

CONFERENCE REPORT

FROM EMERGENCY TO RESILIENCE: BUILDING HEALTHY AND RESILIENT CITIES THROUGH LEARNING

Fifth International Conference on Learning Cities
Yeonsu, Republic of Korea, 27 to 30 October 2021





Institute for
Lifelong Learning

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CONTENTS

OVERVIEW OF THE CONFERENCE – 4

OPENING CEREMONY – 5

PLENARY SESSIONS – 8

Plenary Session I: Learning for health – A new paradigm for the post-COVID-19 era – 8

Plenary Session II: Resilient cities – Strengthening communities and local learning systems – 9

PARALLEL THEMATIC FORUMS – 11

Parallel Thematic Forum 1, Theme 1: Transforming cities into spaces for health and well-being – 11

Parallel Thematic Forum 1, Theme 2: Promoting intersectoral approaches to learning for health – 12

Parallel Thematic Forum 1, Theme 3: Strengthening learning for health in the context of learning cities – 13

Parallel Thematic Forum 2, Theme 1: Lifelong learning for climate action – 14

Parallel Thematic Forum 2, Theme 2: Fostering healthy lifestyles and work in urban settings – 15

Parallel Thematic Forum 2, Theme 3: The contribution of global citizenship education to health – 16

Parallel Thematic Forum 3, Theme 1: Promoting learning for health in the field of sexuality – 17

Parallel Thematic Forum 3, Theme 2: Approaches for inclusive education in learning for health – 18

Parallel Thematic Forum 3, Theme 3: Technology-enhanced learning for healthy populations – 19

MAYORS' FORUMS – 21

Reviewing progress and establishing strategic priorities for the UNESCO Global Network of Learning Cities – 21

NEW STRATEGY – 23

New strategy for the UNESCO Global Network of Learning Cities (2021–2023) – 23

OVERVIEW OF THE CONFERENCE

Responding to and recovering from the COVID-19 pandemic remains an enormous challenge for cities worldwide. Lifelong learning lays the foundation for healthy and resilient cities. Hence, these municipalities are working hard to promote learning for health, and to build long-term resilience among their local populations so that they can deal both with the pandemic and with future emergencies, including those caused by climate change.

The fifth International Conference on Learning Cities (ICLC 5) was hosted by UIL in collaboration with Yeonsu City, Republic of Korea, and took place from 27 to 30 October 2021. Entitled 'From emergency to resilience: Building healthy and resilient cities through learning', the conference attracted over 2,000 participants, who attended either online or in-person. This was an opportunity for cities to come together and share their responses to the COVID-19 pandemic. The sessions enhanced awareness of how the promotion of a culture of lifelong learning plays a key role in building resilience among individuals, communities and cities. They also helped to generate momentum in advocating for the creation of healthy and resilient learning cities. Discussions centred on information and communication technologies (ICTs), learning innovations, distance learning opportunities in the context of the current crises, and how the use of these tools will shape our response to future crises.

In addition to promoting resilience at the city level in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, the conference highlighted the role of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in policy implementation at the local level and in cross-sectoral collaborations with major stakeholders. Particular attention was paid to SDG 3 (health and well-being), SDG 4 (quality education), SDG 5 (gender equality) and SDG 11 (sustainable cities and communities). The conference reinforced existing partnerships, facilitated discussions on pressing challenges, and offered networking opportunities for members

of the UNESCO Global Network of Learning Cities (GNLC), among others.

The conference was held in a hybrid format comprising both face-to-face and online sessions. It included two key plenary sessions: (1) 'Learning for health: A new paradigm for the post-COVID-19 era', and (2) 'Resilient cities: Strengthening communities and local learning systems'. Parallel thematic forums covered nine sub-themes:

- 1.1. Transforming cities into spaces for health and well-being;
- 1.2. Promoting intersectoral approaches to learning for health;
- 1.3. Strengthening learning for health in the context of learning cities;
- 2.1. Lifelong learning for climate action;
- 2.2 Fostering healthy lifestyles and work in urban settings;
- 2.3. The contribution of global citizenship education to health;
- 3.1. Promoting learning for health in the field of sexuality;
- 3.2. Approaches for inclusive education in learning for health;
- 3.3. Technology-enhanced learning for healthy populations.

In addition, two mayors' forums provided municipal leaders with a platform through which they could report on their cities' progress over the past two years and identify new strategic directions for the UNESCO GNLC.

The fifth ICLC culminated in the adoption of the Yeonsu Declaration for Learning Cities. This conference outcome document signalled a commitment by UNESCO learning cities around the world to placing lifelong learning for health and the development of resilience at the centre of their agendas. The declaration will be revisited over the next two years to identify how cities are fulfilling this pledge.

OPENING CEREMONY

Ms Yoo Eun-hae, Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Education of the Republic of Korea, opened the conference by expressing gratitude to all parties and highlighted the necessity to work together to provide lifelong learning and create a favourable environment for education in the context of an ageing society and the COVID-19 pandemic. She also noted that the conference offers cities a great opportunity to share their experiences, explore ways to promote health education and contribute to emergency responses. With goodwill, she reminded participants, it is always possible to find wise solutions to overcome crises.

Mr Park Nam-choon, Mayor of Incheon Metropolitan City, highlighted the significance of hosting this conference in Yeonsu, an evolving international city that is ready to embrace international exchanges.

Mr Do Seong-hoon, Superintendent of the Office of Education of Incheon Metropolitan City, called for reflecting upon a vision for the future, preparing to live with COVID-19, and discussing these issues so as to promote a healthy society.

Mr Ban Ki-Moon, former Secretary-General of the United Nations, described the challenges human beings are faced with, including poverty, social exclusion, public health crises, etc., and pointed out that the problems lie more in a lack of domestic and international insight, planning and cooperation. He advocated international support and cooperation based on the principles of justice and equity, aimed at the sustainability of the health system and the achievement of the SDGs. It is of paramount importance to fulfil the SDGs in order to pass on a safer world to our next generation, he said. He further put forward three ways to achieve the SDGs:

- First, all humans need to respond swiftly to the climate crisis. There is no Plan B because we don't have a Planet B. All parties need to

play their roles and, above all, we must provide education on the environment, and equitable development.

- Second, we need to create a cultural climate which allows for lifelong learning for everyone in the world. Education could be a genuine way to change the lives of people in poverty, and 'digital literacy competencies' are also essential for today's learning.
- Third, we need to promote mutual understanding and enhance tolerance through global citizenship education. It is essential to provide integrated education based on the 17 SDGs.

