

Learning from peers: regional education strategies and SDG 4 Benchmarking indicators and sharing policy responses

A summary of the high-level dialogue with regional education organisations
Webinar, 26 January 2021

The Global Education Monitoring (GEM) Report and the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS) organised the high-level dialogue, *“Learning from peers: regional education strategies – Benchmarking indicators and sharing policy responses”*, with education leads from 25 regional organizations from Africa, the Arab States, Asia and the Pacific, Europe, and Latin America and the Caribbean. Selected UNESCO, international and regional organization representatives participated as observers.

The objective was to examine two key developments in monitoring progress towards SDG 4 from a quantitative and a qualitative perspective, respectively:

1. country and regional [benchmarks](#) and a road map for action; and
2. [tools](#) to help monitor the implementation of national strategies to achieve SDG 4 and opportunities to use and develop these resources.

The event aimed at improving coordination between the convening organizations and regional organizations around the benchmarks and tools presented, driving momentum towards the establishment of benchmarks prior to the 2021 Global Education Meeting and reaffirming the importance of policy dialogue amongst peers.

The session was divided into three thematic presentations and discussions, where selected participants were invited to share their experiences through brief interventions. This document presents a summary of these discussions.

Session 1: Regional benchmarks for monitoring SDG 4 progress

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). However, countries have not yet translated the global targets into national ones. The main objective of benchmarks is to draw attention to data gaps and introduce a coordinated mechanism to flag country progress.

In an attempt to fill this gap, the 6th meeting of the Technical Cooperation Group (TCG) on SDG 4 indicators in 2019 endorsed and proposed seven indicators that could be benchmarked:

- 4.1.1 Minimum learning proficiency in reading and maths
- 4.1.2 Completion rate
- 4.1.4 Out-of-school rate
- 4.2.2 Participation rate one year before primary
- 4.c.1 Trained teachers
- Education expenditure as share of GDP/total expenditure
- Equity indicator (to be defined)

The effectiveness of the process to set, monitor and act on benchmarks rests on two processes:

- *Technical process*: There are two main ways to select benchmarks in a fair, simple and transparent way. One approach is to set a common regional minimum benchmark for all

countries: each country in a region has the same benchmark, which is equal to the feasible progress an indicative country in the region lagging behind is expected to make. The second approach is to set a different benchmark for each country based on its initial value and a faster than average rate of observed progress: when all country-specific benchmarks are added up, an implicit regional target 'benchmark' also emerges, which is higher than the first approach. Countries can also decide to set a more ambitious benchmark than that described above.

- *Political process*: Setting benchmarks as requested by the Framework for Action cannot be done at global level, given the very large differences in starting points between countries. Benchmarks need to be feasible and based on national ownership. Regional organizations have a critical role in leading the process to agree on benchmarks at regional or sub-regional level. The active participation of regional organizations is essential to achieve alignment between global and regional education agendas and to avoid duplication.

The UIS team will provide technical support and guidance to regional organizations throughout the benchmarking process. This [webpage](#) outlines key regional milestones towards the next Global Education Meeting in 2021, where the benchmarks will be presented to the international community.

Summary of interventions provided by selected regional organization representatives

African Union (AU): The AU has partnered with the UIS in bringing the African Continental Education Strategy, CESA 16-25, to the SDG 4 targets. The benchmark exercise has now been formally adopted as part of the AUC CESA Clusters work plan 2020-2021. The AU Commission recognises the significance of national ownership and leadership of the benchmarking process through effective partnership and coordination with Regional Economic Communities. It is necessary to take into account the African education systems' priorities (e.g. TVET), clarifications needed on indicators and their definitions, and the impact of COVID-19, as noted in a technical AU Commission proposal on the regional benchmarking consultation on SDG 4 and CESA 16-25. The AU is committed to continue working with UNESCO in 2021 to implement three activities: a) Continental Technical Consultation on Benchmarking for CESA and SDG 4; b) Extraordinary Ministerial meeting for political engagement, and c) capacity building.

