



UNESCO: Education needs to fundamentally change if we are to reach our global development goals

The new [Global Education Monitoring \(GEM\) Report](#) by UNESCO, shows the potential for education to propel progress towards all global goals outlined in the new [2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#) (SDGs). It also shows that education needs a major transformation to fulfill that potential and meet the current challenges facing humanity and the planet.

There is an urgent need for greater headway in education. On current trends universal primary education in Northern Africa and Western Asia will be achieved in 2048; universal lower secondary completion in 2062; and universal upper secondary completion in 2082. The region would achieve its global education commitments half a century later than the 2030 SDG deadline.

The Report, *Education for people and planet*, shows the need for education systems to step up attention to environmental concerns. Among students aged 15 years, 55% in Jordan and 62% in Turkey only had basic knowledge about the environment. While in the majority of countries, education is the best indicator of climate change awareness, half of countries' curricula worldwide do not explicitly mention climate change in their content.

“A fundamental change is needed in the way we think about education’s role in global development, because it has a catalytic impact on the well-being of individuals and the future of our planet,” said UNESCO Director-General, Irina Bokova. *“Now, more than ever, education has a responsibility to be in gear with 21st century challenges and aspirations, and foster the right types of values and skills that will lead to sustainable and inclusive growth, and peaceful living together.”*

Education systems must take care to protect minority cultures and their associated languages, which contain vital information about the functioning of ecosystems. But the Report shows 40% of the global population are taught in a language they don't understand.

Education systems need to ensure they are giving people vital skills and knowledge that can support the transition to greener industries, and find new solutions for environmental problems. This also requires education to continue beyond the school walls, in communities and the workplace throughout adulthood. Currently, two thirds of adults are financially illiterate worldwide, rising to 87% in Yemen. Only 3% of adults in Iran are able to use basic arithmetic formulas in a spreadsheet. Only 6% of adults in the world's poorest countries attend literacy programmes.

“If we want a greener planet, and sustainable futures for all, we must ask more from our education systems than just a transfer of knowledge. We need our schools and lifelong learning programmes to focus on economic, environmental and social perspectives that help nurture empowered, critical, mindful and competent citizens.” said Aaron Benavot, Director of the GEM Report.

There is also an urgent need for education systems to impart higher skills aligned with the needs of growing economies, where job skill sets are fast changing, many being automated. On current trends, by 2020, there will be 40 million too few workers with tertiary education relative to demand. In Northern Africa and Western Asia, tertiary enrolment is weighted towards subjects with relatively low labour market demand. This may explain why almost 40% of firms – the highest share of any region – identified an inadequately educated workforce as a major constraint to growth.

Inequality in education, interacting with wider disparities, heightens the risk of violence and conflict, which is a major barrier to progress in the region, preventing more than 13 million children from going to school. A recent study drawing on data from 100 countries over 50 years found that countries with higher levels of inequality in schooling were much more likely to experience conflict. The Report calls on governments to start taking inequalities in education seriously, tracking them by collecting information directly from families.

The Report emphasizes that the new global development agenda calls for education ministers and other education actors to work in collaboration with other sectors. It lists various benefits that could come from this way of working, including:

- Education can reduce population growth putting a strain on the environment: In Egypt, the number of births per 1000 teenaged women fell by almost half for those with a secondary education compared with none at all.
- In countries in North Africa and Western Europe, a one-year increase in maternal education is associated with a 23% decrease in the number of children under the age of five dying from pneumonia.
- If workers from rich and poor backgrounds had the same education, working poverty among the poor would be reduced by 39%.
- Health interventions could be delivered through schools: by one estimation, delivering simple treatments such as micronutrient pills through schools is one tenth of the cost of doing it through mobile health units.

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For more information, for photos, b-roll, infographics, an online video and interviews please contact –

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Notes to Editors

Download the Report: <https://bitly.com/sdg4all>

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- [The Global Education Monitoring Report](#) (GEM Report) is developed by an independent team and published by UNESCO. It replaces UNESCO's EFA Global Monitoring Report (GMR). [World Education Blog](#) / [Educación Mundial Blog](#)