



The SDG-Education 2030 Steering Committee's Statement to Ministerial Meeting on Higher Education, on the occasion of the 40th session of the UNESCO General Conference

13 November 2019

Four years since the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, we remain convinced that equitable and inclusive quality education and lifelong learning holds the key to achieving this universal and transformative Agenda to shift the world onto a sustainable and resilient path, socially, environmentally and economically.

Despite sterling efforts of governments and partners to advance this transformative vision of education, progress on SDG 4 is falling far short of what is needed to achieve its targets by 2030.

On current trends, 225 million children between 6 and 17 years of age will be out of school in 2030, representing a mere 14% decrease from 2017ⁱ. Currently, only half of youth complete secondary school, and 6 out of 10 children and adolescents worldwide do not achieve minimum proficiency in reading and mathematics. Over 750 million adults still cannot read and write.

Participation at tertiary level remains vastly unequal within and across countries: 20% of the world's richest 25 to 29 year olds are completing 4 years of higher education while less than 1% of the poorest can do soⁱⁱ.

It is clear from all these facts that we face a learning crisis that threatens the entire 2030 Agenda.

Accordingly, the SDG-Education 2030 Steering Committee calls for a bolder policy focus and interventions to address inclusion not least for refugees and displaced people, greater attention to teacher recruitment and training, improving the relevance and quality of learning and accelerating gender equality at all levels of education. This requires stronger capacity to implement reforms, investment in data to inform action, increased mobilization of domestic financing and coordinated international cooperation to fill the financing gap and assurance of commitments to free public education.

The Steering Committee commends the resolve of the higher education community gathered at UNESCO today to enhance inclusion, equity and mobility in higher education, including through leveraging the potential of digital technologies, research and innovation. Higher education is critical for achieving all the SDGs and ensuring environmental sustainability, prosperity and social justice and inclusion. Furthermore, higher education is fundamental for improving teacher training and promoting lifelong learning. We call for the adoption and implementation of the Global Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education, which marks a milestone in international cooperation to facilitate the fair and transparent recognition of qualifications and the mobility of students, faculty, and researchers. We also encourage commitment to a culture of quality assurance and respect for academic freedom, professional and institutional autonomy, and other principles and standards related to higher educationⁱⁱⁱ.

The Steering Committee, as a unique platform for universal cooperation and coordination on SDG 4, today calls for political engagement at the highest level, stronger collective action and reinforced partnerships to realize our shared commitments and responsibility.

ⁱ UNESCO Institute for Statistics and Global Education Monitoring Report Team. (2019). *Meeting commitments: are countries on track to achieve SDG 4?*. Paris: UNESCO.

ⁱⁱ UNESCO. (2016). *Global Education Monitoring Report. Education for people and planet: Creating sustainable futures for all*. Paris: UNESCO.

ⁱⁱⁱ In particular, the UNESCO Recommendation concerning the Status of Higher-Education Teaching Personnel (1997) and the UNESCO Recommendation on Science and Scientific Researchers (2017).