Organization of Ibero-American States (OEI): The OEI commenced gathering data and setting targets to measure progress in education at the regional level over a decade ago as part of its 2021 Goals process. The current context and the short- and long-term impact of the pandemic on education systems, particularly in relation to school retention, must be taken into account. Once the pandemic is behind us, OEI and partners will be in a position to measure the long-term impacts, including on issues such as inclusion, as the pandemic has hit the most vulnerable learners hardest. The pandemic may also have a positive impact on innovations in remote learning. Existing indicators will need to be adapted to meaningfully interpret these new learning methodologies. Efforts are also being made to develop an equity indicator. In 2021, OEI and partners will be organizing a series of regional events and meetings to support data collection, develop indicators and roll them out at regional level.

Central American Educational and Cultural Coordination Agency (CECC-SICA): Concrete steps have been taken to establish a regional series of 26 indicators for monitoring SDG 4 in the eight countries in Central America. These efforts have been endorsed by the Council of Ministers and technical units have been established in each of the ministries to coordinate the monitoring and follow up on each indicator. An intermediate progress report will be presented to the Council of Ministers this year. CECC-SICA is also concerned on the impact of the pandemic on education progress in the region. National and regional progress reports and additional monitoring activities will be undertaken to monitor the situation.

Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN): A draft ASEAN Work Plan on Education 2021-2025 is currently being consulted with the ASEAN Senior Officials Meeting on Education, external partners and other key stakeholders. Unlike the previous ASEAN Work Plan on Education 2016-2020, it now

features a dedicated outcome area to promote effective monitoring and evaluation, which includes increasing regional efforts to improve the quality of data generated by activities in the work plan through collaboration with other global, regional and national organisations. The UIS has been identified as a potential partner in this activity. The preliminary activity indicators of the Work Plan cover all proposed benchmark indicators except finance. However, ASEAN does not intend to collect education data or report ASEAN Member States' progress against SDG 4; rather, the data against the Work Plan's indicators will focus on the implementation of activities. The ASEAN Senior Officials Meeting on Education has no concrete plans to embed targets and benchmarks into the Work Plan's M&E framework. However, the proposed SDG 4 regional benchmarking exercise was recently presented to the sector for consideration and ASEAN intends to continue discussing the initiative with key stakeholders in coordination with the UIS.

Session 2: Tools to monitor and achieve the global education goal

Under its mandate to monitor the implementation of national and international strategies to achieve SDG 4, the GEM Report strategy has been developing new tools to enhance policy responses to accelerate progress to achieving SDG 4 and facilitate knowledge sharing.

PEER country profiles: Identifying countries that do not meet benchmarks should generate interest for policy responses to accelerate progress. The GEM Report launched [Profiles Enhancing Education Reviews \(PEER\)](#) in June 2020, an online tool with systematic and comprehensive national descriptions of laws and policies on issues central to achieving SDG 4 to promote policy dialogue and peer learning. The first set of profiles was on inclusion in education and was linked to the 2020 GEM Report. On International Day of Education 2021, the GEM Report launched a second set of profiles examining how countries' financing policies promote equity in education. New sets of country profiles are being developed for the 2021/2 GEM Report on regulation of private education providers, as well as on climate change education and on gender equality in education.

Regional reports: A new series of [regional GEM reports](#) aims to promote policy dialogue at regional level. To date three regional reports covering the Arab States (on migration and displacement); Central and Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia (on inclusion); and Latin America and the Caribbean (on inclusion) have been produced. Regional organizations can benefit from the targeted findings and analysis provided, as well as opportunities to partner with the GEM Report on the production and dissemination of the reports. Forthcoming regional reports include non-state actors in South Asia (2022) and technology in Eastern and South-eastern Asia (2023).

In addition, a new annual **Spotlight Report** series covering universal basic education completion and foundation learning in Africa will start in 2022, in partnership with the Association for the Development of Education in Africa, with the following characteristics:

- Cover 12 countries per year in Africa, with a focus on 4 countries from different sub-regions
- Provide a succinct analysis of key data and gaps and map the latest government actions and donor coordination to support completion and learning, providing recommendations.
- Add value would through a comparative overview and an independent perspective to what joint sector reviews or education sector analyses provide.