Mr Nam-Seok Ko, Mayor of Yeonsu, gave a warm welcoming speech. He expressed his full faith in using lifelong learning as a tool for tackling difficult issues and stressed the necessity of policies and best practice designed to improve learning and health in cities around the world. In this regard, he drew attention to three key topics related to lifelong learning. First, the need to promote health education to respond to future global crises, taking into consideration that health literacy can help citizens cope with issues such as infectious diseases and climate change. Second, learning programmes must be in direct correlation with local communities, operating as an organic network to foster local resilience and mitigate economic and psychological impacts upon individuals. Third, he recalled the importance of local governments in implementing policies focused on lifelong learning, reinforcing the need to promote urban planning and the building of spaces for learning and well-being.

Mr David Nabarro, Special Envoy on COVID-19 for the World Health Organization, explained that humanity must learn to live with the virus as it continues to circulate, yet ensure that it does not cause suffering. Responding to COVID-19 means responding to inequity, he stated. Collaborations, particularly at community level, are of great importance, and cities should play their vital roles in

people's public health. He also briefly introduced the work of the World Health Organization in building interface between policy and practice in cooperation with city leaders and health teams. He reiterated his confidence in overcoming COVID-19 through collective effort and with the good spirit of working for the people.

Mr Park and Mr Young, representatives of the Korean National Assembly, expressed their gratitude to all participants. The Republic of Korea found an opportunity for learning in its fight against COVID-19, seeking solutions in order to provide education in any place, at any time. The country will establish an educational system that can stand up to future crises and which acknowledges the value of education for making the country more competitive. The conference was an effective opportunity to highlight the importance of lifelong learning, they said.

Ms Stefania Giannini, Assistant Director-General for Education at UNESCO, expressed her gratitude to Yeonsu for hosting the conference. The lessons we can draw from this crisis is that education and health must be prioritized: every city must implement ways to ensure their universal provision.

UNESCO takes a holistic approach and vision of learning throughout life as a human right and foundation for all development. When it comes to the post-COVID context, education must be part of a sustainable and inclusive recovery. Moreover, she stressed that UNESCO supports countries around the world to mitigate the impact of school closures, addressing the learning losses and adapting education systems to this new environment, particularly for vulnerable and disadvantaged communities.

Throughout the pandemic, the UNESCO GNLC was a unique platform for members to showcase their responses, to share their own experiences and best practices, and to learn from each other. The 229 member cities of this network share the common goal of mobilizing resources across all sectors to maximize opportunities for lifelong learning and achieve the SDGs. During this year's

conference, the aim is to strengthen the linkages between the SDGs, especially those on education, health, gender equality, and cities. The focus is on how to build healthy and resilient cities through learning.

Mr David Atchoarena, UIL Director, welcomed participants to the fifth International Conference on Learning Cities, in a hybrid modality for the first time. The COVID-19 pandemic has dramatically shaped life in learning cities over the past 20 months. Reductions in the activities of schools, universities and other educational institutions around the world have disrupted learning for countless children, youth and adults.

At the city level, responses to the crisis have been driven by a sense of togetherness. The UNESCO Global Network of Learning Cities has found new ways to thrive. Through webinars on learning cities' responses to COVID-19, virtual meetings, online capacity-building activities, and research projects across thematic clusters of cities, the UNESCO GNLC has continued to promote lifelong learning for all, knowing that cities have a unique role to play in achieving the 17 goals of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Mr Atchoarena concluded by saying that the theme of this conference, 'From emergency to resilience: Building healthy and resilient cities through learning', provides an opportunity to reflect on the experiences of the COVID-19 pandemic and establish new priorities for the promotion of lifelong learning in cities.

During the ICLC handover ceremony, Mr Daniel Quintero, Mayor of Medellín, transferred the honourable role of ICLC host from Medellín to the city of Yeonsu. Mr Nam-Seok Ko gladly accepted this role and expressed his hope that UNESCO GNLC members will continue to work together to address the challenges brought by the pandemic. Finally, Mr Atchoarena initiated proceedings to officially open the conference. The conference adopted the agenda and confirmed the conference, including the Yeonsu Declaration Drafting Committee tasked for finalizing the conference outcome document.

A spotlight on the learning city of Yeonsu

The fifth ICLC would not have been possible without the efforts and continuous collaboration of the city of Yeonsu.

Although organizing such a major event in the current context was a considerable challenge, the city's strong commitment and the determination of its staff ensured that the conference was a great success. Indeed, the aims of the event were met and learning cities had plenty of rewarding opportunities to share their responses to the COVID-19 pandemic, especially their initiatives in promoting learning for health and strengthening resilience.

Through the host city's efforts, the conference attracted more than 2,000 participants online and offline, offering a rich and diverse agenda. In this regard, the programme addressed not only the key themes of learning for health and resilient cities, but also featured enthralling cultural performances showing the talents of the people of Yeonsu and the Republic of Korea. Participants were no doubt left with a sense of the many and varied benefits of lifelong learning.

Further enhancing collective experience at the fifth ICLC, participants who attended the conference in person were able to go on a number of site visits to see lifelong learning in reality in Yeonsu. These impressive experiences revealed a city that has achieved a great deal when it comes to lifelong learning. As a result of its endeavours in promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all at the local level, the city of Yeonsu has played an active role in the UNESCO GNLC. Having joined the network in 2018, Yeonsu was one of the coordinating cities of the thematic cluster on Global Citizenship from 2019 to 2021, before successfully hosting the fifth ICLC in October 2021.



Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Education of the Republic of Korea, Ms Yoo Eun-hae, opened the fifth International Conference on Learning Cities. © UIL



Former Secretary-General of the United Nations, Mr Ban Ki-Moon, pointed to the way forward for achieving the 17 Sustainable Development Goals despite the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic. © UIL

PLENARY SESSIONS

Plenary Session I: Learning for health – A new paradigm for the post-COVID-19 era

In the first plenary session, speakers discussed the need to promote health literacy and citizenship for health as core values of learning for health. While health literacy represents a personal and societal resource that enables people to protect and promote their individual health and that of their families, citizenship for health relates to the knowledge, skills and capabilities that people require in order to participate actively in health-related decisions and to contribute towards building healthy environments, both locally and globally. Moreover, learning for health includes mental health and well-being, and specifically takes into account the needs of vulnerable groups.

The session further determined that learning is a key tool for improving the well-being and health of all. In this regard, Councillor Colm Kelleher, Lord Mayor of Cork, and Ms Ann Doherty, Chief Executive of Cork City Council (Ireland), shared experiences and community responses to the COVID-19 crisis, including local actions focused on youth and vulnerable groups. In a digital era marked by constant and rapid change, mental health and well-being must remain central values to societies. During the pandemic, citizen activism played a key role in coping with the situation, which also required cross-sectoral cooperation. This approach is crucial for ensuring effective responses to future crises and achieving the 17 SDGs.

This session moreover highlighted the importance of promoting health literacy and adopting an interdisciplinary approach to dealing with future challenges. Mr Alejandro Gómez López, District Secretary of Health, Bogotá (Colombia), recalled that health is a precondition for other fundamental rights, and praised active citizen participation

during the COVID-19 crisis, complemented by governmental efforts to fight the dissemination of fake news. Access to reliable scientific data could be seen as one of the gains of the pandemic.

