

Sixth International Conference on Learning Cities (ICLC 6)

‘Learning Cities at the Forefront of Climate Action’

3 to 5 December 2024, Jubail Industrial City, Saudi Arabia

Concept Note

Background

Climate change is now a code-red emergency for people and the planet. Communities around the world are already experiencing its devastating effects, including the erosion of animal and plant ecosystems, deadly heatwaves, irregular rainfall patterns, droughts and floods. These and many other challenges generated by the changing climate demand sustainable solutions.

Soaring temperatures also significantly impact urban life. Rising sea levels, extreme weather events and the spread of mosquito-borne diseases will increasingly affect the services, infrastructure and livelihoods of many urban communities.

At the same time, **cities are responsible for an estimated 75 per cent of global CO₂ emissions**,¹ with transport and buildings among the biggest contributors. The impact this has on the environment will continue to grow with the pace of urbanization – one of the demographic megatrends that will shape the world in the coming decades. By 2050, almost 70 per cent of the population is expected to live in urban areas.² Targeted policy interventions are therefore imperative to curb burgeoning emissions.

The climate crisis needs to be confronted from various angles, ranging from international policies to local actions. The international response is key to developing a comprehensive game plan to safeguard a just future for all of humanity through universal strategies and goals. In 2015, the Paris Agreement³ marked a pivotal milestone in the global fight against climate change, aiming to reduce worldwide greenhouse gas emissions and foster low-carbon solutions to mitigate the impact of human activity on the climate. The Paris Agreement is a legally binding international treaty to which 195 parties acceded, pledging to keep the global average temperature increase to well below 2°C above pre-industrial levels.

The United Nations (UN) is instrumental in advancing climate action and sustainable development around the world. UNESCO, as a key agency of the UN, specifically promotes climate change education. In 2022, the Organization launched the Greening Education Partnership (GEP), a collaborative platform comprising more than 80 Member States and 1,100 institutional partners worldwide to enhance climate awareness and education.

One of the four key action areas of the GEP focuses on ‘greening communities’, emphasizing the critical role that adult education and learning (ALE) plays in transitioning towards more sustainable, green and climate-resilient communities. The Marrakech Framework for Action (MFA), adopted by 142 UNESCO Member States in 2022, also promotes ALE is a key lever for equipping individuals with the knowledge and skills needed to address the climate crisis and empowering them to become role models for change.

¹ UN Environmental Programme (UNEP). n.d. *Cities and Climate Change*. Available at: <https://www.unep.org/explore-topics/resource-efficiency/what-we-do/cities/cities-and-climate-change>

² UN Habitat. 2022. *World Cities Report 2022. Envisaging the Future of Cities*. Available at: https://unhabitat.org/sites/default/files/2022/06/wcr_2022.pdf

³ United Nations (UN). 2015. *Paris Agreement*. Available at: https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/english_paris_agreement.pdf

Against this backdrop, **the upcoming Sixth International Conference on Learning Cities (ICLC 6) aims to raise awareness of the potential for learning cities to be at the forefront of climate action.** The learning city concept provides an effective framework for transforming urban environments through lifelong learning. Achieving the transition towards net-zero in cities requires social change, manifested in individuals' everyday life practices and broader social relations and structures. While the climate crisis calls for a deep transformation of carbon-based economies, change is also needed in people's awareness, behaviour and day-to-day decision-making in favour of sustainable development. People need practical knowledge, attitudes and skills to change established patterns of consumption, production and mobility and to develop green economies in urban and peri-urban spaces.

Importantly, climate change education must be inclusive and consider the learning needs of vulnerable groups. Learning cities promote learning in various settings and spaces, widening access for underrepresented groups and whole communities. When aligned with national and international priorities, learning cities can cultivate a culture that values and encourages sustainable practices beyond the local level. This local dimension supports an inclusive approach, amplifying diverse social groups' voices and providing lifelong learners with transversal skills that can be used in a wide variety of settings.

Overview of the conference

The **UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL), in collaboration with Jubail Industrial City, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia**, a member of the **UNESCO Global Network of Learning Cities (GNLC)**, will host the ICLC 6 from 3 to 5 December 2024.

Like its predecessors, the ICLC 6 will provide an opportunity for GNLC members and other stakeholders to gather, strengthen ties and share their experiences in developing learning cities. The theme of this year's conference, 'Learning Cities at the Forefront of Climate Action', aims to offer a platform for participants to discuss strategies for promoting climate consciousness and equipping local residents with the green skills needed to support a sustainable society. Participants will be encouraged to consider how cities can work cohesively to facilitate a common response to climate change within the broader framework of education for sustainable development (ESD).

The conference will also provide participating cities with an opportunity to exchange knowledge on climate action and showcase their projects aimed at improving community resilience in the face of current and future environmental crises. The ICLC 6 output document will consolidate directions for future policies and programmes to promote climate action in cities through lifelong learning. Additionally, deliberations among member cities will result in a new operational strategy for the GNLC.

