

SDG-Education 2030 Steering Committee Meeting 28 June 2021 - 13:00 – 15:30 CET (online)

Summary

- The Steering Committee’s meeting assessed the state of the implementation of the SDG-Education 2030 Agenda at global, regional and country levels. The meeting provided a platform for exchange and peer dialogue on common challenges and lessons learned, shortcomings requiring urgent policy attention, as well as concrete innovative solutions for the COVID-19 recovery and the acceleration of progress towards SDG 4.
- Recognizing that the setting of benchmarks is an important acceleration strategy and a commitment made in the Education 2030 Framework for Action and the 2020 GEM Declaration, the meeting reviewed the progress on the establishment of regional SDG 4 benchmarks, which focus on a small number of priority policy areas linked to the achievement of SDG 4. There will be set at regional and national levels for each priority policy area.
- All regions faced similar challenges throughout the pandemic, especially those related to the digital divide, safe return to face-to-face learning, lack of data, as well as insufficient preparedness and support for teachers to facilitate ICT-mediated learning. In terms of lessons learned and effective acceleration strategies, regional reporting highlighted the central role of teachers and the need for greater support to them, the urgency to strengthen cross-sectoral collaboration for more holistic educational support, as well as the importance of mobilizing additional resources for education.
- The meeting also provided the opportunity to deliberate on the Ministerial Segment of the 2021 GEM, convened by UNESCO and the Steering Committee on 13 July 2021, and to discuss the way forward for SDG-Education 2030 global coordination based on the presentation of highlights of the multi-stakeholder consultation on the reform of the global education cooperation mechanism (GCM). The Steering Committee members exchanged views on the final version of the Working Group’s proposal for a strengthened GCM, in view of the latter’s endorsement at the 2021 GEM. In this context, the following main points were made by the members of the Committee:
 - Ensuring broader ties with Member States that are not represented on the body to secure continued engagement and foster ownership of decisions taken.
 - Securing high-level representation.
 - Clarifying the structures of accountability of all stakeholders.
 - Strengthening ties with the regional and country levels was recalled.
 - Developing clear terms of reference for the Sherpa Group, together with the need to further clarify links to the Office of the UN Secretary-General and the Global Education Forum.
 - Maintaining “Education 2030” in the name.

Welcoming remarks and purpose of the meeting

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

- At its first online meeting in April last year, the Steering Committee issued policy recommendations for governments and partners in their COVID-19 education response, around equity and inclusion, greater support to teachers and the protection of education financing, which formed the basis for the 2020 GEM Declaration in October last year, and remain relevant today.
- Throughout the crisis, the international community demonstrated solidarity, responsiveness and eagerness to work together to prevent a generational catastrophe. Moving forward, it is critical to leverage the lessons learned, the innovations made, and the partnerships forged to work better together in building more resilient, inclusive, and sustainable education systems and futures for all.
- It is in this spirit that the dedicated Working Group has been intensively working to develop a proposal for a strengthened global education cooperation mechanism, as mandated by the 2020 GEM, to be agreed upon at the ministerial segment of the 2021 GEM on 13 July 2021.

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

- With the international community approaching the midpoint of the implementation of the SDGs, the need for accelerated action towards the global education goals and targets has never been more critical, in particular in the current post-COVID-19 context.
- The pandemic highlighted the magnitude of challenges the world faces to achieve the Education 2030 Agenda. Many innovative actions have taken place. Still, the most disadvantaged are affected disproportionately, notably when it comes to the digital divide.
- The G7 communiqué and the Declaration on Girls Education made important commitments to continue advancing joint progress

From recovery to acceleration – where do we stand?

