

The SDG4-Education 2030 High-Level Steering Committee's contribution to the 2024 High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development

*Reinforcing the 2030 Agenda and eradicating poverty in times of multiple crises:
the effective delivery of sustainable, resilient and innovative solutions
with a focus on SDGs 1 (no poverty), 2 (zero hunger), 13 (climate action),
16 (peace, justice and strong institutions), 17 (partnerships for the goals)*

1. Education drives progress across the Sustainable Development Goals

Education is a fundamental human right, a global public good and a state responsibility that enables and advances all other human rights.ⁱ The vision of the Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4 – “ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all”) is to transform lives through education, recognizing the critical role of education as the main driver of development and thus achieving all SDGs.

Education is vital to humanity's and the planet's sustainable future. It drives every aspect of a country's progress by equipping all learners with values, knowledge, skills and competencies. It helps eradicate poverty; reduce inequalities; improve health and wellbeing; enhance productivity and decent employment; protect and promote cultural diversity; build peace and security; and sustain the environment for future generations.

Education's relevance and contributions to the SDGs under review of the 2024 HLPF are as followsⁱⁱ:

- **SDG 1**

Education is a critical catalyst for lifting people out of poverty and preventing the intergenerational transmission of poverty by providing each individual with the skills and knowledge needed to secure decent employment, upskill and reskill to meet the evolving labour market needs, and promote financial literacy and entrepreneurship. Gender disparities, particularly in education, contribute to the persistence of poverty: removing barriers to girls' education and promoting gender equality in and through education is crucial for poverty reduction efforts. An educated population can make informed decisions and creative solutions for themselves as well as their families and communities, by contributing to equal rights, economic and natural resources and to granting basic services for all people, including ownership and control over land and property, inheritance, appropriate new technologies and financial services.ⁱⁱⁱ

- **SDG 2**

Education is key to acquire the necessary knowledge to adopt sustainable approaches that increase agricultural production and the income of small farmers, especially women and indigenous peoples, while respecting the environment, the biodiversity and the resources of each region. Education is a powerful tool for the promotion of sustainable agriculture and food systems, while increasing awareness about food security, nutrition and health, as well as how food can affect human health and well-being. Adequate and up-to-date knowledge also helps to anticipate and prevent problems potentially causing famines, such as drought, floods and other disasters.^{iv} Moreover, schools play a key role in providing nutritious food and important social safety nets to the most vulnerable, through school feeding programmes and school meals, thereby delivering significant development gains related to poverty, hunger and WASH.^v

- **SDG 13**

Greening education empowers every learner to be climate-literate and climate-ready with knowledge, skills, values and attitudes to tackle climate change and promote sustainable development. This includes strengthening human and institutional capacity on mitigation,

adaptation and resilience through reducing the impact of climate change through effective education sector planning, management and implementation, as well as encouraging innovative solutions towards green future.^{vi} Climate-smart education systems build the resilience of learners and education infrastructure to withstand climate shocks.

- **SDG 16**

Equitable and inclusive education for all reduces inequalities, promotes democracy and peace, and fosters a culture of diversity, respect for human rights and the rule of law. Education develops socio-emotional and civic skills, including digital literacy, towards sustainable development, non-violence and lasting peace. Safe, inclusive education for all thus helps prevent and address violence against children in and through education. Moreover, in the context of increased exposure to misinformation, media literacy is key to peace and justice. In educated societies, fundamental freedoms and rights, including public free access to information, are more likely to be protected.^{vii}

- **SDG 17**

Quality education and lifelong learning raise awareness about sustainable development and enable engagement with organizations and individuals working on various topics related to SDGs. Improving education and skills enhances research and data, decision-making, innovation, resource allocation and partnerships for achieving sustainable development goals. International support, effective and targeted capacity-development activities, including through North-South, South-South and triangular cooperation, can enable developing countries to implement national plans related to all SDGs.^{viii}