Conference aim and objectives

The overall aim of the conference is to **facilitate knowledge exchange on lifelong learning for climate action at the local level**, including responses to the climate crisis and actions to improve resilience against future environmental crises.

The specific objectives of the ICLC 6 are to:

1. **facilitate the sharing of city-level responses** to the climate crisis and initiatives for lifelong learning in climate action;
2. **foster discussions on ESD and the role of lifelong learning** in building resilient communities;
3. **promote the creation of sustainable, resilient learning cities** and the use of learning technologies for climate action;
4. **highlight the specific challenges faced by girls and women** in the climate crisis and ensure inclusive approaches in policy implementation;
5. **strengthen connections between education, sustainable cities and climate-related Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)** and foster partnerships for a unified response to environmental emergencies.

Key conference themes

The theme of the ICLC 6 is 'Learning Cities at the Forefront of Climate Action'. Under this overarching theme, a wide range of topics will be explored, including:

1. Developing strategies for multi-stakeholder coordinated action

The first key topic addresses the cooperation between local stakeholders in promoting climate action in learning cities, with a **particular emphasis on monitoring mechanisms and sustainable financing sources**. The conference will explore local strategies to support climate change education, considering the diverse needs of urban and peri-urban communities, as well as national and international frameworks that impact city administrations. Discussions will cover mechanisms to measure progress in developing green and climate-resilient cities (i.e. approaches, tools, data sources, etc.) and sustainable ways to finance local initiatives.

2. Strengthening education institutions and learning environments

The second key topic will explore **ways to enhance climate change education in various learning spaces**, including formal and non-formal education institutions, community spaces and online environments. Sessions will examine the roles of schools, universities, adult education and community learning centres, museums and libraries, among others, in fostering community resilience through climate education. **These sessions will highlight diverse learning approaches**, including formal, non-formal, informal and family and intergenerational learning, and learning circles, and will reflect on the potential of technology and virtual learning spaces to expand lifelong learning for climate action.

3. Empowering change agents

Addressing the climate crisis requires a long-term perspective and empowering urban communities to take action. This topic will examine **the role of 'change agents', with a focus on the pivotal role of young people**. The conference will also highlight the need to consider vulnerable groups, such as girls and women, people living in informal settlements, Indigenous groups, migrants and refugees, among others.

4. Fostering knowledge and skills to build green and climate-resilient cities

The fourth topic emphasizes **the development of knowledge and skills needed for the 'green transition' within local communities**. Key areas include renewable energy, energy efficiency, water and wastewater management, sustainable agricultural practices, zero- and low-carbon mobility and biodiversity protection. Sessions will examine how to foster green skills and transform people's relationship with the environment, behaviour and day-to-day decision-making in favour of sustainable development.

The work of the thematic clusters of the GNLC – ESD, global citizenship education and inclusion, and health and well-being – will also be reflected in the conference sessions, contributing to a comprehensive and holistic understanding of climate action at the local level.

Format

The conference will be held in-person in Jubail Industrial City, with a livestream available for selected sessions to reach a wider audience. The programme will feature interactive plenaries for debate and dialogue, parallel sessions for in-depth discussion, workshops, expert panels, site visits and exhibitions. Additionally, networking opportunities will be available for all participants.

Expected outcomes of the ICLC 6

The expected outcomes of the conference include:

1. **enhancing the capacities of city authorities and relevant stakeholders to develop, adapt and improve lifelong learning policies, programmes and practices for climate action**, resilience and the creation of sustainable cities and spaces;
2. **adopting the ICLC 6 outcome document** to advance climate action at the local level;
3. **adopting the new operational strategy of the GNLC**.

Date and venue

Date: 3 to 5 December 2024

Venue: Jubail Industrial City Conference Location, University City (Road 4), Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

Location: [Conference venue](#)

Participants

The conference will involve a broad range of stakeholders from all world regions who have a vested interest in the implementation of lifelong learning and urban planning. Attendees will include representatives of GNLC member cities (mayors and local officials), national policymakers, experts in adult education and lifelong learning, private sector representatives, non-governmental organizations, civil society groups, researchers, teachers and facilitators. Additionally, representatives from various international organizations, UNESCO entities, and relevant international city networks will participate.

Working languages

The working languages of the ICLC 6 will be in Arabic, English, French and Spanish, with simultaneous interpretation available for all plenary sessions and selected parallel sessions.

Organizers and partners

The conference is organized by UIL in collaboration with the host city, Jubail Industrial City.

Contacts

The GNLC Coordination Team at UIL can be contacted via email, at learningcities@unesco.org.

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Stay updated with the latest information on the ICLC 6 by visiting the UIL website:

<https://www.uil.unesco.org/en/sixth-international-conference-learning-cities?hub=38>

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.