Moderated by Prof. Kazuhiro Yoshida, Co-Chair, SDG-Education 2030 Steering Committee (Japan)

Presentation on the state of SDG-Education 2030 in the world and update on the establishment of regional SDG 4 benchmarks

Joint presentation by Ms Silvia Montoya, Director, UNESCO Institute for Statistics, and Mr Manos Antoninis, Director, UNESCO Global Education Monitoring Report

- The Education 2030 Framework for Action called on countries to establish “appropriate intermediate benchmarks (e.g., for 2020 and 2025)” for the SDG indicators, seeing them as “indispensable for addressing the accountability deficit associated with longer-term targets” (§28). More recently, the 2020 GEM Declaration echoed the call for accelerated progress towards the establishment of realistic benchmarks.

- Benchmarks provide focus on a small number of priority policy areas linked to the achievement of SDG4. They will be set at global, regional and national levels for each priority policy area. At the regional level, the benchmarking process aims to empower regional organizations to strengthen peer dialogue processes. Regional benchmarks are sensitive to countries furthest behind and aim to support the improvement of educational outcomes.
- Dashboards and regular monitoring reports will be used to display progress at country and regional levels, which is publicly accessible to ensure transparency and accountability. Countries will be trained to ensure effective use.

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

- The pandemic forced us to think the knowledge and skills that will prepare learners for their future. This notably calls for greater progress on SDG target 4.7, which is at the heart of the future of education.
- Today, for many students, the digital world is actually a real world, notably in OECD countries. At the same time, being a digital native does not go hand in hand with digital skills. Young people have to be trained to navigate the digital world, which notably implies being able to distinguish facts from options.
- This SC can play an important role in pushing the industry towards better connected and more adequate digital tools. Smarter regulations are needed to reconcile ethics, transparency and data protection. In addition, the systems made more open for ideas from outside the education sector.
- Broadening access and availability of open educational resources for all countries is critical, in the COVID-19 context and beyond.

Q&A session

ABEGS - Mr Abdusalam Aljoufi, Advisor

- The establishment of benchmarks has been a long process and it is important to move forward quickly to set national and sub-regional benchmarks.

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

- As part of its regional benchmarking exercise, Europe highlighted the importance of higher education. Future teachers are educated in higher education institutions and higher education institutions are also the place where much of the new knowledge and understanding needed today is developed. Higher education as part of SDG 4 is irrespective of the continent not a luxury but a necessity. Higher education also plays a central role in shaping attitudes and behaviours and the overall building of a culture of democracy and sustainably.

European Commission – Mr Bartek Lessaer, Policy Officer, co-ordinator of the Education and Training Monitor

- The EC welcomes UNESCO’s initiative to ask regional organizations for benchmarking indicators and targets.
- The three indicators currently used in the EU to measure both the SDGs in Europe, as well as to measure the yearly progress of EU Member States in education are:
 1. basic skills acquisition as the share of low achieving 15-year-olds in reading, mathematics and science as measured by the PISA survey;
 2. share of early leavers of education and training;
 3. participation in early childhood education and care.

Responses - Mr Manos Antoninis, Director, UNESCO Global Education Monitoring Report

- National benchmarks are expected to be set by countries based on the targets they already have. It is important to now take action to fulfil the commitment of the Education 2030 Framework for Action, as well as of the 2020 GEM Declaration.
- The TCG opted not to select the higher-education indicator. In the minds of the members of the group, the challenge was that the number of indicators had to be limited. In addition, the rationale was that there is no standard trajectory countries follow as they expand their higher education systems, unlike in primary and secondary education. However this is opening the opportunity for regional organizations to establish regional benchmarks and the seven indicators should be seen as a starting point.

Regional reporting on the advancement of the SDG-Education 2030 Agenda

Europe and North America – *Ms Marie-Anne Persoons, Advisor International Policy, Flemish Department of Education and Training, Strategic Policy Unit*

- The main challenges identified at the GEM 2020 remain, notably those related to the digital divide, equity, equality, inclusion and support for teachers. TVET, adult learning, higher-education and research were the sectors suffering most from the suspension of face-to-face learning.
- A European Commission Communication on Achieving the European Education Area by 2025 was published on 30 September 2020 to be read in connection to the Recovery Plan for Europe that puts strong emphasis on skills development and employment as well as on digitalization and sustainability (“Green Deal”). In response the EU Education Council adopted conclusions in 2020 and 2021 fleshing out several aspects of the EAA.
- On 29 October 2021 the Ministers of Education of the Council of Europe on “The Education response to the Covid-19 crisis” with adoption of a political declaration and (the above-mentioned) Roadmap.