Education is *the* critical enabler of progress across the full spectrum of SDGs. However, the rising number of crises around the world has impacted development and investment in education and lifelong learning globally. Recent UNESCO figures show an annual financing gap close to US\$ 100 billion for low- and lower-middle-income countries to meet their national SDG 4 education targets. This financing gap limits the ability of the education sector to invest in transformative actions that would also enable accelerated progress towards SDGs 1, 2, 13, 16 and 17, including programmes such as school meals; greening and climate change education; human rights and peace education; school safety and community resilience programmes; and science, technology, engineering and mathematics education (STEM).

2. Sustainable, resilient and innovative solutions contributing to SDG 1, 2, 13, 16 and 17

- **SDG 1**

Education is the key and a powerful tool for breaking the cycle of poverty and eliminating gender and social inequalities, buffering against poverty's impacts and providing individuals with the knowledge, skills and competencies needed to access better job opportunities and participate in their communities. However, a significant challenge remains, as around 250 million children and youth are out of school; an estimated 763 million people worldwide lack basic literacy and numeracy skills, two-thirds of whom are women, and 76 per cent reside in just 30 countries. In response, the [Global Alliance for Literacy](#)^{ix} was established to assist these countries with literacy policy and programme development, alongside capacity-building efforts, focusing on marginalized groups. The alliance launched several initiatives, including enhancing digital literacy skills among educators, fostering family and intergenerational literacy, and enabling countries to assess adult literacy learning outcomes. The [UIL Learning Hub](#)^x, a multimedia learning platform, provides lifelong learning capacity-building to more than 1,500 stakeholders.

Targeting persistent gender-based barriers and bottlenecks that prevent learners from fulfilling their potential, the [Global Platform for Gender Equality and Girls' and Women's Empowerment in and through Education](#) aims to drive transformative leadership, accountability, innovation, data and financing to advance gender equality in and through education. The Global Platform leverages

the cross-sectoral and intergenerational spirit of the Transforming Education Summit, bringing together government representatives, education leaders and champions, and a broad array of stakeholders and activists.

- **SDG 2**

School health and nutrition programmes promote learners' physical and mental well-being, essential for their full engagement in learning. The school infrastructure, including access to clean water, sanitation and electricity, alongside quality employment conditions for teachers, is vital for maintaining both learner and teacher well-being, attracting and retaining educators, and ensuring quality education delivery. Moreover, school meal programmes are a powerful, cost-effective means to provide vulnerable children with nutritious meals, increase their school attendance and retention and support their families and communities. The [School Meals Coalition](#)^{xi} drives actions to improve and scale up school meal programmes to ensure that every child has the opportunity to receive a healthy, nutritious meal in school by 2030.

- **SDG 13**

The [Greening Education Partnership \(GEP\)](#)^{xii} is a global initiative that fosters collaboration and synergies to prepare every learner to acquire the knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes to tackle climate change and promote sustainable development—engaging over 1,100 organizations and 82 Member States in creating solutions for climate challenges. The first annual meeting held during the COP28 culminated with the [Declaration on the Common Agenda for Education and Climate Change](#)^{xiii} endorsed by 42 founding partner countries, reaffirming their dedication to transforming education for a sustainable future. The GEP developed two technical documents to guide the integration of climate change into education and set standards for climate-ready schools: the [Greening Curriculum Guidance](#)^{xiv} and the [Green School Quality Standard](#).^{xv} The [UNESCO Global Network of Learning Cities](#)^{xvi} contributes to the GEP by actively implementing innovative lifelong learning policies and programmes for climate action.