In order to promote better education among citizens, cities must encourage civil society participation and global partnerships that provide children with a proper environment in which they can play and learn. In this context, Mr Sang-Wook Kwak, Mayor of Osan (Republic of Korea), presented the city's '5P' strategy (play, place, partnership, participation and prosperity), and stressed the relevance of local communities and citizen participation in the COVID-19 response, linking education to the achievement of the SDGs.

Another important point that emerged during this session was cities' strong commitment to building resilience among citizens through concrete measures designed to make lifelong learning a reality. Here, Ms Kadia Gadiaga, Director of Education, Social and Health Affairs of Guédiawaye (Senegal), outlined local initiatives for women and youth, including the city's House of Women and Safeguarding Centre, as well as its health programme, E-Santé, which enabled citizens to access healthcare close to home.

Finally, the session reiterated the need to provide the populations of cities with education related to health literacy and citizenship for health in the context of increased urbanization. As noted by Mr Didier Jourdan, Chairholder of the UNESCO Chair Global Health and Education, cities are at the epicentre of health issues, which requires a focus not only on health care services, but also on learning through education to equip citizens with multi-faceted tools to face crises.

Session participants emphasized the need to promote mental health and well-being, and to protect vulnerable groups. Overall, speakers perceived lifelong learning and healthcare as two

interconnected concepts, concluding that education constituted an essential tool for safeguarding health and well-being.

Plenary Session II: Resilient cities – Strengthening communities and local learning systems

In the second plenary session, speakers exchanged views on what the pandemic had revealed about the resilience of cities' communities and learning systems. The goal was to elaborate on success stories from cities that had become more resilient by prioritizing formal and non-formal education, focusing on initiatives that fostered community resilience and improved local learning systems.

Session participants concluded that education provides citizens with the means to recover quickly from difficulties; hence, communities and local learning systems must be strengthened in order to build resilient cities. Ms Ofelia Ángulo Guerrero, Undersecretary of the Secretariat of Education, Science, Technology and Innovation of Mexico City (Mexico), presented the city's ECOS programme, an initiative that has established thematic taskforces to build urban resilience and ensure the continuation of learning. The city's Taskforce of Resilient Universities aims to deal with the impact of seismic changes resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic, and to develop practical guidelines for carrying out academic activities. Its Taskforce for Seismic Events Preparation works alongside organizations to prepare protocols to be followed in case of earthquakes. The Taskforce for Health supports prevention programmes designed to encourage healthy lifestyles with regard to eating habits, sports and psychological well-being. Mexico City's Taskforce for Climate Change and Environmental Education, meanwhile, promotes the use of solar energy and the creation of university programmes that offer free courses on sustainability.

To reduce learning losses, cities should encourage schools to support local programmes organized by teachers, students and localities. Mr Jaejoon Lee, Mayor of Goyang (Republic of Korea), emphasized the fact that the COVID-19 pandemic had

worsened the gap in academic achievement and created obstacles to the development of relationships, resulting in psychological, emotional and social issues. In response, the city had implemented initiatives such as 'Village is a Happy Place', an experience-based learning programme that identifies and connects educational resources in villages to schools. Moreover, the city had adopted measures to avoid disruption to studies due to COVID-19 outbreaks, including the 'Drive-through Test Centre', a drive-in briefing event on university entrance tests, and the distribution of self-testing and isolation kits to students.

The session noted that income, skills and health inequalities had been aggravated due to the pandemic, which requires cities to mobilize resources using a multisectoral, collaborative approach. Mr Greg Brackenridge, Mayor of Wolverhampton (United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland), highlighted the city's efforts to set up food distribution points, create an emergency helpline to support people with mental health issues related to lockdowns, digitalize its library services, and distribute laptops to children so that they could access digital learning resources and continue their education.

As demonstrated by Mr Qun Chen, Deputy Mayor of Shanghai (People's Republic of China), intersectoral challenges must be faced by promoting an ecosystem that encourages lifelong learning at all levels. Shanghai has established a community education network that involves schools at all levels and focuses on the city's diverse learning needs. It has furthermore developed an online learning platform to share resources and ensure access to learning. Moreover, the city has fostered a positive learning environment through initiatives such as Learning Week; the Learning Tree Festival; an education and arts festival for older people; and independent, citizen-led online and offline learning groups.

Finally, the session highlighted the fact that individual resilience lays the foundation for systemic and urban resilience. Mr Michael Osborne, Chair of Adult and Lifelong Education at the University of

Glasgow (UK), argued that digital learning is a key tool in addressing learning losses brought on by COVID-19, which requires bottom-up initiatives that cover lifelong learning, formal education and non-formal education. This calls for a holistic approach that focuses on education, health, social care and the environment. Mr Osborne illustrated his arguments with success stories from Africa, Bangladesh, Manila and Australia.

Participants debated the relevance of strengthening communities and local learning systems in order to build resilient cities. They agreed that local-level efforts involving citizens and communities plays a key role in providing education and developing resilience in cities.



Mayors of member cities of the UNESCO GNLC gathered in the city of Yeonsu to review the main developments of the network over the past two years and plan for the forthcoming period. © UIL

PARALLEL THEMATIC FORUMS

Parallel Thematic Forum 1, Theme 1: Transforming cities into spaces for health and well-being

During this parallel thematic forum, speakers drew attention to the challenges that COVID-19 had posed with regard to public health in densely populated urban areas, identifying the factors that determine population health and the ways in which cities can positively influence them. They examined the role of local governments in creating environments and opportunities for the improvement of local people's health and well-being, including through shared spaces in cities.

Participants determined that the transformation of cities into spaces for health and well-being is linked to the need to empower women and increase their participation in economic, social and political issues. Ms Manal Awad, Mayor of Damietta (Egypt), presented a safe city project in Ezbet El-Borg-Damietta designed to reduce sexual harassment and other forms of violence against women. The project aims to empower women and girls by providing them with economic opportunities; furthermore, it seeks to transform local businesses by making them more environmentally friendly and healthier places to work.

The session noted that people's health and well-being could be further improved by fostering the development of sustainable learning cities based on genuine partnerships between academics, policy-makers and practitioners, and drawing on policy-relevant research. According to Ms Lina Liakou, the Resilient Cities Network's Global

Director of City Engagement and Knowledge, there was a pressing need to build a safer, more equitable and sustainable future for all. To achieve this, she noted, cities must bring diverse stakeholders together to address shared challenges and design innovative, resilient projects. Ms Billie Giles Corti, Director of Australia's Healthy Liveable Cities Lab, concurred, arguing that all sectors must work together to develop comprehensive solutions. She cited the city of Melbourne's liveability report cards, which can help people to use data-driven metrics to better understand their health context and request policy-makers to implement necessary changes.

