

Welcome and Introduction by the Co-Chairs of the Steering Committee

Ms Stefania Giannini, Assistant Director-General for Education, UNESCO

Ms Giannini highlighted that the COVID-19 pandemic continues to be a global crisis and tragedy, with the international community still struggling to ensure every learner's right to quality education and to prevent the amplification of the pre-COVID-19 educational crisis.

The 2020 GEM highlighted the severe impact of the crisis on learning continuity and education finance, as well as the challenges related to the safe reopening of schools, the critical role of teachers, and the necessity to adopt a forward-looking approach when it comes to skills development, but also the urgency to ensure connectivity for all learners. In this regard, the meeting provided a unique opportunity to shake the world to come to recognize that without renewed commitment to education and stronger cooperation, the implementation of the 2030 Agenda in its entirety is at risk.

The Assistant Director-General emphasized that the Steering Committee's meeting will allow to take stock of concrete actions and strategies undertaken in response to the commitments made in the 2020 GEM Declaration, while also touching upon the Steering Committee's expected role to bridge the education sector's COVID-19 response to the broader advancement of the SDG 4-Education 2030 targets. Finally, the meeting will anticipate key milestones related to the consultation process, which UNESCO is entrusted to design and lead, with a view to improving the global education cooperation mechanism and strengthening the SDG-Education 2030 Steering Committee.

Professor Kazuhiro Yoshida, Co-Chair, SDG-Education 2030 Steering Committee (Japan)

Prof. Yoshida emphasized that the fact that the COVID-19 crisis is not yet overcome cannot be a valid excuse to delay the international community's efforts to achieve SDG 4. He stressed the need to leverage innovation and creativity to bring about transformation and address the challenges of the new normal. He furthermore warned that the pandemic is likely to have a lasting effect, calling for strengthened cooperation among stakeholders.

Prof. Yoshida also underscored the centrality of information sharing, highlighting the need to build on lessons learned and the experiences of all actors to foster transformation and strengthen resilience. Finally, he called on the Secretariat to convey the key messages of the Steering Committee's discussion to the Working Group on the reform of the global cooperation mechanism.

Part I. Follow-up to the 2020 GEM Declaration commitments

Discussion questions:

- 1) How can the five priority action areas of the 2020 GEM Declaration be taken further in the respective countries or regions in 2021?
- 2) How can we ensure strong ownership of all relevant UN, international and regional organizations for the GEM follow-up?

Introduction - Ms Maki Katsuno-Hayashikawa, Director, Division for Education 2030

Ms Katsuno-Hayashikawa recalled the five thematic priorities identified in the 2020 GEM Declaration: education finance, safe school reopening, teachers, skills development for employment, as well as digital educational resources and connectivity, with equity, inclusion and gender equality as a cross-cutting priorities.

Since the 2020 GEM, UNESCO has been compiling resources and tools at global and regional level to help countries and partners accelerate and monitor progress. To address challenges related to the safe reopening of schools, UNESCO developed the COVID-19 Education Response Toolkit, which helped guide countries to prepare for the return to school, improve infrastructure and guarantee learning continuity.

To support teachers, UNESCO also launched the Global Teacher Campus under the framework of the Global Education Coalition. At regional level, a publication on “Continuing Professional Development for Teachers in the Asia-Pacific Region” has been elaborated, together with a variety of teacher surveys across different regions. In the field of skills development, digital resources and connectivity, the Global Skills Academy has been launched, together with the Framework on tech-enabled schools beyond campus.

The Director moreover shed light on different resources and tools for the monitoring of the impact of COVID-19 on education, such as the joint UNESCO/UNICEF/WB Survey, which has already been carried out twice.

Open discussion - moderated by Mr Kazuhiro Yoshida

Belgium – Ms Marie-Anne Persoons, Advisor International Policy, Department of Education and Training, Strategic Policy Unit, Flemish Community

Ms Persoons welcomed the Assistant Director-General’s remark on the need to stand united in addressing common challenges. In this regard, she highlighted the importance of fostering stronger synergies and linkages between different existing bodies pursuing the same objectives. Moving on the importance of skills development, emphasized that beyond a focus on skills for employment, the dimensions of SDG 4.7 should not be neglected as they make a central contribution to recovery and development more broadly. Finally, she underscored that the Steering Committee has the responsibility to make sure that the Education 2030 Agenda and the Education 2030 Framework for Action remain the compass for all different strings, at national, regional and global levels.

