also leads efforts to respond to contemporary global challenges through transformative learning, with special focus on gender equality and Africa across all actions.



The Global Education 2030 Agenda

UNESCO, as the United Nations' specialized agency for education, is entrusted to lead and coordinate the Education 2030 Agenda, which is part of a global movement to eradicate poverty through 17 Sustainable Development Goals by 2030. Education, essential to achieve all of these goals, has its own dedicated Goal 4, which aims to *“ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.”* The Education 2030 Framework for Action provides guidance for the implementation of this ambitious goal and commitments.



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