An additional year of education reflects a 35% increase in green voting,^{xvii} contributing to the achievement of SDG 13. Education for the environment, often referred to as the Blue and Green Curriculum, is increasingly integrated into curriculum transformation and [Climate COPs](#)^{xviii} have emerged as crucial platforms for amplifying the critical role of education in addressing the climate crisis. Following [COP26](#)^{xix}, UNESCO and partners have advanced educational reforms for climate readiness, marked by a landmark ministerial session where 27 countries pledged to increase cross-sectoral collaboration on climate action. Youth activism at the Milano Conference and [COP27](#)^{xx} further energized this movement and the Greening Education Hub and the RewirED Summit at [COP28](#) hosted significant discussions among countries,^{xxi} including the launch of a \$70 million programme by the Green Climate Fund and the Global Partnership for Education for climate adaptation in the education sector (BRACE).

- **SDG 16**

At the 42nd Session of the UNESCO General Conference in November 2023, all 194 UNESCO Member States adopted the revised [UNESCO Recommendation on Education for Peace, Human Rights and Sustainable Development](#) as the only global standard-setting instrument outlining how education can and should contribute to bringing about lasting peace and foster human development. In translating this recommendation into practice, [Global Citizenship Education](#)^{xxii} builds a sense of belonging to a common humanity, nurtures intercultural understanding, social justice, gender equality and environmental protection and helps learners become responsible and active global citizens. On the other hand, the [Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack](#)^{xxiii} is an inter-agency coalition formed in 2010 to address the problem of targeted attacks on education during armed conflict while the 2015 [Safe Schools Declaration](#)^{xxiv} expresses an inter-governmental political commitment to protect students, teachers, schools and universities from

the worst effects of armed conflict. Moreover, [Safe to Learn](#) is a global initiative working to end violence in, around and through schools to ensure every child has access to safe and inclusive learning environments.

- **SDG 17**

The [Global Education Coalition](#)^{xxv}, launched by UNESCO in March 2020, exemplifies a collaborative effort to support the resilience of education systems in different crisis situations and advance the transformation of education. The Coalition unites over 210 members from various sectors, including UN organizations, civil society, academia and the private sector, who work together to provide expertise, resources and capacity-building support to countries in crisis and beyond. Today, the Coalition collaborates around five areas with specific targets including: 1 million teachers trained, 10 million youth acquiring skills for employment, and supporting gender mainstreaming, STEM learning and digital transformation in education. Likewise, the [Global Campaign of Education](#), a collective movement sustained by civil society organizations, teachers' unions and students' federations, has also been contributing to the achievement of this objective.

By mobilizing research and fostering cross-sector partnerships, higher education institutions enhance collaboration among academia, government, NGOs and the private sector, particularly in the Global South. This collaborative effort supports education, research and community engagement, driving innovation and sharing knowledge and solutions to achieve SDGs. Universities are bolstering collaboration across borders through transnational networks to address interdisciplinary challenges with practical solutions. In preparing the workforce for future jobs, higher education is adapting to the evolving employment landscape influenced by Industry 4.0, artificial intelligence and emerging technologies. Furthermore, leveraging the research function, higher education emphasizes evidence-based decision-making in science, technology and innovation. Universities have developed AI solutions for mapping poverty areas, supporting aid allocation, predicting disasters and reducing exposure to disasters, thus informing national policy decisions for poverty prevention and enabling the private sector to launch responsive products, contributing to poverty reduction and prevention efforts.

3. Actions most urgently needed to effectively deliver sustainable, resilient and innovative solutions to eradicate poverty and reinforce the 2030 Agenda