Latin America and the Caribbean - *Mr Camilo Gutierrez, Head of Financing and Planning, Ministry of National Education*

- The most critical challenges of the region are related to access and performance, mitigating learning losses derived from structural inequality, safe return to face-to-face learning, the digital divide, open educational resources and platforms, information systems for education planning, implementation and evaluation, as well as financing.
- Some of the key lessons learned, achievements and effective solutions include:
 - Fast and effective action to guarantee educational continuity and keep school enrolment rates at the pre-pandemic level;
 - Increased appreciation of the role teachers, school leaders and other education workers;
 - Consolidation of the family-school-community relationship;
 - Appreciation of the school's importance as a safe and protective space;
 - Strengthened dialogue and exchange with other sectors, within the region, with international organizations and civil society.

Asia and the Pacific - *Ms Ethel Agnes P Valenzuela, Director, SEAMEO Secretariat*

- The most critical challenges of the region are related to equity in access, quality education and low levels of learning during school closures, as well as the lack of data to measure the impact of the pandemic.
- Key Lessons Learned from the COVID-19 crisis include the need for:
 - cross-sectoral collaboration;
 - up-scaled investment in data;
 - stronger monitoring systems;
 - greater focus on the most vulnerable;
 - strengthened support for teachers;
 - plans for a safe and inclusive school reopening;
 - concrete measures to address the digital gap;
 - maintained or increased education financing.

Africa Region – *Mary Kangethe, Director, Education Programme, Kenyan National Commission*

- In the Africa Region, the digital divide has been a central challenge. Although most countries had ongoing radio, TV and cloud-based education programmes, not all learners could be reached and digitized teaching and learning materials were not readily available. Already prior to the pandemic, teachers were not well prepared to use ICT in teaching and learning, as well as to access online resources and platforms. Children from poor households and those living in remote areas, as well as girls were the most disadvantaged.
- The COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated the digital transformation, creating opportunity for progress. Remote learning, alternative modalities and opportunities to reach all learners have been enhanced and have facilitated progress from no technological infrastructure and lack of access to high-speed broadband and digital devices. Offline and low connectivity solutions to reach the unreached have been sought and implemented.

Arab Region - Mr Abdusalam Aljoufi, Advisor, ABEGS

- The most critical challenges of the region are related to the digital divide, with particularly severe consequences for the poor, the most marginalized, as well as girls. Prolonged school closures further exacerbated existing learning gaps. In addition, very few countries saw the need or had the capacity to support teachers psychosocially and emotionally or to bridge the teachers' digital divide by granting access to ICT tools and accessible connectivity.
- Moving forward, greater efforts are needed to mitigate the digital divide, notably by making use of solutions involving low-cost technology or other methods. Strengthened cooperation between relevant Ministries/sectors for more holistic support to respond to the needs of the most vulnerable students will be essential.

Discussion

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

- Education must remain high up on each and every agenda. Implementing online education will be essential to reach all students and ensure learning continuity. Ensuring safe school reopening must also be made a priority, together with better support for the poorest and most vulnerable students.

Education International – Ms Haldis Holst, Deputy General Secretary

- Throughout the recovery and beyond continued support for teachers will be essential. In this regard, dialogue with teachers remains crucial to determine challenges and needs. While needs vary from region to region, greater psycho-social support is required across all countries.
- Greater attention has to be paid to the most vulnerable learners and those at greatest risk of not returning to school.