Colombia – H.E. Ms Maria Victoria Angulo Gonzalez, Minister of National Education

The Minister highlighted that region of Latin America and the Caribbean is investing in the five priority action areas of the 2020 GEM Declaration. She informed the Steering Committee that the regional Steering Committee is about to issue a regional statement of commitment to the meeting’s outcome document and call of action in support of the five priority areas. Many countries are taking concrete actions, notably to protect education financing, which is a key priority for the region. The Minister highlighted the central role of regional coordination mechanisms in defining regional goals and elaborating concrete strategies to advance the implementation of SDG 4. In 2021, the region will continue to put particular emphasis on safe school reopening to prevent education disruption, as well as dropouts, and counter the impact of the crisis on socio-emotional learning. In ending, the Minister highlighted that the crisis calls for up-scaled inter-institutional, inter-sectorial and international cooperation to elaborate clear guidelines to allow all students to return to school.

OECD – Mr Andreas Schleicher, Director for Education and Special Advisor on Education Policy to the Secretary-General

Mr Schleicher highlighted that the economic downturn caused by the COVID-19 had a tangible impact on education financing. In this regard, he suggested that the Steering Committee could play an important role in supporting countries to foster stronger links between Ministries of Education and Finance. He expressed concern about the fact that education is not high on the agenda in discussions about stimulus packages, stating that it is essential to provide better tools and data to raise greater awareness of the value of investing in education. He furthermore highlighted that with regard to the safe reopening of schools, there have been many encouraging developments. Many countries have found good solutions to ensure a safe return of students to the school benches, putting particular emphasis on reaching those at greatest risk of dropping out. In this regard, he stressed that the Steering Committee could further strengthen its role in the field of information sharing, to provide a platform for the sharing of experiences, better tools, better data and better mobilization.

Council of Europe – Mr Sjur Bergan, Head of the Education Department

Mr Bergan highlighted the importance of ensuring ownership of the follow-up to the 2020 GEM, putting particular emphasis on the need for explanation and information sharing. He stressed the need for a clear roadmap connecting the 2020 and 2021 extraordinary sessions of the GEM to the next regular session of the Global Education Meeting. Finally, he emphasized the centrality of involving countries and regional organizations in the preparation of upcoming events and consultations, highlighting the Council of Europe stands ready to support the organization of the Europe and North America regional consultation.

CLADE – Ms Nelsy Lizarazo, General Coordinator

Ms Lizarazo highlighted that the priority area's agreed upon at the 2020 GEM are important at all levels, highlighting that what is being done at present is not sufficient, stating that much more has to be done at the community level to find solutions. Civil society plays a central role in this regard. She emphasized that the pandemic could be an incentive for renewed action, highlighting that it is vital to reinforce public education across the system, from early childhood to lifelong learning opportunities. This requires priority investment, especially given the devastating impact of the pandemic. Finally, she underscored the need to work closely with other UN family organizations for the reinforcement of rights, in particular the right to education.

Japan – Ms Jun Takai, Permanent Delegation of Japan to UNESCO

Ms Takai highlighted the importance of ensuring no one is left behind, emphasizing that the principles of equity and inclusion have to be at the heart of all efforts in the priority areas of the 2020 GEM Declaration. Japan is actively advancing the commitments of the GEM. In the area of connectivity, Japan put in place a policy to equip each student across Japan with a laptop. This is part of a broader policy package named "Giga School Programme", launched in 2019, which has been further expanded in the context of the pandemic. Ms Takai moreover stated that in the long term, it will be important to incorporate Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) in all efforts towards the acceleration of progress for SDG 4 and the 2030 Agenda more broadly.

ABEGS – Mr Abdusalam Aljoufi, Advisor

Mr Aljoufi highlighted that the Arab and Gulf region attaches great importance to the priority action areas of the 2020 GEM Declaration. He informed that in February, two reports will be launched: the Arab region report on the achievement of the Education 2030 goals and objectives, together with the Gulf region's report on the same topic. In the latter, particular emphasis will be put on coping with the post-COVID-19 context, as well as with financial challenges related to the pandemic. In this regard, he explained that the budgetary deficit in the Arab region is considerable, having detrimental effects on educational resources. The aforementioned reports will allow to shed light on what has already been achieved in the GEM's five priority areas, as well as on persisting gaps and challenges.

