Comment on the Draft OER Recommendation Text

The Wikimedia Foundation is a nonprofit charitable organization dedicated to encouraging the growth, development and distribution of free, multilingual, educational content, and to providing the full content of these wiki-based projects to the public free of charge. The Wikimedia Foundation operates some of the largest collaboratively edited reference projects in the world, including Wikipedia, a top-ten internet property. These projects model how Open Educational Resources could be created through global, collaborative efforts, and the educational work of our community has empowered educators and students to contribute to open knowledge in their own languages and about their own communities.

The Wikimedia Foundation commends UNESCO for its leadership to establish a recommendation on OERs to achieve Sustainable Development Goal 4. SDG4 is powerful because it supports the right of individuals to a quality education, and advances the other sustainable development goals. OERs reduce costs associated with delivering quality education and make possible innovative pedagogies that allow educators and students to become not only consumers, but also contributors to open knowledge. We find this recommendation in alignment with a core pillar of our communities’ strategic direction of focusing on Knowledge Equity -- ensuring that participation in knowledge creation includes communities limited by structures of power and privilege. We look forward to cooperating with UNESCO and its partners on these areas of action.

When preparing to comment on the OER Recommendation Text, we consulted stakeholders throughout our movement. Staff, chapter representatives and individual volunteers provided insight, opinions and questions we have used to shape our comment.

I. Definition and Scope

CONCERNS

Terminology. “enable personalized learning.” This is educational jargon that will likely not accurately translate across communities of practice and cultures. Recommend changing to, “assist in meeting the needs of individual learners.”

The limits of OER to achieve SDG4 targets. SDG4 is a wide-ranging resolution. At its heart is the desire to “ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.” OERs are an important resource that help to achieve many of the SDG4 targets but do not directly impact targets like 4A: Build and upgrade education facilities that are child, disability and gender sensitive and provide safe, non-violent, inclusive and effective learning environments for all. We suggest that the text more clearly identify the alignment of OERs to SDG4 targets.

ICT as a barrier. There is not enough evidence that ICT is a facilitator and not a barrier to quality education for marginalized groups. There are many people for whom access to ICT is limited whether because of a lack of infrastructure or digital literacy. ICT solutions often provide “one-size-fits-all” approaches to learning that don’t account for these affordances or cultural context. We suggest that the Recommendation highlight that many ICT solutions for Education are built on culturally dominant

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assumptions, and that ICT and OER tools built for working with marginalized communities need to be
designed in response to self-identified community needs.

**Elaborate further on why innovative pedagogy leads to higher quality education.** Paragraph 3
emphasises ‘novelty’ of approach (repeated in paragraph 7) without saying why the ‘new’ is better than,
for example, ‘tried and tested.’ We recommend that demonstrable impact of “new” approaches be
emphasized over novelty.

**Sensitivity toward marginalized groups.** We would like to stress the need for this text to both represent
and respect the knowledge of marginalized peoples.

**ENDORSEMENTS**

**Including government bodies.** We commend the proposition that stakeholders include government
bodies. We support the principle that publicly funded works should be in the public domain (or at the very
least openly licensed [1]).

**Including civil society actors.** We also commend the inclusion of civil society actors, like the Wikimedia
Movement, who through their grassroots efforts help to achieve SDG4 and contribute to creating and
disseminating OERs.

**Gender parity.** Explicitly underlining the use of OERs to promote gender parity is aligned with our
commitment to knowledge equity and closing the gender gap on Wikimedia projects. [2] [3]


**II. Aims and Objectives**

**CONCERNS**

**Elaborate on the practicalities of international collaboration.** This section doesn’t fully explain the
practicalities of doing OER in an international collaborative environment. For example, it is important
that actors respect the needs of local and vernacular knowledge and learning in the prevalence of
dominant cultures and technologies. The recommendation should describe the collaborative principles
required for success in this space.

**ENDORSEMENTS**

**OER as an enabler of governmental collaboration.** This largely reiterates previous declarations.
However, para. 8 notes that OER also enables government collaboration leading to more cost effective
measures for meeting national educational priorities. This is reflected in the following comment.

**Making publicly funded works available to the public [1]:**

We particularly endorse (ii): "Developing supportive policy: encourage governments to openly license
publicly funded educational materials and develop strategies to enable broad use and adaptation of OER
to support high quality, inclusive education for all learners."

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Reiterating the need for locally relevant content. (v) mentions "locally relevant" educational materials. This aligns with our efforts to address access barriers and raise awareness of our movement in parts of the world where we are aiming to increase the number of new readers and contributors.

The impact of students as content creators. Evidence from Wikimedia projects shows that learning is more effective when learners have a high degree of agency as 'creators of content and members of a knowledge society'. As more educators and learners become content creators, the amount and quality of knowledge representing local languages, cultures and perspectives will increase. Moreover, our programs show that content creators introduce greater digital literacy into their communities, because they are able to explain the practicalities and processes for using digital tools to share knowledge.

[1] https://wikimediafoundation.org/wiki/Open_access_policy

III. Areas of Action - Build the capacity of stakeholders to find, re-use, create and share OER

CONCERNS

Governmental and administrative support for teacher education. 11.b. We would like to emphasize the importance of administrative support structures for teacher education on the use of OERs. Part of this should be building time into teaching schedules for sustained learning and practice. Continuous learning is an integral part of teaching and needs to be supported at every level.