Japan – Mr Yoshiaki Ishida, Director for International Strategic Planning, Office of the Director-General for International Affairs, Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology

- Throughout the recovery and beyond, it will be critical to build resilient and inclusive societies to effectively prepare for future crises. Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) plays a central role in this regard, as an educational strategy to equip people with skills to transform actions, behaviours and societies themselves. The Berlin Conference reaffirmed the important role of ESD as a key enabler for all SDGs.

Global Campaign for Education - Mr Refat Sabbah, President

- The definition of learning loss has to be further clarified. Greater focus on addressing psycho-social loss is also important and interconnected with overall learning loss.
- When it comes to indicators, social and academic outcomes have to be connected as they are intrinsically linked.

Saudi Arabia – HRH Princess Haifa Al Mogrin, Ambassador, Permanent Delegate of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to UNESCO

- UNESCO played a central role in leading the reform process for a more efficient GCM, which is a critical endeavour, in particular in the COVID-19 context.
- In the Arab region, a number of priorities remain important such as better support for teachers, greater emphasis on the promotion of skills for work and life—including digital skills and entrepreneurship—, fostering safe and inclusive learning environments, as well as improving early childhood development and care.

The way forward –Towards the 2021 Global Education Meeting (13 July 2021)

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

Highlights of the multi-stakeholder consultation process on the reform of the Global Education Cooperation Mechanism (GCM) and presentation of the final version of the scenario paper

Key messages and take aways

- While the majority of members expressed satisfaction with the balance the proposal strikes between efficiency and inclusiveness in terms of representation on the HLSC, several SC members underscored the importance of ensuring stronger and broader ties with Member States that will not be represented on the body to secure continued engagement and foster ownership of the decisions taken.
- The importance of securing high-level representation was unanimously supported.
- Several members highlighted that moving forward, more work will have to be done to ensure that the structures of accountability of all stakeholders are further clarified.
- The importance of strengthening ties with the regional and country levels was recalled.
- The centrality of developing clear terms of reference for the Sherpa Group was also underscored, together with the need to further clarify links to the Office of the UN Secretary-General and the GEF.
- The importance of maintaining the name “Education 2030” was highlighted.

Norway – Mr Stig Skjerven, Deputy Permanent Delegate, Permanent Delegation of Norway to UNESCO

- The proposal as it stands strikes the right balance between a lean and effective body on the one hand, and the importance of representation and inclusion on the other.
- The HLSC, the Advisory Group to it, the functional areas, and the Inter-Agency Secretariat will allow to strengthen cooperation and coordination to reach SDG 4 targets at the country level.
- Another central element for Norway is that the global apex body will be based on high-level participation.
- Norway is also pleased to see the link to the UN Secretary-General’s Office being strengthened.

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

- Countries should be encouraged to hold preliminary consultations at the regional level to exchange opinions and collect feedback ahead of the meetings of the High-Level SC. This will notably allow to better engage Member States who are not represented on the body and create a stronger sense of responsibility for the implementation of the decisions taken.

Colombia – Mr Camilo Gutierrez, Head of Financing and Planning, Ministry of National Education

- Colombia expressed its appreciation for the thorough, inclusive and consultative process UNESCO led for the elaboration of the proposal, which puts forward a representative and equitable composition of members for the advancement of SDG 4.

European Commission – Ms Annica Floren, Deputy Head of Unit

- The current proposal strikes the right balance between agility and inclusiveness.
- The EC supports the importance of a participatory approach and good collaboration to ensure everyone has a voice.
- The EC fully supports the proposal, including the suggested next steps.

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

- China approves the reform of the SC under the GCM.
- The GCM should play a better role in mobilizing and supporting Member States in the implementation of SDG 4. It should in particular promote and allow for better communication and cooperation between UNESCO and Member States and among Member States.
- Member States should be encouraged and supported to establish similar mechanisms at the country level.
- The GCM should identify priority areas for the implementation of SDG 4.