Summary of interventions provided by selected regional organization representatives

European Commission (DG EAC): The European Union has developed an efficient system of monitoring education within its long-term strategic policy framework. Monitoring systems are characterised by the presence of both quantitative targets and indicators as well as qualitative information collection and analysis, such as the Eurydice network that was the inspiration for the GEM Report's PEER tool. The EU's system of indicators and targets is developed together with the member states for the member states and provides an overview at aggregate EU level. On the political level, in the Council, Member States have signalled that EU targets are an effective policy tool to

underpin reforms. They guide the analysis of policies and the setting of policy priorities. Just as importantly, performance data on education and training have a high media impact, and therefore high potential to attract attention to the policy process. The Commission encourages the SDG community to learn from the EU's example and to develop proper monitoring systems featuring strong quantitative and qualitative data collection schemes.

Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organization (SEAMEO): SEAMEO and its members continue to benefit from the tools and technical expertise provided by the UIS and GEM Report teams. Annually, SEAMEO collects good practices, progress and accomplishments of SEAMEO full, associate and affiliate members through Ministerial, High Officials, Executive Committee and SEAMEO Centres meetings to monitor progress in delivering their mandates. The PEER tool will be a useful resource for the organization's ongoing monitoring of SDG 4 implementation in the region.

Association for the Development of Education in Africa (ADEA): ADEA in partnership with the UIS and the AU International Centre for Girls and Women Education are working together to develop and manage an observatory on Covid-19 responses across Africa supported by GPE KIX. The Observatory provides evidence of national education policy and practices in 41 countries across the region utilising a gender, equity and inclusion lens. The Observatory's analysis complements many of the areas covered by PEER. ADEA's partnership with the GEM Report on the Spotlight Report series is critical to ensuring the buy-in from education policy makers. ADEA's convening power and established networks with key stakeholders will be essential for advocacy and dissemination through ADEA-led policy dialogue platforms. Additional activities underway to complement these two initiatives include the development of a remote learning benchmarking toolkit to set norms and standards, and a learning and knowledge management hub to ensure that new and existing research is easily accessible, understandable, and usable for policy makers.

Global Partnership for Education (GPE): GPE has been promoting peer learning through Joint Sector Reviews among partner countries; PEER may benefit from greater coordination with them. Knowledge from PEER may be especially beneficial for civil society and teacher organizations for strengthening their advocacy for reform and helping define forward actions. PEER and Spotlight may be particularly valuable at planning stage, when countries diagnose issues to be addressed and look to embed long-term policy solutions in their education sector plans. GPE's new strategy is taking this diagnostic and problem-identification approach to help countries prioritize reforms and make evidence-based decisions. Beyond a focus on laws and policies, information on the enabling environment is needed, as countries and donors also need to understand the processes that translate laws and policies into real commitment and effective action: the entry points, political realities and resource constrained environments in which they operated. They need robust evidence about the implementation of policies, looking at contextual factors that worked and an assessment of the external validity of the measures taken. PEER added value can also be on themes not available elsewhere, such as non-state provision or climate change education.

Session 3: Opportunities for collaboration with regional organizations

Participants were presented with a range of opportunities to strengthen collaboration and exchange with the GEM Report and the UIS to support improvements in education within and across regions.

Engagement with the UIS

- Membership of the [Technical Cooperation Group](#) on SDG 4 Indicators through six sub-regional committees: Asia and the Pacific, Arab States, Central and Eastern Europe, sub-Saharan Africa, Latin American and the Caribbean and Western Europe and North America.
- Partnership in benchmark implementation and regional overviews, such as on [Africa](#).
- Collaboration in national capacity development activities to improve data quality and SDG 4 monitoring: regional/sub regional training workshops on education statistics and provision of technical support to selected countries in building sustainable education systems.

- Engagement with UIS three microsites: [Global Alliance to Monitor Learning \(GAML\)](#), [COVID-19 response](#) and [EMIS – Education Management Information System](#).

Engagement with the GEM Report

- Nominate your organization to take up one of four positions assigned to regional organizations as members of the GEM Report's [Advisory Board](#) in 2021 and 2022.
- Host a GEM Report launch event to inform and influence policy in your region.
- Technical support for regional policy dialogue and peer learning.
- PEER profiles validation, e.g. on regulation of private provision or climate change education.
- PEER profiles development on region-specific themes and priority areas.
- Partnership on future regional report and Spotlight series.

