

SDG-Education 2030 Steering Committee

Accelerated action and transformative pathways: Prioritize education to achieve sustainable development

March 2020



This paper is submitted amidst an unprecedented educational disruption caused by the Covid-19 disease. As of 17 March, nearly 900 million children and youth – accounting for half the world’s global student population – had to stay away from schools and universities, with nationwide closures effective in 105 countries¹. This situation imposes immense challenges to ensure educational continuity through open and distance learning, guided by the principles of inclusion and equity. It also calls for resolute international cooperation and partnerships to share tools and experiences, build capacity and support countries to respond to the crisis.

As the international community enters the last decade of the SDGs in an uncertain and complex environment, education is the most transformative and sustainable long-term solution for strengthening peace and social cohesion, economic growth, increasing shared prosperity, building resilience and protecting our endangered planet. To accelerate progress across the 2030 Agenda, education has to be placed at the core of sustainable development, driven by greater political commitment, scaled-up solutions, more resources, and societal mobilization.

While evidence demonstrates that education is a development multiplier, on current trends, one in six children between the age of 6 and 17 will still be out of school in 2030 and barely 6 in 10 will complete secondary education. The most vulnerable, marginalized and fragile populations are being left behind, with conflict and crisis exacerbating educational exclusion and inequalities. In many countries, increasing inequalities and exclusion threaten social cohesion.

Without **more inclusive, equitable and transformative policies** that tackle the multiple causes of educational exclusion, address learning poverty² and equip learners with 21st century skills and competences, the vision of the 2030 Agenda will not be achieved. Meeting commitments requires

¹ Status as of 17 March 2020 - COVID-19 Educational Disruption and Response
<https://en.unesco.org/themes/education-emergencies/coronavirus-school-closures>

UNESCO has been monitoring school closures related to COVID-19 since 4 March 2020.

² Learning poverty means being unable to read and understand a simple text by age 10.

a political shift to recognize that **education is not a cost for governments but an investment in people, planet, prosperity and peace.**

The SDG-Education 2030 Steering Committee calls for strengthened political commitment at the highest level and targeted action in four key areas: inclusion, quality, data and financing, all under the overarching principle of safeguarding the right to education. Quality and inclusion are not mutually exclusive; rather they are two sides of the same coin. Education systems cannot be of high quality unless they offer adequate opportunities for all learners in accordance with their potential and aspirations.

Acceleration Strategy 1. Prioritize inclusion and equity in education

- To leave no one behind, promote a culture of inclusion in and **throughout education systems**, to reach all learners from the early years, prioritizing the most disadvantaged and vulnerable.
- Design and implement affirmative policy actions and innovative learning programmes that act on the multiple factors preventing children and youth from pursuing a full education cycle.
- Ensure that education policies prioritize **gender equality**, eliminate all barriers to girls' completion of 12 years of free, publicly funded, compulsory quality compulsory education, and encourage their participation in Science Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM).
- Increase investment in **early childhood care and education** to counter disadvantages and set the foundations for successful learning in school, including through mother tongue instruction.
- Strengthen policies to include **refugees, migrants and the forcibly displaced** in national education systems and ensure continuity of education in conflict and crisis-affected situations.

Acceleration Strategy 2. Transform education for quality, relevance and impact across the SDGs

- Scale up investment in **teachers** through better training, professional development and decent working conditions, improved social and health care support, as well as the development of teacher communities, taking into account the 69 million teacher gap and teachers' powerful influence on learning achievement.
- **Transform teaching and learning** to make education relevant in the context of rapid technological change and geared to building more sustainable, equal and just societies and promoting well-being. Progress towards the SDGs can be accelerated if learners are empowered with the knowledge, cognitive and non-cognitive skills, ethical principles and values to address the inter-related challenges of our times and become responsible global citizens. To this end, Education for Sustainable Development and Global Citizenship should be mainstreamed in learning programmes.

- Increase **youth employability** and leadership through more flexible education and training systems; skills anticipation, policies to facilitate school-to-work and work-to-work transitions and lifelong learning opportunities spanning formal, informal and non-formal pathways, taking into account the emerging challenges of the 4th industrial revolution.

Acceleration Strategy 3. Better data and intermediate benchmarks to inform action

- Invest in **better and more disaggregated data** to shape targeted policy interventions, monitoring and accountability, including through building the capacities of national statistical systems.
- Set regional **benchmarks** to drive action around identified policy gaps.

Acceleration Strategy 4. Increased Funding for Equitable and Resilient Public Education Systems

- Increase **domestic financing** to ensure governments allocate at least 4% to 6% of GDP to education and/or commit 15% to 20% of public expenditure to education at least, notably through the broadening of the tax base, tax reform, anti-corruption measures, as well as by tackling illicit financial flows.
- Increase **official development assistance** to meet the benchmark of 0.7 % of GNP and increase funding to education, matching development assistance with countries farthest behind, and strengthening coordination among actors. Education's share in humanitarian aid must be increased.

Acceleration Strategy 5. Strengthened Partnerships

- Work beyond policy silos to connect education, health, nutrition, gender, technology and labour, bringing on board the expertise from governments, non-governmental organizations, civil society, teachers, parents, youth and the private sector.
- Support collaboration across sectors to identify common challenges, generate solutions, and exchange good practices and innovations among actors at local, regional and global level. Schools, universities, youth and student organisations, teacher organisations, civil society, as well as employers and the private sector should be involved in policy planning and implementation through a regular and structured dialogue.

The SDG-Education 2030 Steering Committee is the global multi-stakeholder consultation and coordination mechanism for education in the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda. Its primary objective is to harmonize and strengthen support to countries and their partners for the realization of the global education goal and targets. The Steering Committee is composed of members representing a majority from countries, the World Education Forum 2015 convening agencies (UNESCO, UNDP, UNFPA, UNHCR, UNICEF, UN Women, ILO, the World Bank), the Global Partnership for Education, the OECD, regional organizations, teacher organizations, civil society networks, the private sector, foundations and youth organizations.

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