China – Mr Changwei Qin, Secretary-General, Chinese National Commission for UNESCO

Mr Qin highlighted that the question of education financing is a critical one, emphasizing that mobilizing additional resources for education in the current context is particularly complex, as many sectors require additional financial resources. In this regard, he stressed the importance of providing empirical evidence to Ministers and decision makers to convince them of the necessity to put education on top of the agenda. In addition, Mr Qin underscored the importance of sharing good practices, information and experiences in responding to the pandemic. He also stressed that the new hybrid educational model, which combines online and offline education, has to be further strengthened. In this regard, he highlighted the need to further develop open educational resources, as well as the urgency to bridge the digital divide.

Argentina – Mr Pablo Gentili, Secretary of Educative Cooperation and Priority Actions, Ministry of Education

Mr Gentili highlighted that the pandemic further amplified social and economic inequalities. He emphasized that Argentina considers the five priority areas of the 2020 GEM Declaration to be a roadmap for the improvement of equality, equality and inclusion in its national education system. He also emphasized the centrality of rolling out a wide-ranging vaccination process for teachers and educational staff. Furthermore, he underscored the importance of ensuring connectivity, emphasizing that digital learning is essential to ensure learning continuity. He warned that there is extreme inequality in this regard, stating that equality needs to be re-established through the safe reopening of schools.

GCE – Mr Refat Sabbah, President, Global Campaign for Education

Mr Sabbah highlighted that many countries need to rebuild their tax system to rebuild tax justice. Big companies have to commit to paying their taxes. In addition, countries need better systems of governance to fight corruption, as otherwise there will not be sufficient funding for education. He moreover warned that countries with considerable amounts of debt cannot succeed in meeting SDG 4. He also stressed the importance of partnerships, in particular between governments and communities. Finally, he highlighted the need for greater solidarity, warning that without solidarity, the countries in the south will not be able to achieve the SDGs.

European Commission – Mr Bartek Lessaer, Policy Officer, European Commission

Mr Lessaer highlighted that the European Commission would like to see the country level stressed in the efforts of 2021. In this regard, he highlighted that 2021 should be the year when the Steering Committee, uses all its leverage to support national education systems. He furthermore welcomed the increased role of GPE, the World Bank, UNICEF and UNESCO to mobilize financial and policy support at country level, as well as the excellent work done by the GEMR team. In ending, he stressed

that further efforts are needed to support developing countries in monitoring progress towards SDG 4.

Part II. Monitoring and accelerating progress towards SDG 4 in the post COVID-19 context

Discussion questions:

- 1) How can the impact of the pandemic on SDG 4 be monitored?
- 2) What relevant regional benchmarks can be set up to accelerate progress toward SDG4?
- 3) What roles regional organisations and regional SDG-Education 2030 coordination mechanisms can play in accelerating post-COVID recovery and progress towards SDG 4?

Introductory presentation - Mr Manos Antoninis, Director, UNESCO Global Education Monitoring Report

Mr Antoninis highlighted that the impact of COVID-19 on education is complex, stating that the world is about to enter a third wave of school closures. He drew attention to the joint UNESCO-UNICEF-World Bank survey, allowing to monitor policy responses in the COVID-19 context. The third round of the survey will be conducted from February 2021 onwards; this time also in cooperation with the OECD. Particular emphasis will be put on school openings and closings, distance education, teachers, learning assessment, financing and decision-making. While the second round already covered 150 countries, the third round is expected to allow for universal coverage, making the survey a key tool in the monitoring of the commitments made at the 2020 GEM.

Moving on to the access and equality dimensions, he explained that inequalities have been rising as a result of the pandemic but it remains challenging to demonstrate by how much. Indirect, pre-existing assessments show that pre-COVID-19 there have already been large disparities in access to the internet and devices. Substituting traditional household surveys, a series of phone surveys conducted by the World Bank allowed for direct assessments on access and equity. In addition, the Center for Global Development, as well as the Young Lives project also compiled insightful data on the subject.

With regard to quality and learning, Mr Antoninis highlighted that at current stage no data is available, allowing for projections only. One estimate that has become increasingly popular is that a 3-month school closure could reduce long-term learning by 1-years' worth of learning. Learning losses due to school closures could as such continue to accumulate after children return to school.

