

UNESCO Contribution to the 2020 HLPF thematic review, 7-16 July 2020

I. Accelerating action on SDG4 and across the SDGs

The momentum for education has never been stronger. Global challenges – such as **the current health pandemic or climate change** –require an **urgent shift in our lifestyles and a rapid transformation of the way we think, learn and act**. In a complex and rapidly changing world, education is more than ever central to all 17 SDGs. **Education is both a driver of inclusion and empowerment, as well as a generator of knowledge to address the challenges of our time.**

Yet, although we are entering the last decade of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the world is behind on its commitments, including in reaching the education goal. Even though more children are starting school, one in six aged 6-17 will still be excluded by 2030. Of those who are enrolled, many are not learning or will drop out early. By 2030, when all children should be in school, four in ten young people will still not complete secondary education.

The COVID-19 pandemic disrupts education of millions and raises the immediate challenge of ensuring continuity and equity of education through alternative means. As of 18 March, almost 900 million children and youth - half the world's student population –is not attending schools and universities due to closures to contain the pandemic. Even when temporary, school closures carry high social and economic costs. This situation puts immense pressure on governments to provide open, distance and on-line learning responses, unevenly developed within and across countries, which tends to disadvantage vulnerable and marginalized children and youth. The context calls for resolute international cooperation to share tools and experiences and build capacity to respond to the crisis.

It is clear that we can raise up to the learning challenge only through collective and coordinated action, around clear priorities and drawing on multidisciplinary perspectives, with education at the heart of the strategy to accelerate progress across the SDGs, leading to more sustainable societies.

Acceleration Strategy 1. Inclusion and equity in education: leaving no one behind

- We need further engagement of all Member States in supporting global efforts to ensure that **no one is left behind**, by fostering a culture of inclusion in and throughout education systems, to reach all learners, from the early years and **prioritizing the most disadvantaged and vulnerable**, in order to enable all to complete the full education cycle.
- A renewed global drive is necessary to accelerate action for girls' and women's education. We need to galvanize cooperation for gender equality in and through education with **better-quality learning opportunities**, particularly in STEM, to empower all girls and women. We also need **better legal, policy and planning frameworks** to advance rights. Cooperation is needed across a wide range of partners to tackle harmful social norms and attitudes that underlie exclusion in education.

- Increased emphasis should be given to including vulnerable migrants, **refugees and internally displaced people** in national education systems and ensuring continuity of education in conflict and crisis-affected situations.

Acceleration Strategy 2. Transformative power of education: quality, relevance and impact for the SDGs

- Given teachers' critical role in improving education quality and learning outcomes, countries need to invest more in increasing the supply of **qualified teachers**, strengthening support for teacher training and professional development, as well as ensuring decent working conditions to bridge the gap of 69 million teachers needed to achieve the goal.
- We will not succeed if we do not ensure that youth are **learning the skills** they need for the ever-shifting world of work. Governments need to increase adaptability of education and training systems to improve **youth employability** and equip young people and adults with 21st century skills, which have to be **transferable**, and in a **lifelong perspective**.
- Countries must **transform teaching and learning** to make education relevant and geared to building more sustainable and just societies and promoting well-being. Progress towards all the SDGs can be accelerated if students are empowered with the knowledge, skills and values to take on active, responsible and effective roles to address the social, cultural, environmental and economic challenges of our times, to take informed decisions and become responsible global citizens. To this end, Education for Sustainable Development, Global Citizenship, as well as for health and well-being should be mainstreamed in learning programmes.
- Education systems must be more flexible and innovative to **ensure that all learners have access to relevant and responsive digital learning environments** - regardless of learners' disabilities, social or economic status, or geographic location. The current **global COVID-19 pandemic** is testing national capacities to shift to large-scale distance learning to ensure continuity of schooling. It has revealed gaps in knowledge about available tools, lack of teacher preparation, connectivity issues and disparities in access, with students from more disadvantaged and vulnerable backgrounds most at risk of missing out, notably due to uneven access to IT infrastructures and tools, threatening the right to education.