Japan – Mr Yoshiaki Ishida, Director for International Strategic Planning, Office of the Director-General for International Affairs, Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology

- Japan commends the Co-Chairs of the Working Group, as well as the UNESCO Secretariat for the tremendous work done.
- Japan believes that the strengthened GCM will pave the way forward and supports the proposal.

Saudi Arabia – Mr Sultan Almusallam, Permanent Delegation of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to UNESCO

- Saudi Arabia endorses the proposal and agrees with other Member States about the importance ensuring both agility and inclusion when it comes to membership.

World Bank – Mr Jaime Saavedra, Global Director for Education

- More work will have to be done in the future to ensure that the structures of accountability of all stakeholders are further clarified.
- Exact terms of reference of the Sherpa group have to be elaborated and relationships with other existing entities such as the GEF and the Office of the UN Secretary-General further clarified. Establishing strong linkages will be essential to ensure a strong accountability framework is put in place. This work will have to be carried out in the coming weeks and

months as there is an understanding that there will not be an immediate opportunity to do so in the next years.

GPE – Ms Sarah Beardmore, Senior Strategy and Policy Specialist

- GPE sees this as a critical moment to galvanize on the momentum of the crisis to mobilize high-level political attention and leadership in the field of education.
- GPE welcomes the objective of elevating the SC, as well as of strengthening the tools that it has to amplify existing efforts and the accountability architecture.
- Moving forward, it is essential to secure high-level representation on the groups to allow for stronger leadership. In addition, existing regional and national mechanisms should be further strengthened.

CCNGO – Ms Nelsy Lizarazo, General Coordinator, CLADE

- Consulting regions and countries is essential to ensure an effective process, as well as ownership of decisions made.
- Dialogue at global, regional and national level with civil society is critical.

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

- Countries appear to be side-lined in the proposal when it comes to representation. This could result in the same challenge that exists with the current SC, which is the lack of engagement of countries not represented on the body.
- The new structure must ensure that there is good liaison with the collectivity of countries. The proposal put forward lacks a mechanism for this type.
- It is important to keep the name “Education 2030” as it points towards a broader political framework.
- The so-called “Sherpa Group” is a technical group and should be named as such.
- Further consultation within Group I will be needed to clarify Member States’ position with regard to the proposal to have only two countries per region represented on the High-Level SC.

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

- The CoE stands ready to continue contributing to the work on the GCM going forward.
- In terms of representation, there is one voice that is missing in the proposal, which is a representative from higher education.

OEI – Ms Andres Delich, Deputy Secretary General

- OEI supports the proposal, which responds to the need for greater effectiveness and stronger leadership in education.
- Moving forward, it is important to put additional emphasis on the strengthening of regional efforts.

Closing remarks and way forward

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

- Progress is made and initiatives launched in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, but they have not eradicated key challenges. Despite the innovations being made, the most vulnerable and disadvantaged continue to suffer most. However, there is enormous potential to make use of the creativity and transformation witnessed in the COVID-19 context to accelerate progress towards the achievement of the Education 2030 Agenda. Moving forward, it is more than ever essential to put equity and inclusion at the centre of joint efforts and the reform of the GCM provides a strong framework to do so.
- In the next stage, efforts will have to focus on implementing and translating the Working Group's proposal into an operational reality. This will require additional consultations and continued cooperation over the next months.

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

- Over the past years, the Committee produced timely and important policy recommendations at a critical time, notably in the context of the 2019 HLPF which reviewed progress on SDG 4, as well as in the context of the COVID-19 emergency. The Steering Committee's reflections, contributions and lessons learned also fed into the Working Group's proposal for a strengthened, more effective global education cooperation mechanism.
- In this regard, the SC members have been invited to rally their respective regions and constituencies behind the Working Group's proposal, which reflects the consolidation of extensive consultations and our collective commitment to translate the proposal into a concrete reality.