- **Invest more, more equitably and efficiently in education:** Education is the best long-term investment for humanity's sustainable future, providing a path out of poverty and inequalities. Strong education systems with sufficient resources have the best chance to serve the marginalised and underprivileged. Low- and lower-middle-income countries are facing the annual financing gap of \$97 billion to achieve their national education targets while insecurity, conflicts, climate change, inflation and rising food prices are increasing pressure on education systems. Various global emergencies are also squeezing the level of development aid, despite education's critical contribution to the tackling of complex, inter-connected global crises. Strengthening the link between education sector planning and the budget cycle can improve service delivery for millions of learners worldwide and gender-responsive budgeting, which in turn can reduce gender and other social disparities and inequalities. States as the guarantors of the right to education are urged to scale up whole-of-government efforts to widen fiscal space and free up more resources for education, including via tax reforms and international tax cooperation, innovative financing, debt relief and public-private cooperation.
- **Ensure inclusive, safe, healthy and stimulating learning environments** that enable all learners, teachers and other education personnel to achieve their full potential and physical, mental and emotional well-being, prioritizing the most vulnerable, marginalized and furthest behind, including those affected by crises and emergencies. Building climate-smart education systems will make

schools safer and greener and reduce impacts of climate-induced disasters. Education must be conceived as a holistic, lifelong and whole-of-society endeavour. The right to education must begin with laying a strong foundation that begins with comprehensive early childhood care and education, followed by foundational learning, as part of inclusive lifelong learning for all. Equally important are the provision of flexible learning pathways, as well as the recognition of the knowledge, skills and competencies acquired through non-formal and informal education. These are essential investments to reduce poverty and violence and improve decent employment, health and gender equality.

- **Harness the power of the digital revolution to provide quality education** as a public good and a human right, with a particular focus on the most marginalised. In so doing, three ‘keys’ of digital learning should be used to unlock its potential: connectivity, capacities and content. Universal access to broadband connectivity for teachers, students, schools and other educational environments is essential. The capacity of teachers, learners and other education stakeholders to use digital technology to improve learning must be strengthened. High-quality, curriculum-relevant digital teaching and learning content must be made available to all students, learners, teachers and caregivers through digital learning platforms. The digital transformation of education to benefit all learners and contribute to the betterment of humanity.
- **Mainstream education for sustainable development to transform education and build resilience against crises:** The ultimate purpose of education is to prepare learners for life. To this end, knowledge, skills, values and action for just, peaceful and sustainable economies and societies are critical. In an increasingly complex and interconnected world facing existential threats such as climate change, growing inequalities and emergencies, education should equip individuals with the knowledge, skills and values necessary to become active agents of change for the green transition and sustainable development of our societies. Transformative green skills will be developed through quality education from early childhood and building on foundational learning. Education helps build resilience, innovation and digital skills. As climate change and natural disasters are progressively worsening, societies and education systems need to be resilient and prepared for recurring crises.
- **Engage and empower youth as agents of change to deliver sustainable, resilient and innovative solutions to multiple crises:** Youth are the vibrant force ready to redefine innovation. By engaging youth in all its diversity and expertise, especially those from historically marginalized groups, in policy and decision-making, they can lead the change, crafting solutions that resonate with their communities in a way that is inclusive, impactful and deeply rooted in local needs.
- **Transform the teaching profession and prioritize investment for teachers.** Teachers are the backbone of all good education systems. To fulfil their roles and help learners gain the knowledge, skills and competencies needed in today’s world, they have to be qualified, professionally trained, motivated and well-supported as recommended by the [United Nations Secretary-General’s High-Level Panel on the Teaching Profession](#).

4. The SDG4 High-Level Steering Committee’s follow-up to the implementation of the Political Declaration of the 2023 SDG Summit

In the face of the multiple crises, an urgent and profound change of course in global development is needed and quality education holds the key to fostering the knowledge, skills and attitudes that contribute to the peaceful, democratic, inclusive and sustainable futures of humanity and the planet. In pursuit of the Political Declaration of the SDG Summit, the [SDG4 High-Level Steering Committee](#)^{xxvi} (HLSC), co-chaired by the Director-General of UNESCO and the President of Chile, continues to champion education and lifelong learning at the global and regional levels.

