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Arab region contribution to the revision of the UNESCO 1974 Recommendation concerning education for international understanding, cooperation and peace

Summary report

As the UNESCO 1974 Recommendation is approaching its 50th anniversary, UNESCO Member States decided to start a process to revise it, in order to take into account shifts in the global and educational landscape and make it better suited to address the new threats and challenges faced by our generations. The objective is to have a renewed powerful international legal instrument to promote the role of education in eradicating conditions that threaten human survival and well-being.

On 20 and 21 March 2022, 274 among education planners, curriculum specialists, educators, teachers, policy-makers, NGOs, IGOs, youth, academia, independent education experts, and UNESCO Chairs from the Arab region participated in an online regional consultation on the revision of the UNESCO 1974 Recommendation. This summary report presents the key recommendations and perspectives issued from the consultation and the post-meeting survey.

Revision of the UNESCO 1974 Recommendation: Key messages from the Arab region

Summary of key challenges

1. Participants underlined numerous specific challenges that they are confronted with working on the issues addressed in the 1974 Recommendation. These challenges include:

    - **Crisis-affected countries**. Many countries are heavily affected by crises, wars and violent conflicts, either because they were engaged in civil wars, were fighting wars with other nations, are received very large numbers of refugees which have put the education system and their society at large under extreme duress.
    - **Quality of educational facilities** that are not conducive to learning, whether due to violent conflict or to neglect. In addition, the technological upgrades necessary for modernizing education are also lagging whether at the level of infrastructure or the level of capacity-building.
    - **Gender factors** continue to hinder educational opportunities for girls and women in parts of the Arab World.

2. **Cross-cutting themes** that are echoed by most participants, and are applicable to the recommendations below. These themes have been mentioned by several participants in relation to most of the recommendations. Therefore, they should be considered at the design and implementations of stages of each of the recommendations below:

    - Gender equality;
    - Inclusion of marginalized groups (i.e. students with disabilities);
    - Emphasis on including SDGs, with a particular focus on climate change.

Action areas and improvement of the education experience

3. **Focus on ICT and virtual models as necessary elements of education that are here to stay.** The experiences of the last two years showed that using ICT and virtual models can be an efficient option to reach wider audiences especially in times of emergencies due to natural or human-made factors. This would require teacher training and preparation especially in ICT and virtual models, as most still lack such knowledge and skills. In this context, the Recommendation should crystallize these elements in its articles in order to ensure a safe and secure participation of children of the world in virtual environments, to provide them with materials and topics appropriate for their age groups, and protect them from forms of symbolic and cyber violence that are rife with virtual networks.

4. **Training teachers and other educational cadres to ensure that they perform their professional roles effectively and efficiently, including their commitment to the ethics of human rights in general and children's rights in particular.** All teacher training programmes should include components of international education and opportunities to compare the results of their experiences with those in other global settings. Education about human rights may benefit from the following approaches:

    - Introduce the notion of 'Rights and Duties' in the curricula;
    - Introduce and generate a 'Digital Human Rights Library' that can be connected with other countries;
    - For younger students, encourage ethical storytelling about human rights from their environment and context;

- Design projects about human rights work in the region done by the students and supervised by teachers;
- Include arts and drama to teach about human rights.

5. **Review of curricula to make it more relevant and continuously updatable especially with the rapid technological changes.** Curricula should give importance to skill-based education within an educational environment that is equipped with the best teaching aids, and educators with high-quality professional competencies who are able to help their students learn.

6. **Learner-focused approaches that move away from traditional methods based on lecturing and rote learning.** Educational practices should actively put the student at the center of the educational process and take into account the differences of knowledge and learning capabilities among students and to focus on socially- constructive pedagogies.

7. **More engagement of youth through interactive and transformative pedagogy that involves collaborative learning and empowering youth to think creatively and critically.** The focus should be on active learning, taking into consideration the different learning styles and the multiple intellectual competencies.

Values, themes and principles

8. **Family engagement in all aspects of the educational experience, and to support students emotionally and socially.** The engagement of family with the school, especially during the pandemic, is necessary to the student as well as their parents as such connection would positively affect the students' behavior in and out of the school.