Lastly, this session confirmed that well-being and learning are intertwined concepts that should be dealt with through mutually enhancing strategies. As articulated by Mr Philip Braat, Lord Provost of Glasgow (United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland), well-being and learning go hand-in-hand: the city asked children and parents to define their well-being and learning needs, which formed the basis for a project focusing on core competencies, such as citizenship,¹ purposeful connections, critical thinking and communication.

The speakers in this forum focused on partnerships between cities and their citizens. They emphasized the importance of listening to the voices of young people, reiterating that it was city leaders' duty to create a powerful legacy for future generations. Finally, all presentations shared a twin focus on the changes that could be made in cities today, and the long-term goal of creating a better future.

¹ Citizenship competency is linked to the concept of global and active citizenship that was key to the COP26 UN Climate Change Conference hosted by Glasgow in 2021.

Parallel Thematic Forum 1, Theme 2: Promoting intersectoral approaches to learning for health

The learning city concept covers a range of policy areas that are normally dealt with individually. However, their fundamental interconnectedness requires the involvement of a variety of stakeholders perhaps not normally associated with health or learning, or who do not normally work together. This forum provided a space for discussions on the role of stakeholders in promoting learning for health and for cities, and on the challenges they faced in pursuing their strategies.

It was determined that, in order to provide adequate learning for health, governments and stakeholders must formulate and implement policies adapted to the local context and vulnerable groups. Ms Angélica Patricia Alvarado Juárez, Mayor of Huejotzingo (Mexico), explained how policy-makers, experts and religious leaders can work together to create a constructive dialogue aimed at reducing the spread of COVID-19. For example, churches in her city held events online and the city supported schools in implementing online courses. The next step will be to promote local consumption, offer psychological support and foster healthy living habits. Ms Aminata Goloko, Director of Transversal Projects, Mantes-la-Jolie (France), provided another good example. Local government and stakeholders had been working together to improve prevention measures such as HIV tests, dental care and breast cancer tests in Mantes-la-Jolie. The city had established three different working groups to build local health centres that care for vulnerable populations and deal with citizens' mental health issues. This initiative enabled the city to respond quickly to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The session furthermore noted that learning for health requires multiple-stakeholder

collaboration, cross-sectoral exchanges and synergies, and learning and capacity-building provision. Ms Natallia Alekseeva, Team Leader for National Climate Change Action at the UN Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO), noted the impact of growing urban populations on food security and climate change, identifying a need for a systematic and holistic approach along the lines of the 'One Health' project.²

Other key elements to promote learning for health alongside stakeholder collaboration are community involvement and local agendas to support education and lifelong learning. Ms Roberta Piazza, Professor, University of Catania, representative for the city of Lucca (Italy), pointed to the key role a strategic alliance for lifelong learning can play. In the case of Lucca, such an alliance has complemented existing regional and local planning systems, particularly during the COVID-19 crisis. Furthermore, the city presented its initiatives for the promotion of health and well-being among children and families affected by the pandemic, emphasizing once again the importance of making lifelong learning an integral part of urban planning. Mr Hamidreza Gholamzadeh, Deputy Mayor for International Affairs of Tehran (Islamic Republic of Iran), noted that cooperation is required to foster inclusive education that teaches children life skills and creates a healthier environment.

This forum facilitated a better understanding of the role played by stakeholders in promoting learning for health. Participants stressed the need for cooperation between all sectors and stakeholders in the development of successful strategies related to lifelong learning and health education. In turn, intersectoral approaches to learning for health enabled the promotion of core values such as inclusion, equity and citizen participation.

² For more information on the One Health project, visit <https://www.cdc.gov/onehealth/index.html>.

Parallel Thematic Forum 1, Theme 3: Strengthening learning for health in the context of learning cities

This forum looked to provide an operational understanding of health literacy, i.e. the individual dimension of learning for health. It discussed the types of data needed and available, and how such data could be used to guide educational interventions. It concluded that, in addition to developing an evidence base, health literacy provision must build citizens' capacities with regard to accessing and assessing health information, understanding and carrying out instructions for self-care, and planning and making the lifestyle adjustments needed to improve their health.

One of the goals of learning cities, participants determined, was to become more healthy, liveable and sustainable by adopting a holistic approach based on citizens' health needs and cross-sectoral collaboration. Ms Kate Nicholl, Lord Mayor of Belfast (United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland), demonstrated how her city used key data from its community plan to analyse the impact of the pandemic on people's lives, especially with regard to learning. Moreover, Belfast worked with partners to tackle the main issues regarding health and education, taking into account the challenges posed by limited health literacy and digital poverty among certain populations.

During this session, speakers praised education as a core societal value, stressing the need to prevent school drop-outs and take into account students' mental health. It noted that the concept of education extended beyond schools to include family learning activities in the home. Mr José Alberto Moreno Villamil, Secretary of Education, Tunja (Colombia), explained how parents played a key role in assisting their children with virtual classes during the COVID-19 pandemic. Given the gravity of the crisis, only a collective effort based on prevention and protective measures could enable teachers and students to return to their schools. Even during this difficult period, the network of cities in Latin America continued to work to facilitate urban partnerships.

As in previous sessions, participants reiterated their firm belief that education constituted the sole means of weathering the COVID-19 crisis, and that the pandemic had generated valuable learning outcomes with respect to preventive measures and resilience. Mr Gabriel-Antonio Ríos, Coordinator of the UNESCO Learning City Project, Villa María (Argentina), argued that the city's educational programmes focused on resilience and health had not only impacted citizens' lifestyles but had also raised environmental awareness. Furthermore, the city had created interdisciplinary mobile teams to strengthen educational continuity in schools, reinforce its learning network, and expand its programmes to include more schools. It had also met with considerable success with regard to its use of technology, particularly WhatsApp, to engage young students and adults in educational activities. Moreover, this session concluded that stakeholders should work together to target vulnerable groups, as demonstrated by Mr Philippe Bohelay, representative of the city of Clermont-Ferrand (France), who shared details of the health education and learning programmes for young girls launched by the city.

Finally, presentations recalled the dangers of unhealthy lifestyles and the consequences of a society that is ageing rapidly. Mr Si-Hyung Lee, Director of the Comprehensive Research Institute for Natural Medicine (Republic of Korea), contended that education represented a key preventive measure in this regard, and made suggestions such as fostering a mix of generations in workplaces and educational institutions, and further promoting the concept of lifelong learning/working.

Speakers provided relevant data to expand the definition of health literacy as a central concept in contemporary societies. Participants concluded that cities needed to promote educational programmes that would help citizens to understand information related to health, and adopt healthier lifestyles.

Parallel Thematic Forum 2, Theme 1: Lifelong learning for climate action

This forum addressed the theme of lifelong learning for climate action. Speakers discussed the actions being taken by cities facing major climate crises to create a population of active learners. Discussions focused on the role of learning in response to the far-reaching challenges presented by climate change. Speakers highlighted the crucial role of lifelong learning in promoting climate action, galvanizing political will, and creating a sustainable, green and inclusive economy.

