Education Sector

United Nations
Educational, Scientific and
Cultural Organization

Dialogue with Permanent Delegations to UNESCO
on the future Medium-Term Strategy 2022-2029 (41 C/4)
- Pillar 3 of UNESCO's Strategic Transformation -

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Introductory note

Context

- UNESCO's mandate of 'building peace in the minds of men and women' is as relevant today as when the Organization was created. UNESCO's Constitution calls for full and equal opportunities for education for all, for the purpose of mutual understanding and a truer and more perfect knowledge of each other's lives, in order to build peace. This dialogue is an occasion for UNESCO's Member States to discuss how UNESCO's work in education can evolve with the times, while delivering on its core mandate.

- The dialogue takes place in the context of the **universal agenda for transforming our world** that was adopted by all Member States of the United Nations in 2015 for people, planet and prosperity. Global trends shape education, but education also has impact on trends in a whole range of positive ways – on income, on health, on coping with climate change, on gender equality. The 2030 Agenda not only places emphasis on all levels of education, but on **lifelong learning** – a dimension strongly encouraged by UNESCO – reflecting the realities of rapid change and the necessity to constantly adapt, learn and upgrade skills.

Global trends impacting and transforming education

- **Demographics:** There will be 10 billion people in 2050, with the lowest income countries experiencing the highest population growth. How do we harness the youth dividend, especially in the lowest income countries? In Africa, it is expected that the youth population will more than double, reaching 2.4 billion, or nearly one-third of the world's population by 2050. On the other hand, in Europe and in certain parts of Asia, populations are aging. How can UNESCO support its Member States to plan for new skills, new jobs and lifelong learning? How do we collectively take measures to ensure that inequalities, of all different types, do not become further pronounced?

- **People on the Move**: According to the 2019 Global Education Monitoring Report, 763 million people are estimated to live outside the region where they were born and this number is set to grow. Half of the world's 70 million refugees are children under 18 years of age. Some 90% of the refugees are hosted by low and mid- income countries. The pace of displacement is putting enormous strains on education systems, which must be prepared to ensure the right to quality education for all and to recognize qualifications and skills across borders, to manage diversity and global citizenship education. **Student mobility** at university level is another dimension of this. In 2017, 4.6 million students went abroad to study, a number predicted to double to more than 8 million by 2025, especially in Africa. This is an enrichment for individuals and societies. How do we harness everyone's potential, increase resilience and foster a culture of inclusion? How can UNESCO's action in education for global citizenship, foster mutual understanding and respect?

- **Technology** is driving the fourth industrial revolution. Especially, the rapid technological advancements in **artificial intelligence** are transforming our societies, changing the way we learn,

work and live together. Education systems have to respond to the demand for skills required for work and life, which is changing rapidly with artificial intelligence (AI). It is important for Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) education to evolve in line with the technological advances. At the same time, education systems could use AI to profoundly change their management, teaching and learning. Our responsibility as an education community is to reduce the digital divide. Attention must be paid to the deep and growing gender inequalities in accessing digital skills education and training, including in the wealthiest countries. We need to capitalize on new technologies to deliver learning in novel ways, to improve provision for the most marginalized groups, including those living in conflict, to facilitate learning for people with disabilities, to support teachers in their practice and promote more interactive learning. AI holds tremendous potential to achieve the goals set in the 2030 Agenda but is also a threat that can further exacerbate inequalities in access to knowledge and research.

Not on track to achieve SDG4 by 2030

- Today, 262 million youth are out of school. If we continue business as usual, there will still be **220 million children and youth out of school in 2030**. Out of school rates are stagnating and are significantly higher in rural and poor households. The challenge is particularly great for countries in sub-Saharan Africa, where the school-age population is growing faster than elsewhere in the world.

- We have a **learning crisis** – six out of 10 children and adolescents are not achieving minimum proficiency in reading and mathematics – with two-thirds of them in school. On current trends, one in three adolescents is not expected to complete secondary education.

