

UNESCO Global Network of Learning Cities

(GNLC)

Membership Concept Note

February 2023

Background

The number of city dwellers around the world has been growing more rapidly than ever in recent years: today, more than half of the world's population lives in cities, and this number is expected to rise to 60 per cent by 2030. As cities have expanded, they have played an increasingly influential role in national and world affairs. However, this expansion also presents municipal governments with multiple challenges relating to social cohesion, economic development and sustainability. A growing number of municipalities see the implementation of a lifelong learning strategy for inclusive, sustainable urban development as key to tackling these challenges, which is why they are taking steps to transform themselves into learning cities. In order to support local governments in developing concrete strategies for building learning cities, the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL) established the UNESCO Global Network of Learning Cities (GNLC).

The UNESCO GNLC is an international, policy-oriented network providing inspiration, know-how and examples of best practice. The network's mission is to support and accelerate the practice of lifelong learning in the world's communities by promoting policy dialogue and peer learning among member cities; forging links; fostering partnerships; building capacities; and developing instruments to encourage and recognize progress in building learning cities.

The network is based on two documents: the *Beijing Declaration on Building Learning Cities* and the *Key Features of Learning Cities*. These documents were adopted at the first International Conference on Learning Cities in 2013. Important additional documents include *Learning Cities and the SDGs: A Guide to Action* and the *Guidelines for Building Learning Cities*.

The UNESCO GNLC opened for membership in 2015. Since then, the number of members in the network has risen to more than 290 cities from all five UNESCO regions. UNESCO GNLC members are engaged in building learning cities and believe that lifelong learning for all is crucial for their cities' future. In applying to become a member of the network, each city acknowledges its commitment to developing into a learning city, sharing experience and best practices, fostering partnerships and strengthening its policies and implementation of lifelong learning for all.

UNESCO GNLC members are cities, represented by mayors or other formally endorsed city representatives. For the purposes of this membership concept, a city is normally understood as an administrative unit governed by a city council or other form of elected body, and recognized as a city by the national government of the country in which it is located. A learning city can therefore be a learning municipality, a learning village, a learning town or a learning community.

Benefits of becoming a member of the UNESCO GNLC

UNESCO GNLC members benefit from:

1. Receiving guidance and support during their journey towards building a learning city
 - a. Accessing tools and strategies for developing learning cities (e.g. training modules and video tutorials on how to build a learning city)
 - b. Gaining insights into best practices based on the latest research and reports on best practice
 - c. Receiving news updates on learning city developments around the world from the UNESCO GNLC Coordination Team
2. Being part of a dynamic network and strengthening their own partnerships and networks
 - a. Receiving support when hosting international conferences and regional meetings
 - b. Connecting with other learning cities with common interests, tackling similar issues and envisioning similar development agendas
 - c. Communicating with a network of experts and professionals specializing in the field of lifelong learning for sustainable development
 - d. Receiving technical support from member cities
3. Receiving recognition for their efforts and showcasing the actions of their city
 - a. Sharing milestones and progress through the communication channels of the UNESCO GNLC
 - b. Contributing learning city case studies to showcase their city and its actions, innovative measures, best practices and lessons learned
 - c. Being eligible for the UNESCO Learning City Award

Based on UNESCO's inclusive approach and open-source policy, all publications and documents are published on the UNESCO GNLC website and are freely accessible to all.

Membership regulations

Who can apply?

Key players and/or authorities from a city located in a UNESCO Member State that wishes to adopt the learning city concept may apply for membership. An application may only be submitted once it has been formally endorsed by the city's mayor.

Who is the member?

The member is the city itself, represented by the mayor and/or the person who has been formally endorsed as a representative of the city. All endorsed representatives act as delegates of the city.

What are the requirements for becoming a member?

In order to join the network, the municipality should pursue the vision of providing lifelong learning and becoming a learning city, in the spirit of the values and objectives guiding UNESCO in pursuit of dialogue and international cooperation.