Indirect assessments of quality and learning through teacher surveys illustrate that teachers struggle to assess the effectiveness of education continuity strategies. Over 35% indicated that students learned but not much more or even less than in school. With regard to financing, Mr Antoninis highlighted that it is still difficult to assess the impact of the crisis. It is however clear that education is not a major part of stimulus packages. He further explained that evidence on the budgetary impact is just emerging and that targeted measures are still relatively absent and too weak for the challenge encountered.

Updates on regional benchmarking on SDG 4 indicators, Ms Silvia Montoya, Director, UNESCO Institute for Statistics

Ms Montoya recalled that the commitment to establish relevant and appropriate benchmarks is both enshrined in the Education 2030 Framework for Action, as well as in the 2020 GEM Declaration. She explained that in this spirit, seven indicators were adopted by the Technical Cooperation Group (TCG)

in 2019, satisfying the principles of efficiency and relevance. The latter put particular emphasis on learning, completion, access, equity and teachers.

Ms Montoya highlighted that benchmarks are relevant to (sub-)regional organisations, as the latter encourage the harmonization of monitoring frameworks, contribute to the development of data collection strategies, as well as to the monitoring of progress on SDG 4. She emphasized that (sub-)regional organizations have a central role to play in discussions on benchmarks, the elaboration of additional relevant regional indicators, the follow-up with Member States to secure feedback, as well as in ensuring high-level political endorsement of the proposed benchmarks.

Ms Montoya moreover informed the Steering Committee about the efforts to establish common regional minimum benchmark for all countries, equal to the feasible progress the country/-ies furthest behind can make. In addition, country-specific feasible benchmarks, equal to or above the minimum benchmark level, based on its initial condition and a measure of feasible progress (e.g., based on progress of average country), are in the process of being elaborated. Finally, she explained that setting an optional country-specific and country-set benchmark, based on country's willingness and ambition to commit, can further contribute to the acceleration of progress.

Open discussion - moderated by Mr Kazuhiro Yoshida

Colombia – Ms Maria Victoria Angulo Gonzalez, Minister of National Education

The Minister highlighted that the Latin American and Caribbean region is closely monitoring the impact of COVID-19 on educational systems and looking at concrete country solutions. She recalled that Latin America and the Caribbean is one of the regions in which schools have been closed the longest, making it essential for the region to work on participation and completion rates. In this regard, she also underscored the centrality of databases and empirical evidence to shed light on regional trends. The Minister explained that the region has a very good system for measuring success, such as the Latin American Laboratory of the Assessment of the Quality of Education, which enables the region to set relevant benchmarks in learning achievement. Finally, the Minister also highlighted the importance of continuing to support the sharing of lessons learned, practices and experiences across the priority areas of the 2020 GEM Declaration, stating that the international community must emerge from this crisis with stronger policies.

Belgium – Ms Marie-Anne Persoons, Advisor International Policy, Department of Education and Training, Strategic Policy Unit, Flemish Community

Ms Persoons congratulated the GEM Report and UIS for having taken immediate action following the 2020 GEM. She recalled that the setting of relevant benchmarks is a crucial task with which the Steering Committee has been entrusted through the 2020 GEM Declaration.

Czech Republic – Mr Stanislav Štech, Professor, Charles University

Mr Štech highlighted that all countries suffer from lack of reliable data, underscoring the need for a set of well-designed, reliable indicators. In this regard, he welcomed the focus on the regional level, as this approach allows for comparable situations.

CLADE - Ms Nelsy Lizarazo, General Coordinator

Ms Lizarazo highlighted that monitoring the effect of the pandemic on SDG 4 is not something that is easy to be done, stating that it is nonetheless vital to have the reliable data at the disposal of governments and local communities. She emphasized that there is a critical role to be played by UNESCO and regional organizations in this regard. One important part of the monitoring process is to

have the right mechanisms to collect data at all levels, notably the local level. In this regard, local governments have a central role to play. Finally, she also stressed that a central concern must be the strengthening of free, public education systems, with the State as guarantor of the right to education. Ms Lizarazo emphasized that this requires adequate financing and correct dialogue between Ministries to have economic policies support joint efforts in the field of education.