- **Reducing inequalities**: Education drives growth, increases the incomes of the poorest and, if equitably provided, mitigates inequality. We have to promote approaches to combat the multiple and intersecting manifestations of inequality. Only 1% of the poorest girls in low-income countries complete secondary education. Location is another source of inequality – with children in rural areas twice as likely to be out of school as those living in urban areas in low-income countries. Two thirds of adults without literacy skills are women; and a large proportion of these women are in sub-Saharan Africa. It is well-known that higher levels of education are closely associated with lower poverty rates. If all adults completed secondary education, 420 million could be lifted out of poverty, reducing the total number of poor people by more than half globally and by almost two-thirds in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia. **Education, particularly for girls and women,** is essential for the achievement of all SDGs.

- **Aid to education** has stagnated since 2010, reaching $13.2 billion in 2017, of which only $5.4 billion is allocated to primary and secondary education in low and lower-middle income countries. There is an annual financing gap of $39 billion over 2015-2030 for reaching universal pre-primary, primary and secondary education of good quality in low and lower middle income countries.

Education architecture – from fragmentation to joint acceleration

- The increasing number of initiatives and funding mechanisms for education is a positive indicator of the growing recognition given to education as the infrastructure for development. The challenge, however, is to prevent the fragmentation of the global education architecture, an increased competition for funds and the multiplicity of agendas which could lead to dispersion and wastage of efforts and resources.

- The **SDG-Education 2030 Steering Committee:** The SDG-Education 2030 Steering Committee is the main global multi-stakeholder consultation and coordination mechanism for education in the 2030 Agenda, convened by UNESCO. It provides strategic guidance to Member States, in particular through review, monitoring and reporting on progress towards global education targets and commitments.

- The need to transition towards more sustainable and resilient societies requires an integrated approach that recognizes that the challenges and their solutions are interrelated. This is reflected in the interlinked nature of the Sustainable Development Goals. UNESCO, with its mandate in education, culture and the sciences, is uniquely positioned to respond to key global issues by pooling its interdisciplinary expertise. On climate change, for example, the Education Sector contributes with education for sustainable development. UNESCO's UNITWIN network and chairs can also be capitalized upon to support the increasing role of higher education institutions as an accelerator for these interdisplinary approaches. The year 2019 is decisive for education, particularly in light of the review of SDG 4 at the High Level Political Forum (New York July, 2019) which should also chart recommendations for the way forward to accelerate action.

Current status – Education Sector's Medium Term Strategy 2014 – 2021

- The Education Sector's current Medium Term Strategy (2014 – 2021) has **three strategic objectives:** 1) Developing education systems to foster quality lifelong learning opportunities for all; 2) Empowering learners to be creative and responsible global citizens; and 3) Shaping the future education agenda.

- The Education Sector's overarching priority is to support Member States in the implementation of SDG 4–Education 2030, while also leading the global and regional coordination and review/monitoring of SDG 4.

- In the 39 C/5 (2018-2021), Major Programme I is in full alignment with the 2030 Agenda. Its ten expected results contribute directly to nine out of the ten SDG 4 targets/means of implementation and education-related targets in other SDGs.

- **Global priorities: Gender equality and Africa** - The Education Sector has progressively given more attention to gender equality, including by mainstreaming gender across its programmes, implementing gender-specific projects as well as establishing a designated Section. The Sector has also consistently prioritized Africa, which now has the largest share of regular programme funds and staff in the field.

Indicative questions to guide the reflection of the Member States

- How to better reposition UNESCO in the 2030 Agenda?
- What are the opportunities for a more interdisciplinary UNESCO approach?
- How to better reflect Global Priority Africa?
- How to better contribute to the promotion of gender equality?
- Where should the Education Sector increase its focus?
- How do we reinforce prioritization while ensuring a holistic approach to education?
- Does prioritization mean doing something less and if so what are these areas?