The forum found that, as regards lifelong learning and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, one of the main goals is the establishment of collaborations between local populations and local authorities in order to promote actions that respond to climate change. Mr Elmhajib Abdallah, Vice-President of Chefchaouen (Morocco), shared that the city has created three key sustainable initiatives that involve the community directly in the government's decision-making processes. The first initiative is the Participatory Council for Energy, Climate and the Environment, which is devoted to energy and sustainable development initiatives. The second initiative is the Municipal Board of Youth, another participatory council that includes 29 young people aged 18–35, which aims to help young people learn how a municipality is run, and, more specifically, how development programmes are initiated and sustained. The city's third initiative is a participatory budget, developed jointly by municipal authorities and local citizens, to create democratically approved budget allocations for the city.

A further key aspect of lifelong learning and climate action identified during the forum was recognition of the key role played by action-oriented approaches that promote community-led initiatives for sustainable action through multi-stakeholder partnerships. Ms Miki

Konishi, Programme Coordinator of Innovation and Education at the United Nations University in Tokyo, Japan, presented the programme's Regional Centres of Expertise (RCE) as a good example of this action-oriented approach. RCEs are similar to learning cities in that both are territorial approaches to achieving the SDGs, with a particular focus on SDG 4 and the provision of lifelong learning opportunities for sustainable development. In Bogotá (Colombia), the RCE has encouraged young leaders to advocate for sustainable lifestyles through informal learning opportunities. In Denmark, the RCE has supported apprenticeship programmes teaching participants how to transform regular construction methods into sustainable construction methods.

Climate action and education are systemically related and inseparable, as education helps people understand and address the impacts of the climate crisis, equipping them with the knowledge, skills, values and attitudes they need in order to act as agents of change.³ Ms Shanti Jagannathan, Principal Education Specialist at the Asian Development Bank, argued that much had been achieved with respect to improving access to education worldwide, but that there was still work to be done to enhance the quality of education provided and the relevance of the materials covered. It was important, she noted, to bear in mind that each stage of education approaches climate change differently: basic education, higher education and technical and vocational education and training (TVET) all promote, enable, and verify climate change action in various ways.

Finally, the session reinforced the notion that climate change is of paramount importance, which requires strong commitment from all stakeholders to promoting lifelong learning as a means of building capacities for the future. Mr Ville Taajamaa, Sustainable Development Goals Project Manager

³ See <https://en.unesco.org/themes/education-sustainable-development/cce>.

for the city of Espoo (Finland), and Mr Jürgen Forkel-Schubert, Former Head of the ESD Department in the Ministry for Environment, Climate, Energy and Agriculture of Hamburg (Germany), presented their cities' initiatives to foster education as a tool to facilitate sustainable development. These initiatives mainly addressed the issue of climate change and included Espoo's stance on education to fight global warming and Hamburg's ESD master plan.

The speakers in this forum all emphasized the crucial role of education and collaboration in achieving real and lasting change in the face of the global impacts of climate change. Education was the thread that linked all of the initiatives presented during this session. In each case, it was through education and lifelong learning that communities had been able to develop the capacities needed to instigate positive and sustainable change.

Parallel Thematic Forum 2, Theme 2: Fostering healthy lifestyles and work in urban settings

Speakers addressing this forum explored cities' role in making their citizens' everyday lives healthier. They examined the role of education in promoting exercise, healthy diets, environmental protection and the use of green spaces, and the creation of healthy work environments. In particular, speakers reflected on the opportunities that urban settings presented for learning about healthy lifestyles.

Participants found that learning cities need to be committed to improving the health, safety and happiness of their citizens, and promoting healthy work environments and urban settings. Mr Kan Huang, Deputy Director of the Beijing Municipal Education Commission (People's Republic of China), showed how the city has committed to improving pollution prevention and control, and has notably reduced particulate matter (PM2.5) and haze. As a result, the life expectancy of its citizens has increased and over half of its population exercises regularly. During the COVID-19 pandemic, Beijing focused on prevention within communities, and contributed towards fighting the spread of the virus. By communicating with the public and

disseminating knowledge widely, the city has also promoted its garbage classification initiative as a tool to reduce waste and promote a better environment and better lives. Ecological education has been incorporated into primary and secondary school curricula: national policies on food, water and energy usage, and environmental protection are now reflected in compulsory subject areas such as geography, morality and biology.

Participants equally noted that urban settings play a major role in facilitating and enabling healthy lifestyle choices. Mr Boubacar Khalil Ndiaye, Special Advisor to the Mayor of Fatick (Senegal), expressed the city's efforts to encourage young people to become active in their neighbourhoods. These young people have received special training in city planning, and are now developing solutions to fight the silting of roads and facilitate population flows. The city has also promoted urban planning initiatives to build fitness facilities, thereby prompting its citizens to adopt healthier habits. It has furthermore made education integral to environmental protection and waste management through its 'eco gesture' programme, which encourages workers to maintain eco-friendly practices in public spaces and offices and has led to greater respect for ecological and sanitary standards in the city. The city stated that its goal was to create solidarity and positivity in all sectors of the community with regard to establishing a collective healthy lifestyle.

Moreover, the forum found that green infrastructure enhances social sustainability and social well-being. Ms María del Carmen Benítez, Mayor of Ybycuí (Paraguay), conveyed that it is vital to implement social structures that seek to ensure sustainable development throughout society. At the municipal level, Ybycuí has focused on creating green public spaces and protecting rural areas and national parks. The city has similarly prioritized arts and culture: it has supported the construction of a communal library, promoted the preservation of traditional legends and stories, established an intergenerational festival, and set up theatre schools. Moreover, it has implemented programmes to promote inclusive work

environments, accessibility, cleanliness in public spaces, hygiene, and wildfire prevention.

This session furthermore reinforced the idea that initiatives must include non-formal and informal learning, and draw on the experiences of other cities to bring citizens together to create healthy and sustainable communities. Technical partnerships are valuable tools for achieving this goal, as demonstrated by the International Labour Organization (ILO) International Training Centre in Turin (Italy). Mr Stefano Merante, Programme Officer in the Employment Policy and Analysis Programme, explained that ILO had brought stakeholders (workers, local authorities, the private sector, etc.) together to create working groups that address themes relating to innovation management and future-oriented thinking. ILO has also organized expert meetings with stakeholders, and included young people in its health improvement projects. ILO focuses on initiatives that advocate learning at the local level and take into account the different dimensions of the city when getting messages about health and well-being across to the population.

Finally, innovative interventions should be built on the principle that individuals have the ability to adopt healthy lifestyles and prevent non-communicable diseases when supported by conducive programmes. Mr Joet Garcia, Vice Chairman of the Committees on Appropriations, Health and Energy (Philippines), presented countrywide initiatives designed to address lifestyle diseases such as diabetes, certain cancers and asthma. These initiatives have included an anti-smoking campaign, the creation of non-smoking areas in public spaces, fitness classes and Zumba programmes in each city, annual citywide races, urban sports facilities, and university conferences for medical doctors.