Japan – Ms Jun Takai, Permanent Delegation of Japan to UNESCO

Ms Takai highlighted that benchmarking is crucial to measure the impact of COVID-19. She furthermore emphasized that information sharing within UNESCO should be further promoted, as well as cooperation between different organizations and partners. She moreover stressed that to make regional coordination more effective, particular emphasis has to be put on the needs and actual realities the region is facing.

China – Mr Changwei Qin, Secretary-General, Chinese National Commission for UNESCO

Mr Qin commended UIS and the GEM Report for their important work, emphasizing that all Member States need the capacity and the outcomes of this monitoring and assessment process. Member States should however be involved more closely. A new framework for monitoring should be developed to support Member States in monitoring and assessment. Second, he underscored the need for the establishment of an information exchange mechanism, which involves all Member States and allows to collect experiences.

European Commission - Mr Jan Pakulski, Head of Unit at the DG Education, Youth, Sport and Culture

Mr Pakulski highlighted that the European Commission has a two-decade long experience in monitoring around a small framework on a single digit of benchmarks, which has proven to work effectively. In this regard, the European Commission welcomed the opportunity to share experiences with the GEMR and UIS. Mr Pakulski also informed that the European Commission just reviewed its new benchmarks for the next 5 to 10 years. The latter cover six areas, namely the quality of education, equity, distance learning and higher education. He moreover explained that emphasis is also put on Europe as a global player. In ending, he highlighted the importance of ensuring both ownership, as well as transparency as part of the monitoring process, emphasizing also the importance of sharing experiences.

Council of Europe – Mr Sjur Bergan, Head of the Education Department

Mr Bergan highlighted that in Europe, short-term action has been largely taken at the national level, underscoring the need to take medium and longer-term actions at the regional and global levels to prevent the health crisis from turning into an educational crisis and a crisis for democracy. In ending, he highlighted that the Council of Europe's Education Committee could also play a central role in preparing the European response to the 2020 GEM follow-up.

Republic of Korea – Mr Kyung-Koo Han, Secretary-General of the Korean National Commission for UNESCO

Mr Han highlighted that school is not only about learning but also about playing and the development of socio-emotional skills. In this regard, he called for greater awareness of not just the loss of learning but also the loss of play and interaction due to COVID-19 related school closures. He further stressed that there is not just a considerable educational gap between the rich and poor in learning but also in socio-emotional development.

CAMPE - Ms Rasheda K. Choudhury, Executive Director

Ms Choudhury asked whether it would be possible to consider convincing governments to reach a consensus and identify how many children are left behind when it comes to access to digital resources, connectivity etc. to determine what concrete actions are needed. Addressing her question, the Director of the GEM Report highlighted that reaching a consensus is challenging as countries are at different stages, facing different realities and adopting different approaches. The Director of UIS explained that a rapid assessment survey will be rolled out in the coming month to collect data on many educational aggregates pre- and post-COVID-19.

Part III. Improving the global education cooperation mechanism

Discussion question:

1) How should the global coordination look like in order to steer a transformative policy agenda, mobilize partnerships, as well as financial resources for education to accelerate progress toward the SDG-Education 2030 Agenda?

Introduction by Ms Stefania Giannini, Assistant Director-General for Education, UNESCO

Ms Giannini highlighted that the COVID-19 pandemic exposed the education sector's vulnerabilities and the urgent need to transform and reform the existing global cooperation mechanism to deliver an immediate response and make efficient use of scarce resources.

Thanks to the multilateral and multi-sectoral collaboration achieved during the COVID response and recovery, culminating with the 2020 GEM, the reform of the global education architecture or cooperation mechanism has regained relevance and momentum.

This is an opportunity to build back better, more efficient, inclusive and resilient through an improved global cooperation mechanism, which must:

1. **Connect the dots of the global education architecture**
 - connecting political, technical and financial support to education
 - connecting the global, regional and country levels of action
 - finding the right balance between the universal, holistic, lifelong learning perspective of the Education 2030 Agenda and the "unfinished EFA" agenda that focusses on foundational skills in low income countries; and lastly,
 - harmonizing multilateral and bilateral funds and aid to education
2. The improved global cooperation mechanism should strengthen the **authority of the existing coordination platform**, that is the SDG-Education 2030 Steering Committee, as a governing/decision-making body to guide and set the policy agenda and enhance accountability of all stakeholders.
3. Such a global cooperation mechanism must **mobilize technical and financial support for the achievement of SDG 4-Education 2030** by:
 - Coordinating the allocation of aid to education, where it is most needed, for impact
 - Mobilizing technical and financial resources through the development of collective missions and benchmarks