ENDORSEMENTS

Importance of learners as content creators. We stress 'creation' as the key learning activity. This strongly contributes to the ambitions set out in paragraph 9 (v) — that the pool of resources should be 'culturally diverse, locally relevant and accessible'. Many of our community leaders throughout the world engage in education work that brings local knowledge onto the Wikimedia projects. In education, program leaders focus on local languages, contributing not only to diversity of content and acquisition of digital skills, but to mother language literacy as represented by initiatives in India and Indonesia. [1][2]


Ensuring OERs can be easily found, remixed and shared. We would like to emphasize the word “easily,” and encourage not only adaptation to cultural contexts, but also the required investment and concerted effort needed to ensure diverse representation in OERs, especially in images and other media. This includes teacher training materials that represent diverse educational and classroom contexts.

III. Areas of Action - Develop supportive policy

CONCERNS

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Make clear what alignment with other open policies means. ‘Align OER policies with other open policies such as those for Open Access, Open Data, Open Source and Open Science.’ — Align is too vague, and could be expressed more explicitly with examples from the policies mentioned. Where are the misalignments? What roles do different actors play in the alignment of these policies? In our experience, actors in this space sometimes misuse or misappropriate “open” when it’s not tied directly to a definition. We suggest that the Recommendation point towards specific declarations and definitions, such as The Open Definition,[1] The Open Source Definition,[2] the Bethesda Statement on Open Access Publishing[3], and others.

Phrasing of ‘open standard formats’. 12. (c) ‘open standard formats’ is an odd term and doesn’t address the the wide range of challenges created by file formats that are ubiquitous, but rely on software in proprietary control (i.e. Microsoft file formats) which jeopardizes the long term reusability and preservation of these OER materials. We suggest that the recommendation rely on a clearer concept, which reflects the need for materials to be distributed in formats accessible via Open Source software, software that supports local languages and software that can be used to create disability-accessible versions, such as for the visually impaired.

ENDORSEMENTS
Supportive regulatory environment. We agree that a supportive regulatory environment (together with appropriate public funding) is a key to the success of OER approaches to education.

Make publicly funded works open. Para. 12 is aligned with our goal to make publicly funded works available to the public.

III. Areas of Action - Ensure inclusive and equitable access to quality OER

CONCERNS
Stress on OER professionals. It is worth stressing that the Wikimedia project model — which devotes a considerable amount of resources to ensuring the quality of Wikimedia content — is not limited to contributions by ‘OER professionals’. We would suggest that emphasis in paragraphs 13 (e) and (f) is slightly too much on the professionals. The Wikimedia approach has been to create a vibrant, diverse, argumentative but engaged community and it is this community that provides the quality assurance that has made Wikipedia (and sister projects) such a trusted and well used resource. By including extraprofessional communities in the quality assurance process of OER materials, communities of knowledge and practice can better correct errors, improve equitable representation of their own knowledge, and ensure that educational materials communicate well to broader groups of learners.

ENDORSEMENTS
Stressing the importance of knowledge equity. The Wikimedia movement’s vision for “knowledge equity” is that we will break down the social, political, and technical barriers preventing people from accessing and contributing to free knowledge. This is about access, but even more so about recognising different types of knowledge people have to offer and providing space for them to share it.

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Investment in infrastructure. We agree that investment in infrastructure is paramount to ensuring inclusive and equitable access to quality OER. The Wikimedia Diversity Conference [1] featured several presentations that explored how communities with well established infrastructure do not appreciate the challenges of internet and technology access that are initial barriers in emerging communities. Our experience reiterates the importance of investment in infrastructure.

Further policy commitments stemming from this recommendation. Supporting OERs could encourage Member States to adopt open policies for content such as public data sets which could have further beneficial impact on education. For example, Wikidata [2], Wikimedia’s collaboratively edited open knowledge base, offers massive potential for supporting linguistic diversity and less-used, under-resourced languages. It offers a good process for enriching and identifying gaps in Wikipedia and other Wikimedia content (as OER) in those languages, but relies upon the availability of open data sets.

[2] wikidata.org

III. Areas of Action - Nurture the creation of sustainability models for OER

CONCERNS
Terminology. In some contexts, like the United Kingdom, “Public Private Partnerships” is a discredited term.

ENDORSEMENTS
Community as an innovative sustainability model. In this section we would emphasise clause 14 (a). It is our community, and the sense of community, that provides sustainability for the Wikimedia projects. [1] This could be a case study to emulate for other OER initiatives.


III. Areas of Action - International cooperation

CONCERNS
Monitoring impact of OERs on SDG4 targets. We were surprised that the suggestions in paragraphs 16 (a) and (b) did not link more explicitly to monitoring whether these OER initiatives increase the ability of member nations and stakeholders to deliver on the various ambitions of SDG4. We encourage the collection of data that links OER to SDG4 targets. One example is target 4.4: ‘By 2030, substantially increase the number of youth and adults who have relevant skills, including technical and vocational skills, for employment, decent jobs and entrepreneurship’. Monitoring OERs contribution to this target might include collecting data on digital skills resulting from student contribution to open knowledge. This is data we are actively working with our community and partners to collect.

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ENDORSEMENTS

International collaboration. As a global movement that is built on international collaboration and cooperation, we strongly endorse this component of the recommendation.

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