During this forum, each of the speakers emphasized the role of education and citywide learning in creating healthy and happy citizens. They noted that municipal education initiatives had helped to create green public spaces, and cleaner and safer cities. They had also contributed towards

fostering youth advocacy for healthier community lifestyles and more environmentally conscious city development.

Parallel Thematic Forum 2, Theme 3: The contribution of global citizenship education to health

This forum built on the previous UNESCO GNLC discussions on community resilience to explore the significance of global citizenship in the context of learning for health. Speakers discussed how local people with a keen sense of civic duty could mobilize quickly to instigate bottom-up learning approaches that support individuals and communities alike. Furthermore, lessons learned from the COVID-19 pandemic experience were discussed in order to determine how they might guide further action in the years to come.

The forum concluded that a global citizen is one who is aware of global issues and is socially responsible and civically engaged. Mr Apostolos Kalogiannis, Mayor of Larissa (Greece), shared how his city has engaged with issues of transformation and change through an approach based on synergies and collaboration. Educational activities are an important aspect of the city's civic initiatives, especially for vulnerable groups. Certain adjustments were necessary following the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, leading to the creation of an online information platform. In addition, the city has designed a number of educational programmes to engage young people in activities related to democracy, climate change, water supply and traffic education.

Health-related global citizenship education must also take into account the fact that a learning city needs to offer its citizens inclusive spaces in which they can learn throughout life. Mr Francisco Gaitán Agüero, Mayor of Cantarranas (Honduras), explained that the city's municipal development plan has been designed to cover both formal and informal education, focusing on attainment, inclusion and well-being for sustainability and growth. The city has thus promoted educational equity and entrepreneurship, sustainability and resilience

initiatives, and leisure and cultural events related to lifelong learning. Furthermore, it has fostered capacity-building in the area of digital marketing, and supported small businesses through its ASEMARCA programme. As regards COVID-19 prevention, guidelines were implemented swiftly, and education was harnessed as a tool to fight the spread of fake news.

It was determined that a further important aspect of global citizenship is to recognize that citizens who engage in learning help establish resilient, healthy and happy societies; hence, people must be at the heart of community resilience-building efforts. Mr Javad Mahmoodi, Mayor of Bandar Khamir (Islamic Republic of Iran), shared how his city has involved citizens in strategic planning processes. It has encouraged public participation through initiatives designed to empower and raise awareness among its citizens. It sees its citizens as the key to social cohesion and resilience, and aims to transform them into 'global citizens who act locally'. The city has thus built their skills through educational workshops, while at the same time supporting social hubs such as CEPA (communication, education, participation, awareness) centres.

It was also noted that global citizenship education contributes to health by fostering community resilience. The conference host, Mr Nam-Seok Ko, Mayor of Yeonsu (Republic of Korea), articulated lifelong learning as the driving force behind cities' progress. He presented three municipal projects that support citizen health by promoting resilience: a disaster-resistant village project focusing on managing emergencies; a mask distribution service; and an initiative to support migrants.

Although top-down actions are vital at the municipal and systemic levels, bottom-up initiatives spearheaded by NGOs, neighbourhoods and citizens are equally important. Mr Hajjaj Moussaïd, Vice-President of Benguerir (Morocco), expressed that the city has adopted a university-led development programme designed to transform it into a green city. Programme initiatives include the country's first high-level coding course, a solar energy project, and the Act4Community

programme to support citizen-led projects. Furthermore, the city's public policies are based around the key civic values of solidarity and social integration.

During this forum, speakers discussed the ways in which global citizenship education had contributed to health. It was noted that global citizens who act at the local level support learning cities in promoting education and health for both individuals and communities.

Parallel Thematic Forum 3, Theme 1: Promoting learning for health in the field of sexuality

This forum discussed the importance of equipping young people with the knowledge and skills they need to make responsible life choices. Speakers explored the ways in which learning cities could provide comprehensive sexuality education (CSE) to empower their citizens, particularly by improving their analytical, communication and other life skills in the areas of health and well-being.

As regards health literacy, it was found that CSE-based curricula play a key role in teaching citizens about the cognitive, emotional, physical and social aspects of sexuality. Ms Denise Morrow, Student Experience Manager, Institute for Art, Design and Technology, Dublin, and Ms Emer Murphy, Dublin Learning City Coordinator, Marino Institute of Education (Ireland), explained how the city has implemented an 'active consent programme' to help students better understand sexual consent and contribute towards ending sexual harassment in all areas of society, including schools.

Unfortunately, too many young people receive confusing and conflicting information about relationships and sex as they make the transition from childhood to adulthood. This has led to an increasing demand from young people for reliable information that prepares them for a safe, productive and fulfilling life. According to Ms Asher Craig, Councillor, Deputy Mayor of Bristol for Children's Services, Education and Equalities (United Kingdom

of Great Britain and Northern Ireland), serious challenges pertaining to CSE have yet to be resolved, particularly with regard to the stigma surrounding HIV/AIDS, and the representation of same-sex relationships or gender reassignment in some religions. Moreover, periods and menstruations remain taboo topics in certain communities. Bristol consequently implemented CSE in secondary schools in September 2020 to address issues such as HIV/AIDS and LGBTQ+ representation. It also launched an initiative called 'A Period Friendly City' to provide an education programme and distribute free sanitary products.

When delivered well, participants learned, CSE can help young people to make informed decisions about relationships and sexuality and navigate a world in which gender-based violence, gender inequality, early and unintended pregnancies, and HIV and other sexually transmitted infections (STIs) still pose serious risks to their health and well-being. As noted by Mr Xavier Hospital, UNESCO Regional Health and Education Advisor for the West and Central Africa Region, CSE has had positive effects. These include an increase in the age of first intercourse, a reduction in the number of sexual partners and frequency of sexual intercourse, and an increase in low-risk sexual practices. Mr Hospital emphasized that CSE programmes did not lead to an increase in sexual activity, and further noted that abstinence-only programmes had proven ineffective. The most effective programmes had included those focused on gender and implemented with parental involvement. These initiatives had been complemented by the introduction of youth-friendly features, such as the 'Hello Ado' app.

In this session, speakers also demonstrated that a lack of high-quality age- and developmentally appropriate sexuality and relationship education can leave children and young people vulnerable to harmful sexual behaviours and sexual exploitation. Ms Marta Suplicy, Head of International Affairs of the city of São Paulo (Brazil), contended that CSE should be an integral part of all educational curricula. Teachers should be trained to act as moderators to help students reflect on issues

of sexuality. This would enable young people to determine their position on their own sexuality, and foster an atmosphere of freedom and respect.