The strategies set out in the key documents, the *Beijing Declaration on Building Learning Cities* and the *Key Features of Learning Cities*, must be reflected in the membership application and adopted by the

mayor of the city, who needs to endorse the membership application. The city needs to complete the membership application form and submit it to the responsible National Commission for UNESCO for endorsement. As part of the strategies and actions taken in the last years to improve accountability mechanisms within the network, members are required to submit a progress report on their learning city project every two years to the UNESCO GNLC Coordination Team.

Application procedure

1. Applicants must complete an application form, which is available on the UNESCO GNLC website (<https://www.uil.unesco.org/en/learning-cities/members/become-member>). The form must be filled in electronically and must include the mayor's signature.
2. Applicants must send the application form by e-mail to the responsible National Commission for UNESCO for endorsement, copying the UNESCO GNLC Coordination Team at UIL (learningcities@unesco.org). You will find the contact details of your National Commission in the [Database of National Commissions for UNESCO](#).
3. The relevant National Commission for UNESCO will endorse the selected application(s) by signing it/them before submitting it/them, copying the city, to the UNESCO GNLC Coordination Team at UIL (learningcities@unesco.org). Please note that UIL has the right to request additional documents and records from the city, if necessary, before accepting the application(s).
4. The application(s) will be sent to an international jury responsible for submitting the preliminary results to UNESCO. Following the final selection procedure, UIL will inform National Commissions and cities of the results.

How many cities per country can be designated as members?

The National Commission for UNESCO can endorse applications to join UNESCO GNLC from **up to three cities** per application period.

When can an application be submitted?

One open call for applications is issued every **two years** for an application period of two months during which time cities may submit their membership applications to their National Commission for UNESCO. After this application period has ended, the National Commission for UNESCO **has up to one month** to send endorsed applications to the UNESCO GNLC Coordination Team.

Membership fee

UNESCO GNLC does not ask for a membership fee. To support the development of the network and its services, however, the UNESCO GNLC Coordination Team welcomes voluntary financial and non-financial contributions from its members.

Communication with the UNESCO GNLC Coordination Team

Member cities are expected to communicate to the UNESCO GNLC Coordination Team by e-mail any new information on their city (e.g. new mayor, new focal point, new learning city plan, events organized within the scope of the network, etc.) in order to keep the Coordination Team informed and their online profiles up-to-date.

Learning City progress report procedures

Member cities are requested to submit a progress report detailing how they are implementing their learning city project. The progress reports should be submitted every two years. Instructions will be sent by the UNESCO GNLC Coordination Team to concerned cities prior to each submission period. If a member city (1) submits an incomplete progress report, (2) does not show progress in building a learning city, and/or (3) does not submit its biennial progress report, the city's membership will not be renewed.

Cities whose membership is not renewed can apply to re-join the network as per the application periods outlined above. Cities whose membership is not renewed will be notified by the UNESCO GNLC.

Evaluation of membership applications: Jury

Composition

The jury shall be composed of independent, high-level international experts with wide knowledge and experience of lifelong learning and learning cities-related issues. Its membership shall also take into consideration geographical distribution and gender. Members of the jury shall be appointed by the director of the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL) for a period of six years.

Remuneration

Members of the jury shall receive no remuneration for their work. The selection process shall take place online and, in specific cases where in-presence participation will be required, allowances for travel and accommodation shall be provided.

Working language

The working language for deliberations by the jury shall be English.

Proceedings

The jury shall conduct its business and deliberations in conformity with this membership concept note and shall be assisted in the performance of its task by a designated member of the UNESCO GNLC Secretariat. The jury shall elect a chairperson. Decisions shall be taken by consensus as far as possible, and otherwise by secret ballot until a simple majority is obtained.

Conflict of interest

Members of the UIL Governing Board cannot be appointed as jurors. Jurors involved in a real or potential conflict of interest shall recuse themselves from further deliberations or be asked by the UIL Director to do so.

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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 and responding 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.