As mandated by the UN Secretary-General, the HLSC leads the follow-up of the 2022 Transforming Education Summit by (1) supporting and monitoring the translation of country commitments into actions; (2) ensuring that education transformation is a key component of the Summit of the Future, (3) upholding the global movement for transforming education; (4) transforming education financing; and (5) promoting the Global Initiatives that emerged from the Transforming Education Summit. In particular, the HLSC requested the UNESCO-led Inter-Agency Secretariat to develop a [Dashboard of Country Commitments and Actions to Transform Education](#)^{xxvii} as a monitoring and accountability tool for the implementation of commitments made by 143 countries through their national statements of commitment.

In line with Paragraph 38 (d) of the Political Declaration of the 2023 SDG Summit, the HLSC has notably intensified its political advocacy at the domestic and international levels, with a view to increasing investment in inclusive and equitable quality education and life-long learning opportunities for all^{xxviii}.

As for domestic financing, the HLSC initiated a periodic strategic dialogue of Ministers of Finance and Ministers of Education at the April 2023 World Bank and IMF Spring Meetings, with a second iteration at the World Bank and IMF Annual Meeting in October 2023 in Marrakech.

Moreover, the HLSC led in-depth reflections on the education finance architecture, with a view to strengthening the international and multilateral education financing systems as an essential step in addressing the numerous challenges faced by the world and the education sector today. At its November 2023 Leaders meeting, the HLSC adopted three targeted proposals for implementation:

1. develop and promote a common narrative across multilateral agencies/funds on education finance to: a) address the role of education as a foundational investment not only in economic development but as an enabler of broader sustainable development; b) build on the thematic priorities from the 2022 Transforming Education Summit to support global-level coordination and cross-sector resource mobilization; c) promote the collective role and contribution of multilateral agencies/funds in financing education in support of government priorities.
2. pursue innovative financing instruments and approaches for the education sector, considering country-level macro-economic conditions, with appropriate safeguards and upholding education as a human right, by: a) accelerating the roll-out and scale-up of existing financing mechanisms, and b) actively exploring new potential financing mechanisms based on the experience of other sectors to unlock additional financing for education.
3. strengthen the adherence to a government-led, inclusive strategic financing and sector planning dialogue at country level as the principal alignment mechanism for all multilateral agencies/funds and other financing partners.

Investing in education unleashes effective delivery of sustainable, resilient and innovative solutions to the multiple crises and thus reinforce the 2030 Agenda.

5. Key messages for inclusion into the Political Declaration of the 2024 HLPF

Education is a fundamental human right. Quality education and lifelong learning provides individuals with knowledge, skills, and values to lead a meaningful and productive life, and thus it is essential for their development, empowerment and wellbeing.

Education is also a global public good and drives progress across all Sustainable Development Goals. Investing more, more equitably and more efficiently in education can transform the future of humanity and the planet. Education must therefore feature prominently in the Pact for the Future.

Education is the foundation for the three pillars of the United Nations – development, peace and security, and human rights. It enables and accelerates progress across all Sustainable Development Goals by enhancing productivity and employment, driving economic prosperity, raising all people out of poverty, reducing inequalities, promoting gender equality and cultural diversity, and improving health and wellbeing. Education promotes climate awareness, sustainable practices and climate change mitigation and adaptation strategies.

Recognizing education as a critical catalytic investment in society’s and the planet’s sustainable future and the States as duty-bearers of this right, we encourage all Member States to scale up whole-of-government efforts to widen fiscal space and free more resources for education, including via tax reforms and international tax cooperation, innovative financing, debt relief and public-private cooperation. We also urge all donors and international financial institutions to scale up funding for long-term investments in education and to support countries in enhancing their own domestic resource mobilization capacity to widen fiscal space to adequately fund public education.

We reaffirm that equitable and inclusive education and lifelong learning for all can help reduce inequalities and promote peace, respect for human rights and the rule of law by challenging prejudice and violent extremist narratives; promote cultural diversity and gender equality; and foster critical thinking, respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, non-discrimination and mutual understanding. In this regard, we welcome the 2023 revised UNESCO Recommendation on Education for Peace, Human Rights and Sustainable Development and invite countries to apply its provisions.