Participants in this session emphasized the importance of CSE in equipping youth with the learning tools and resources they need to make decisions relating to the cognitive, emotional, physical and social aspects of sexuality.

Parallel Thematic Forum 3, Theme 2: Approaches for inclusive education in learning for health

In this forum, speakers reaffirmed the centrality of inclusive education to equitable lifelong learning, specifically in relation to learning for health. They explored the ways in which vulnerable populations can be involved in the design and implementation of health-oriented learning initiatives.

Inclusion in education means making existing provision more accessible to those who have been excluded, whereas a system of inclusive education is responsive and adaptive to the excluded. Mr Carlo Nofri, representative of Fermo (Italy), expressed that the pandemic has shown how a lack of adequate technology and broadband connections exacerbates social exclusion, particularly among disadvantaged and disabled people. Remote education represented a new opportunity, but could not always replicate the experience of attending school in person. 'Blended' formats – i.e. those that combined distance and in-person learning modalities – were thus deemed the best solution moving forward, coupled with greater investment to ensure that all learners are provided with the necessary equipment to access web-based teaching.

Inclusive education requires a holistic approach aimed at strengthening the links between schools and society. Ms Alexandra Agudelo Ruiz, Secretary of Education, Medellín (Colombia), underscored the importance of integrating issues related to health and sustainability into inclusive lifelong learning provision. Ms Jun Qin, Chief of Lifelong Education Division, Chengdu Municipal Education Bureau (People's Republic of China), demonstrated the city's

comprehensive commitment to lifelong learning by showcasing its efforts to improve local infrastructure. Moreover, the city has promoted science and technology courses through its institutes and local communities in order to increase citizens' awareness of the COVID-19 pandemic, health and related psychological issues, and has carried out actions focusing on vulnerable groups, such as anti-smoking campaigns among teenagers.

Furthermore, the forum learned, inclusive learning requires initiatives that are community-focused and aim to promote inclusive education on health and well-being. Councillor Daniel Butler, Mayor of Limerick City and County (Ireland), shared how his city has promoted a culture of learning through education and training initiatives supported by public and private partnerships. Alongside festivals dedicated to lifelong learning, the city has introduced measures to safeguard the health and well-being of its citizens, including water fountains to promote reusable water bottles, small grants from community mental health funds, COVID-19 community response initiatives, and anti-smoking and keep-fit campaigns.

This session also helped to provide alternative definitions of inclusive education that focus on citizens learning and working outside the formal education system. Mr Seok jin Mun, Mayor of Seodaemun-gu (Republic of Korea), announced his city's plan to create a green and healthy learning city by promoting sustainable transport, organizing educational campaigns to encourage disease prevention and health check-ups, and linking the welfare system for older people to lifelong learning by merging healthcare and learning centres.

Participants in this forum contended that lifelong learning initiatives related to health must be inclusive, especially when it comes to vulnerable groups. As a component of lifelong learning, inclusive education should encourage active participation among learners, their families and their communities.

Parallel Thematic Forum 3, Theme 3: Technology-enhanced learning for healthy populations

This forum capitalized on the wealth of evidence that emerged during the COVID-19 pandemic on the advantages of technology for learning. Speakers identified a direct correlation between the resilience of municipal learning systems and the digital spaces available to cities to ensure learning continuity during a crisis. Digital literacy has increasingly emerged as a core skill needed in order to acquire further capacities and knowledge, including health literacy (e.g. the ability to access and assess information and guidance on good health).

Technology-enhanced learning must be seen as a priority; hence, collaboration and an effective learning community strategy are needed in order to foster digital literacy and inclusion. Ms Jasmine Hill, Learning City Portfolio holder, Wyndham (Australia), presented the city's efforts during the COVID-19 pandemic to foster digital literacy skills to help people connect, learn and work. The pandemic has been challenging, but has also presented opportunities for improvement, for example by reinforcing the city council's commitment to implementing learning technology and moving events online. Moreover, the pandemic has accelerated the uptake of new technology. Teachers and students have adapted to a new way of learning, which has also required parents to become more involved in their children's education.

Furthermore, cities must adopt a multisectoral approach to technology and joint initiatives designed to improve citizens' learning capacities and digital literacy. Mr Meng Hui, Director of the Wuhan Education Bureau (People's Republic of China), highlighted Wuhan's introduction of two major technology-enhanced learning initiatives: the opening of 24-hour libraries, and its 'scholarly metro line', which offers book-reading and related activities to metro commuters. During the COVID-19 crisis, Wuhan has offered online lifelong learning services through digital platforms, which have also served as a source of information on

the pandemic in terms of prevention, control and psychological counselling.

Participants were also reminded that the use of digital devices is a key part of the learning process, and an essential means of guaranteeing equal access to education and democratizing digital learning. There is thus a need to facilitate access to digital learning tools and help people understand the learning potential of technology. Mr Pascal Chatagnon, Deputy Mayor, Évry-Courcouronnes (France), emphasized the importance of establishing a strong network of stakeholders in order to enable youth-focused learning to take place during the COVID-19 crisis.

A further aspect of the COVID-19 pandemic has been the worsening of the digital gap between social classes, which has mainly affected low-income students lacking internet connectivity. Unfortunately, this has led to a significant increase in school drop-out rates. This trend notwithstanding, the crisis has also represented a great opportunity to renovate the educational system, building resilient cities through resilient learning structures and digital spaces that can enable continuity of learning during a crisis. Mr Luis González Arenal, representative of the city of Puebla (Mexico), drew attention to the

city's collaborative promotion of digital learning in the field of non-formal and informal education, e.g. through the launch of user-friendly digital and mobile platforms that encouraged participation among students and their families.

When it comes to e-learning, cities play a key role in achieving global sustainability, and there is a pressing need to address the digital gap in the Global South. According to Ms Katja Schaefer, UN-HABITAT's Inter-Regional Advisor, cities need to identify the challenges and priorities faced by citizens in their everyday lives in order to elaborate appropriate plans and actions at the local level. She noted that 'smart city planning', for instance, is not merely a technology- or industry-driven approach, but entails solving specific sustainability problems and other key issues such as climate change, poverty and civic participation.

During this forum, speakers discussed how technology can help in the development of learning strategies in today's world, highlighting the pressing need to adopt concrete measures to reduce the digital gap between citizens. Indeed, digital literacy must be part of a broader move to democratize education, especially with regard to lifelong learning.



Mayor of Yeonsu, Mr Nam-Seok Ko, spoke on behalf of the ICLC host city about the importance of lifelong learning at the local level. © UIL



Director of the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning, Mr David Atchoarena, welcomed everyone to the hybrid event involving international participants and speakers present in Yeonsu and online. © UIL

MAYORS' FORUMS

Reviewing progress and establishing strategic priorities for the UNESCO Global Network of Learning Cities

Two mayors' forums were held during the fifth ICLC. The first reported back on initiatives implemented by cities from 2019 to 2021, presenting the progress made across the UNESCO GNLC thematic clusters. Coordinating cities provided input on a broad range of joint efforts pertaining to technology, and activities related to capacity-building, training and the sharing of good practices, such as webinars, international online conferences, workshops, publications and surveys.