9. **Explore cultural values that advance education and learning.** Values emphasizing the importance of education are well alive in the Arab region (one participant shared how her illiterate mother insisted that she receives the highest levels of education). Other values in the Arab region promote peaceful coexistence, tolerance, and reconciliation. Such values should be emphasized in all aspects of the educational experience in order to spread tolerance and non-violence among the students through dialogue and mutual respect free from bullying, physical harassment and violent extremist tendencies. Cultural and religious stories emphasizing mutual respect and care for the community and neighbors (a famous proverb across the Arab World says: 'The Prophet commanded us to care for as far as our seventh neighbor', providing support to those in need (cultural and religious practices of charity such as *Sadaqa*), and pursuing peaceful means to resolve conflicts can be incorporated in the curricula and pedagogies.

10. **Focus on the psycho-social dimension of education and wellbeing of students.** In addition to educational services, it is necessary to provide social and psychological support services for those who need them, and to make these services available to all in an equitable manner, and ensure that they are of good quality and appropriate to different audiences and age groups. Such support would enhance the existence of a common vision, and strengthen relationships and healthy identities of societal groups; The administration of such support mechanisms must be equitable across all groups in order to promote vertical and horizontal social cohesion.

11. **Focus on "soft skills" such as conflict resolution with a focus on their applications to students' context and life.** Implement curricula such as peace education in order to eliminate violent conflict. This can be achieved by ensuring that education policies have a contribution to reducing conflict with the purpose of keeping children safe in and around school from violence. A school-based approach must engage stakeholders at all social levels in order to make immediate and lasting improvements to children's safety and protection; This requires that the school

environment, including educational facilities, is designed with the lens of safety and protection and is evaluated accordingly.

12. **Approaches to education in war zones and post conflict areas, including the infrastructure challenges in addition to the safety and mental health dimensions.** These conflicts led to significant damage to the infrastructure of technical and vocational education and training institutions, which reflected negatively on the quality of education and job opportunities for graduates of these institutes. Therefore, it is necessary to rehabilitate these institutions and increase the contribution of humanitarian organizations in rebuilding the infrastructure of these institutions. Furthermore, regional and international frameworks should provide an opportunity to enhance cooperation between the United Nations and its relevant bodies and Arab countries, many of which suffer from the repercussions of wars and armed conflicts that have caused the emergence of violent extremism among youth and weakened social cohesion among groups of society.

13. **Global Citizenship Education (GCED), for which there is support in educational circles in the Arab World.** In furtherance of the principles contained in the recommendation, it is necessary to update legislations at the local, regional and international levels, to strengthen international dialogue, and to link international education to the concept of global citizenship contained in the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals.

Selected experts participating in their personal capacity

A selected number of experts were invited to a closed-door conversation around the revision of the text of the 1974 recommendation on the second day of the Regional Consultation:

1. **Mr Abdelbasset ben Hassen**, Arab Institute for Human Rights, Tunisia*
2. **Ms Afifa Zayadi,** ALECSO
3. **Mr Amine Tawil**, Makassed Khaled Bin Al Walid College in Beirut, Lebanon*
4. **Mr Amr Abdalla,** University for Peace, Egypt
5. **Ms Asma Alsharab,** Ministry of Education, Jordan
6. **Ms Elena Ippoliti,** UN Human Rights Training and Documentation Centre for South-West Asia and the Arab Region in Doha
7. **Ms Elisa Karam,** Adyan Foundation, Lebanon
8. **Mr Ghazi Ghaith**, Department of Education, American University of Beirut, Lebanon
9. **Ms Ichrak Ben Ezzine,** OHCHR Doha
10. **Mr Jihad Nammour,** Department of Political Sciences, Saint-Joseph University, Lebanon
11. **Ms Lotta,** OHCHR Beirut
12. **Ms Lydia Ruprecht**, Section of Global Citizenship and Peace Education, UNESCO Headquarters
13. **Mr Mahmood Said Haggeer,** Ministry of Education, Qatar
14. **Mr Marco Pasqualini**, UNESCO Regional Bureau for Education in the Arab States, Beirut
15. **Ms Miriam Sfeir,** Arab Institute for Women, Lebanon
16. **Mr Mohamed Hatem Al-Mekhlafy**, Education expert, Yemen*
17. **Mr Mohammad Hassoun**, Education expert, Syria
18. **Ms Nibal Al-Thwabteh**, Media Development Centre, Birzeit University, Laureate of the 2021 UNESCO-Japan Prize on ESD, Palestine*
19. **Ms Qabas Hassan Awad,** University of Mosul, Iraq
20. **Mr Sameh Kamel**, Youth advocate, Egypt*
21. **Ms Sawsan Kanhoush,** EQUITAS MENA Region, Canada
22. **Ms Suzanne Abdul Reda**, Lebanese Association for Educational Studies, Lebanon*

(12 females; 10 males)
*Keynote speaker

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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.