This collective reflection process will be driven by the following key principles:

- Country-centred cooperation while connecting country-regional-global levels
- Greater simplification and efficiency

- Better linking policy steering with finance
- Greater accountability through more robust data and evidence as well as the use of benchmark indicators and regional oversight
- Stronger inter-sectoral collaboration and partnership

As a first step in the follow-up to the 2020 GEM, UNESCO has established a dedicated Working Group to generate ideas and envision improved arrangements for more efficient global coordination. By the end of March, the Working Group will develop plausible scenarios of the strengthened global education architecture. The latter will also include a concrete proposal for the Terms of Reference of the Steering Committee or whatever platform is recommended, as well as a series of mission statements linked to SDG 4 benchmark indicators. By early May, the Working Group will then submit one proposal for adoption by the international community at the extraordinary session of the 2021 GEM to take place in July.

As part of their responsibilities, Working Group members will consult and secure feedback and support from respective organizations' governing bodies or constituency members on the proposed coordination mechanism for global education cooperation.

To ensure we include all key stakeholders and partners throughout the reform process, UNESCO will furthermore organize a series of consultations in February through April to secure valuable buy-in by all partners. UNESCO will also organize a virtual education donor coordination meeting in mid-February to identify strategies for increasing funding and improving alignment among donors.

Discussion on education financing within the global cooperation mechanism – GPE, the World Bank and the International Commission on Financing Global Education Opportunity

GPE – Ms Morgan Strecker, Global Advocacy & Partnerships co-lead

Ms Strecker highlighted that the monumental challenge of delivering on SDG 4 requires all stakeholders and partners to join forces. She emphasized that it is important to reflect on what has worked well, underscoring that COVID-19 has been a strong catalyst for stronger cooperation, referring to UNESCO's Global Education Coalition, the establishment of joint databases, as well as the policy guidance put together by UNESCO, UNICEF, the World Bank and WFP. Second, Ms Strecker highlighted that the COVID-19 crisis illustrated the need to break out of the education silo to draw on cross-sectoral expertise to address global challenges. She reiterated GPE's support to the five priority action areas, stating that equity and inclusion must be considered as an additional priority action area. Finally, she stated that GPE expects the Working Group on the reform of the global education cooperation mechanism to draw on the lessons learned by the Steering Committee in the field of SDG 4 coordination. She also expressed hope that the Working Group will perform its responsibilities in an agile way, reflective of and responsive to the constituencies that are part of it.

World Bank – Mr Jaime Saavedra, Senior Director, Education

Mr Saavedra expressed the hope that the initiated reform process will allow to find a more efficient framework for cooperation. He emphasized that five issues should be part of the discussion. First, in any forum, stakeholders must reflect on how to continue shaking the world about the deepening of the learning crisis. All societies and governments may not realize how much students are losing as a result of the crisis and how severely the crisis is deepening inequalities. Second, one of the key objectives must be to advocate for more resources for education. This starts with domestic resources and calls on all to jointly make the case for increased investment in education at the domestic level. Thirdly, international resources are important but need to be channelled in the most efficient way.

Forth, he emphasized that resources should always be used to mobilize country debate and put countries in the driver seat. Finally, donors and operating players have to discuss in which ways coordination can be done around specific outputs and objectives.

International Commission on Financing Global Education Opportunity – Ms Liesbet Steer, Director

Ms Steer highlighted that the starting point of this collective reflection should not be to think that there are too many initiatives—the starting point should be that education is far behind and the international community is failing to meet its commitments. She emphasized that a coalition of partners is urgently needed to transform education and ensure no one is left behind. She stated that while some sectors have done better than the education sector, SDG 4 is very complicated as there is no clear message or rallying call around global target and objective, which could motivate the general public. The architecture in the other sectors tends to have a flexibility and cooperation tied around big issues that are further motivating the sectors. In this regard, she stressed that there is a lack of openness in the education sector to new financing models and ideas, a fact that Ms Steer feels is hurting the sector. She expressed hope that the new architecture may come up with a more open approach, allowing to bring in these players.