We value young people and students as rights-holders as well as critical agents of change for realizing sustainable development, peace and security, and human rights. We are concerned about their well-being and development, as well as the challenge of generating decent work and quality employment for young persons. Education is the primary source of hope and solutions for young persons and future generations to lead dignified and fulfilled lives. Education provides individuals with the skills and knowledge to participate meaningfully in society and the workforce, fostering entrepreneurship and innovation.

To effectively deliver on our global and national commitments towards the 2030 Agenda, global governance structures must become more responsive to the multiple crises the world faces today by improving their alignment with country priorities and strengthening the coordination, effectiveness and efficiency of multilateral financing efforts, including the financing of education.

ⁱ United Nations High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development. *SDG4-Education 2030 High-Level Steering Committee* <https://hlpf.un.org/inputs/sdg4-education-2030-high-level-steering-committee-1> (Accessed 2 February 2024.)

ⁱⁱ UNESCO. Sustainable Development Goals – Resources for educators. [Sustainable Development Goals - Resources for educators \(unesco.org\)](https://www.unesco.org/en/sustainable-development-goals/resources-for-educators); NORRAG. https://lookerstudio.google.com/reporting/a43373c4-ee5c-45fb-9d7d-3cd493761539/page/p_i6iqcv9h5c (Accessed 2 February 2024.)

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000247444>

^{iv} Ibid.

^v unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000381965/PDF/381965eng.pdf.multi

^{vi} Ibid.

^{vii} Ibid.

^{viii} Ibid.

^{ix} <https://www.uil.unesco.org/en/literacy/global-alliance>

^x <https://www.uil.unesco.org/en/learning-hub>

^{xi} <https://schoolmealscoalition.org/>

^{xii} <https://www.unesco.org/en/sustainable-development/education/greening-future>

^{xiii} UNESCO. *Declaration on the Common Agenda for Education and Climate Change at COP28*.

<https://www.unesco.org/sites/default/files/medias/fichiers/2023/12/Declaration-on-education-and-climate-change-en.pdf> (Accessed 2 February 2024.)

^{xiv} <https://www.unesco.org/en/education-sustainable-development/greening-future/curriculum>

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- ^{xv} UNESCO. *Greening every school UNESCO Quality Standard on Green Schools (concept note)*. https://www.unesco.org/sites/default/files/medias/fichiers/2023/06/greening-every-school-cn-en_0.pdf. (Accessed 2 February 2024.)
- ^{xvi} <https://www.uil.unesco.org/en/learning-cities>
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- ^{xviii} <https://unfccc.int/process/bodies/supreme-bodies/conference-of-the-parties-cop>
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- ^{xxii} <https://www.un.org/en/academic-impact/page/global-citizenship-education>
- ^{xxiii} <https://protectingeducation.org/>
- ^{xxiv} <https://ssd.protectingeducation.org/>
- ^{xxv} <https://www.unesco.org/en/global-education-coalition>
- ^{xxvi} <https://www.unesco.org/sdg4education2030/en/high-level-steering-committee>
- ^{xxvii} <https://www.unesco.org/sdg4education2030/en/knowledge-hub/dashboard>
- ^{xxviii} “We will continue increasing investment in inclusive and equitable quality education and life-long learning opportunities for all, including early childhood education, youth and adult literacy programmes and initiatives, digital education, cultural education, education for sustainable development, digital technologies for education, skills enhancement, affordable higher education and vocational training, education in emergencies and teachers’ continuous professional development. We recognize that early childhood education and care can generate substantial benefits for children. We will address barriers to girls’ education, gender and disability gaps and promote gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls in and through education and safe, healthy and stimulating learning environments that enable all learners to achieve their full potential and physical, mental and emotional well-being. We also take note of the 2022 United Nations Transforming Education Summit.”