Summary of interventions during open discussion

South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC): SAARC member states have expressed an interest in developing a SAARC SDG 4 monitoring framework organized jointly with UNESCO, UNICEF and the SAARC Secretariat. The proposed mechanism is awaiting discussion and adoption at the next Minister of Education/Higher Education Ministerial Meeting to be hosted by Nepal.

Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD): IGAD continues to work with Member States to support the implementation of SDG 4, CESA and the AU Science, Technology and Innovation Strategy 2024. The organization has a specific focus on ensuring equal access to quality education for vulnerable communities including refugees, returnees and host communities and is working in partnership with key international organizations to achieve this objective. IGAD's regional education policy framework includes the development of a regional qualifications framework.

Council of Europe (CoE): Its Steering Committee for Education is a forum for dialogue with UNESCO countries from regions 1 and 2. The Covid Response Declaration and Roadmap is just one example of what the Steering Committee can achieve. The CoE stressed the importance of policy dialogue and to better establish the link between quality and inclusion. The importance of values of inclusive education, at all levels was underlined in recent CoE recommendations.

Arab Bureau of Education for the Gulf States (ABEGS): ABEGS is working with countries in the region to develop new resources to support the implementation of SDG 4. It is critical for the regional benchmarking process to take into consideration disparities of sub-regions and countries, with indicators tailored to national conditions. ABEGS will continue to work with UIS and the GEM Report to fulfil its objectives and support Member States to achieve SDG 4.

Annex

Resources on regional benchmarks

Webpage on benchmarks: <http://tcg.uis.unesco.org/benchmarks/>

Webpage on benchmarks in Africa: <http://tcg.uis.unesco.org/benchmark-africa/>

Benchmarks for SDG 4 indicators: [A political and technical basis for discussion](#) / [UIS presentation](#)

COVID-19 response: <http://covid19.uis.unesco.org/> (to launch Thursday 28 Jan)

Technical Cooperation Group (TCG): <http://tcg.uis.unesco.org/>

Resources on PEER

Profiles Enhancing Education Reviews (PEER): <https://education-profiles.org/>

2-page [brief](#) on the PEER tool

Contact the PEER Team: Education.profiles@unesco.org

List of participants and invitees from regional organizations

Attendees names appear in **bold**

Name	Position	Organisation
Albert Nsengiyumva Shem Bodo (observer)	Secretary General	Association for the Development of Education in Africa
Haytham Abdallah Selman	Director of the Department of Science and Scientific Research	Arab League Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organization
Sarah Anyang Agbor	AU Commissioner for Human Resources, Science and Technology	Africa Union
Liberat Mfumukeko Kapinga Yvette Ngandu	Secretary General Commissaire à la promotion du Genre, au Développement Humain et Social	East African Community Economic Community of Central African States
Leopoldo Amado	Commissionner for Education, Science and Culture	Economic Community of West African States
Workneh Gebeyehu Kebede Kassa Tsegaye	Executive Secretary Senior Advisor on Social Development (Education)	Intergovernmental Authority on Development
Stergomena Lawrence Tax	Executive Secretary	Southern African Development Community
Douglas Slater	Assistant Secretary-General, Human and Social Development	The Caribbean Community
Carlos Staff Jorge Rivera Pizarro (observer) Raquel Núñez (observer)	Executive Secretary	Central American Educational and Cultural Coordination
Jesus Schucry Giacoman Zapata Cecilia Martins (observer)	Director of the Department of Human Development, Education and Employment	Organization of American States
Didacus Jules	Executive Secretary	Organization of Eastern Caribbean States
Andrés Delich María Adiego (observer) Juan José Leal (observer)	Deputy Secretary General	Organization of Ibero-American States
Abdulsalam Aljoufi		Arab Bureau of Education for the Gulf States
Mary Therese Manuson Muhammad Dika Harliadi (observer) Shinta Permata Sari (observer)	Head of our Education Youth and Sports Division	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
Varuni Muthukumarana	Director of Education at the SAARC Secretariat	South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation
Ethel Agnes Pascua-Valenzuela Nidhi Khattri Ramya Vivekanandan (observer)	Director Manager, Results and Performance	Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organization Global Partnership for Education

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Meg Taylor

Michelle Belisle

Secretary General

Director, Education Quality
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[Pacific Islands Forum](#)

[Pacific Community](#)