Open discussion - moderated by Ms Stefania Giannini

Saudi Arabia – Dr Shuaa Alnifie, Education Counsellor

Dr Alnifie highlighted that following COVID-19 related school closures, e-learning and distance learning have become central themes. She emphasized that the crisis created momentum for the further integration of technology in education. In addition, she also recalled the importance of drawing on lessons learned in the context of the pandemic to build back better, identify and address shortcomings. With regard to key performance indicators, Ms Alnifie indicated that it would be interesting for the Steering Committee to further discuss the evolution over time of these indicators to assess progress achieved and identify remaining challenges.

ABEGS - Mr Abdusalam Aljoufi, Advisor

Mr Aljoufi warned about the severe impact of the pandemic on girls, who were already particularly vulnerable before the start of the crisis. He stated that reductions in the education budgets are likely to hit girls hardest in particular those in crisis-affected regions. He underscored that it is essential for all countries to benefit and take advantage of the expertise of GPE, the World Bank and UNESCO to maximize the impact of limited resources. In light of the critical challenges the international community is facing, he reiterated the need for strengthened partnerships, in particular in the field of education financing.

Belgium - Ms Marie-Anne Persoons, Advisor International Policy, Department of Education and Training, Strategic Policy Unit, Flemish Community

Ms Persoons highlighted that the transition from the period of Education for All to Education 2030 is still not digested. She emphasized that there remains a need for the donor community to communicate and that the reform process initiated by UNESCO in this regard is very relevant and welcome. With regard to accountability, she highlighted that accountability must be ensured towards the Member States of the UN. She moreover recalled that the Steering Committee has always been part of the global architecture, not the architecture itself, expressing hope that this understanding will be maintained throughout the process. Ms Persoons also reiterated the importance of the Steering Committee's technical functions, which have to be maintained.

China – Ms Xiaoping Yu, Chinese Permanent Delegation to UNESCO

Ms Yu highlighted that China welcomes the launch of the reform process, as well as UNESCO's commitment to involve all partners and stakeholders in the process. She emphasized that throughout the process, the fact that countries and regions are facing different realities and challenges must be taken into consideration. She furthermore called on UNESCO to pay particular attention to ensuring appropriate regional balance throughout the reform process, as well as in the reformed global education cooperation mechanism.

Norway - Mr Joakim Bakke, Director, Ministry of Education and Research

Mr Bakke highlighted that Norway remains committed to consult with the members of Group I to bring their inputs into the discussion. Norway is concerned about the universal aspects of SDG 4, emphasizing that the country attaches great importance to the assessment of education policies. He moreover stressed that while the discussion on funding and financing is of course of critical importance, it must be recognized that funding is not a guarantee for high quality education.

Germany - Mr Walter Hirche, Chair of Education Committee, German Commission for UNESCO

Mr Hirche expressed appreciation for UNESCO's continuous effort and strong advocacy for the advancement of the Education 2030 Agenda. He highlighted that Germany welcomes the outcome declaration of the 2020 GEM, which mandates UNESCO to design and lead a consultation in order to develop a proposal to strengthen the SDG-Education 2030 Steering Committee to enable it to effectively steer and coordinate the global education cooperation mechanism. He emphasized that the renewed global cooperation mechanism must focus on improving international cooperation and coherence, especially among the various multilateral actors and funds. Existing political and financial initiatives should be better coordinated through the strengthened Steering Committee. Germany attaches great importance to the leading role of UNESCO. Second, Mr Hirche explained that it is vital that the renewed mechanism is recognised by all relevant actors and thus provides the central forum for coordination and joint advocacy of the education sector. This requires a transparent, participatory process in which all stakeholders are engaged.

Closing remarks by the Co-Chairs

The Assistant Director-General thanked all participants for their contribution to a fruitful discussion. She highlighted that there is a momentum that must be seized to bring all actors of the community together around a shared ambition and concrete missions to join forces for the acceleration of progress across the Education 2030 Agenda and the 2030 Agenda more broadly.

Mr Yoshida joined Ms Giannini in thanking the members of the Steering Committee for a lively exchange. He reiterated that there is a unique opportunity to transform the future of cooperation in the field of education for greater impact and better delivery, calling for the active engagement of all constituencies. In ending, he requested the Secretariat to convey the key messages of the discussion to the Working Group on the reform of the global education cooperation mechanism for its consideration.