The second mayors' forum provided an opportunity to discuss the best practices being employed by cities, the challenges that each city had faced, and the future of the UNESCO GNLC. Participants were able to highlight the role of lifelong learning and how it had addressed the challenges faced by cities and their citizens. The forum was instrumental in creating a vision of a sustainable future and a new strategy of action for the UNESCO GNLC. Participants contributed recommendations and asserted their commitment to making that vision and strategy a reality.

Cork, Ireland, affirmed that learning cities played an important role, both nationally and regionally, and advocated for greater communication between UNESCO GNLC thematic clusters in order to foster more dialogue and collaboration, particularly with regard to developing stronger links with African cities.

Mantes-la-Jolie, France, expressed a strong commitment to supporting African cities, especially in Senegal and Morocco, and agreed that improving communication among cities was a top priority. Mantes-la-Jolie also advocated for more autonomous cities, which would improve communication and collaboration among UNESCO GNLC

participants, and for the increased involvement of small cities in lifelong learning approaches.

Chaing Rai, Thailand, highlighted the positive impact of collaboration, and stressed that community engagement was essential for driving the process of sustainable development. Cities should work together with provincial governments, local communities and entrepreneurs. Chaing Rai prioritizes education for well-being: its older citizens are active participants in health education, and the city will soon launch a health literacy programme for its citizens. Chaing Rai's existing Smart Health Care programmes ensure that no one is excluded from healthcare and health education.

Villa María, Argentina, expressed appreciation for the UNESCO GNLC's support over the past two years. The city hoped to continue its involvement in the network, and advocated for clearer communication and a greater exchange of knowledge, particularly in view of the fact that three more cities in Argentina would soon be joining the UNESCO GNLC and had not yet received guidance regarding the thematic cluster to which they would be allocated.

Chachoengsao, Thailand, outlined the ways in which the city had optimized ICT-based learning in order to mitigate the disruption to students' learning progress during the COVID-19 pandemic. Chachoengsao is committed to continuing to promote working and learning together, both within the city itself and across UNESCO GNLC member cities.

Huejotzingo, Mexico, demonstrated how local officials have played a particularly important role in determining educational provision in the city, as Mexico's national budget allots specific resources to education, which each city must then mobilize and utilize as it sees fit. Citizens' health and well-being is a nationwide concern: during the COVID-19

pandemic, Mexico dealt with high suicide rates and rising rates of violence against women and children. Huejotzingo is striving to combat these trends by focusing on public policies for its youth and children, whom it sees as key to a sustainable future.

Clermont-Ferrand, France, advocated for a directory of key UNESCO GNLC contacts in order to intensify communication between cities and enable members to more easily reach out to other cities for collaboration and dialogue. Clermont-Ferrand also proposed scheduling more webinars and seminars as a means of increasing awareness of ICT-related best practices among cities, and

optimizing the learning opportunities provided through the network.

Participants in the mayors' forums focused strongly on the ways in which collaboration and communication among cities could improve individual cities' approaches to facing and managing challenges. In particular, discussions centred on how the UNESCO GNLC could support cities in dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic, e.g. with respect to ICT-based learning provision, targeted education campaigns, and learning initiatives focusing on health and well-being. Each participant contributed towards a shared vision of what could be done to ensure a sustainable future.



Ten member cities of the UNESCO GNLC received the 2021 Learning City Award for their outstanding achievements in the promotion of lifelong learning. © UIL

NEW STRATEGY

New strategy for the UNESCO Global Network of Learning Cities (2021–2023)

During the mayors' forums, a number of important issues were identified that would shape the UNESCO GNLC strategy for the period 2021–2023. Mayors agreed that changes were needed in order to address the challenges encountered by cities over the past two years. Consequently, over the next two years, collaborations will focus on refining, expanding and further embedding the network's existing activity modalities, with the aim of implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development at the local level through thematic clusters and a renewed funding model.

Recognizing that cities' efforts over the past two years have been largely diverted in order to address the pressing needs resulting from the COVID-19 emergency, the UNESCO GNLC strategy for the next two years will maintain the parameters established in 2019 while refocusing its scope. Moreover, further ways of improving and diversifying communication among UNESCO GNLC member cities will be explored. Mayors discussed the proposed changes presented by UIL and endorsed the new strategy. These proposed changes include:

- **Reduce the number of thematic clusters:** The number of clusters will be reduced to five, keeping the issues that emerged as priorities: education for global citizenship; education for sustainable development; health and well-being; educational planning, monitoring and evaluation; and inclusion.
- **Refine the thematic scope of clusters:** To provide greater conceptual clarity in the scope of thematic clusters, workshops on conceptual definitions will be organized at the beginning of the working phase of each group, with the support of external experts.
- **Improve technical elements of thematic clusters:** Coordinating cities will be elected for two years

and will be responsible for ensuring that the thematic cluster pursues planned activities, as well as reporting on the work carried out and collaborating with UIL to guarantee high levels of participation among cluster member cities.

- **Empower cities:** Advisory sessions will be organized by the UIL coordination team for all cluster coordinating cities so that thematic clusters can be led by the members.
- **Better complementarity between cities and themes:** Cluster member cities will be asked to ensure that the profile of their city cluster representative matches the cluster's thematic focus.
- **Definition of more specific products and work plan (with goals):** By understanding the difference in concepts and methods of work in cities, efforts will be made to better coordinate between clusters to align in terms of results and work schedule.
- **More engagement with technical partners and creation of expert groups:** The groups in which the exchanges were most fruitful were supported by highly experienced technical partners. In this new phase of the strategy, this technical support will be reinforced through expert groups associated with clusters.

A further important goal of the new UNESCO GNLC strategy for the period 2021–2023 is to enhance the collective learning experience based on the development of a database for peer learning, which should be created based on the outcomes of UNESCO GNLC activities. Furthermore, the network should intensify support to learning cities in Africa, which in turn will assist the development and implementation of local learning policies and strategies.

In 2019, the fourth International Conference on Learning Cities, hosted in Medellín, Colombia, launched a multi-donor funding (MDF) mechanism to finance the UNESCO GNLC. Mayors agreed to renew this mechanism for the period

2021–2023. It will be expanded by the UNESCO GNLC coordination team through the addition of flexible, customized funding options (financial or in-kind) and partnership opportunities that fit the individual interests and needs of potential donors and partners.

With the launch of the 2021–2023 strategy, the UNESCO GNLC is embarking on an exciting new chapter in its history.



The city of Yeonsu made the conference an enriching cultural experience by organizing a variety of performances showcasing Korean art and sport. © UIL



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Global Network of
Learning Cities