Acceleration Strategy 3. Greater investment in education and better data to inform action

- **Public financing is critical to achieving SDG4.** Governments must increase domestic financing to commit at least 15% to 20% of public expenditure to education, notably through the broadening of the tax base, tax reform, anti-corruption measures, as well as by tackling illicit financial flows.
- **International financing must prioritize investing in education to ensure predictable, sustainable, efficient, and coherent funding sources to reach the SDG4.** International financing must increase to meet the benchmark of 0.7 % of GNP and allocate at least 10% of that to education, matching development assistance with countries farthest behind, and strengthening coordination among actors. Education's share in humanitarian aid must be

increased.

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

II. The role of culture in accelerating the SDGs

Culture is key for addressing global challenges, including global pandemics, such as COVID-19, to ensure that emergency health responses are effective and responsive to local contexts, but it is also a sector that is particularly affected by this crisis. It is also a resource which can help people, subject to confinement, deal with the crisis. Culture is also pervasive across all 17 SDGs – from quality education, to social inclusion and resilience, economic growth and ecological transition. It helps carve context-relevant sustainable solutions. It fosters engagement and participation. Enhancing linkages between culture and the SDGs accelerate the delivery of the 2030 Agenda. The transformative role of culture should therefore be proactively mainstreamed in public policies across all policy areas to ensure the effectiveness and sustainability of international, national and local efforts towards the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

Action points that HLPF could address in its Declaration

- Promoting the appreciation of cultural diversity as a positive resource and a people-centred approach for enlarging people's choices, in order to strengthen participation, inclusion and reinforce resilience, in a context of increasing inequalities, uncertainty and fragmentation of societies that undermine human rights, peace and stability.
- Strengthening the nexus between culture and education for people to be equipped with the necessary skills to make positive change, notably through heritage education, arts education, the safeguarding of cultural heritage, the promotion of intercultural and intergenerational dialogue and multilingualism.
- Enhancing culture as a capital to expand the full potential of the creative economy, innovation and creativity to reduce poverty and inequality, while ensuring that no one is left behind, in particular women and girls, minorities and youth.
- Maximizing traditional knowledge and practices to inform climate mitigation and adaptation by promoting human-centered, low-carbon economic and social models through the integration of culture in climate action strategies, recognizing the linkages between nature and culture, cultural diversity and biological diversity, people and their environment, as fundamental prerequisites to preserve livelihoods and the planet, and devise more sustainable development patterns.
- Measuring and monitoring culture's enabling contribution to national and local implementation of the 2030 Agenda, notably through thematic indicators on the impact of culture on development, across all SDGs and targets, supporting evidence base, informing policy-making and monitoring progress.

III. Inclusion, Rights and Open Access to Science

Key policies and measures to ensure “accelerated action and transformative pathways”

- Reinforce the human rights anchoring of actions to address issues related to stigma and discrimination related to COVID-19 and to implement Agenda 2030. Despite the explicit normative entrenchment of the Agenda, there remain areas where the articulation with human rights remains weak. Science is one of them. A truly transformative pathway would be one where human rights standards and principles are the cornerstone for developing actions in relation to all science and health related targets. This includes advocating for vaccines and medicines to fight global pandemics, such as COVID-19, to be made accessible to all as a fundamental component of right to health.
- Increase access to information and knowledge about global health issues, such as COVID-19, through open access to science and research and by working to ensure an independent press to ensure free flow of quality and reliable information as a means of combatting fake news, and ensuring that those without digital access can be provided with the information through the radio or other means of communication.
- Harness technology, including Artificial Intelligence, to facilitate access to data, knowledge and information about the pandemic and to mobilize actors to tackle, mitigate and eradicate global pandemics, such as COVID-19, and to accelerate the achievement of the SDGs.
- Accelerating investments in ocean science, increasing scientific and technical capacity globally for observing, assessing and delivering solutions for decision-makers to reverse the decline in ocean health and catalyze new opportunities for sustainable ocean uses, through the United Nations Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development (2021-2030).