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The [WHEC2022](#) is organised by UNESCO in collaboration with the Government of Spain, the regional Government of Catalonia, the City Hall and the Regional Authority of Barcelona, with the technical assistance of GUNi/ACUP and the Scientific Steering Group led by the Futures of Education initiative, IESALC, IPE, MGIEP, UIL, UIS, UNEVOC and others.

The new learning landscape for higher education

Our world today is characterised by rapidly changing economies as well as societal and environmental challenges that have direct impact on higher education systems. This unprecedented transformation is due, among other factors, to new modes of work, technological developments, demographic trends, mass consumption as well as increasing mobility and migration.

The digital revolution – including the emergence of artificial intelligence, the rise of web-based education and training and big data developments – is disrupting all aspects of life and work. Higher education both has impact on and is impacted by this revolution.

Current scenarios for humans include polarisation of labour markets, creation of new jobs and destruction of others, unequal distribution of wealth and diverse forms of conflict, adversity, and uncertainty. Climate change is also affecting human livelihoods, while heightening vulnerabilities and deepening inequalities.

The recent crises derived from the COVID-19 pandemic have provoked major effects on education systems world-wide, including higher education and the research community. Learning opportunities have been significantly disrupted in most countries, particularly for disadvantaged populations.

Building on progress

Higher education systems have dramatically changed in the last two decades. Since the 1st World Conference on Higher Education in 1998, the places, spaces, and modalities of higher education have changed immeasurably.

[The 1st conference](#) called upon Member States to find answers to emerging challenges to higher education and undertaking in-depth reforms to address them with urgency and relevance. Considerable progress was achieved in terms of greater attention to higher education as a responsibility of States.

A decade later, the [Communiqué of the 2009 2nd World Conference](#) demonstrated a commitment by all stakeholders to recognise higher education as a public good, and the major force in building inclusive and diverse knowledge societies and advancing research, innovation, and creativity.

Nevertheless, since 2009 there has been a growing acceptance and convergence on common criteria for [quality assurance in higher education](#).

Higher education in a rapidly changing world

The globalisation of the world's economies and a growing acceptance that knowledge societies need highly skilled and competent knowledge workers has led to the massification of higher education systems with a dramatic increase in enrolment levels witnessed in all parts of the world. Nevertheless, despite these improvements, huge disparities within and across countries and regions remain, and social origin continues to be the main factor that influences participation in higher education.

The past decades' unprecedented increase of enrolment in higher education is also reflected in the mobility of students, with the transition of international universities into a global campus of learners, faculty and researchers quickly becoming a reality.

Since 2009, the quality and added value of higher education has been at the heart of international policy research and dialogue, with demands placed on systems and their organisation to justify their relevance in a bewildering array of aspects including: what and how higher education institutions (HEIs) teach; what they research and for whom; how they use their resources and build governance and management structures; what are their outreach and partnerships with industry; and to which extent their graduates are prepared to enter labour markets at the level of their qualification(s) to make meaningful contributions to national or regional development plans.

New ways of learning, highly diversified providers (including the emergence of private providers), distance and online learning, international joint degrees, cross-border higher education, transnational education, offshore education, borderless education as well as increasing academic mobility have direct implications on delivery, certifications, and quality assurance. The pressures to reform higher education policies and systems and to rethink institutional priorities has thus been immense.

Higher education and the sustainable development agenda

In the midst of disruptions undergone over the last two decades, in 2015 the world adopted a renewed global frame, as articulated by the [Sustainable Development Goals](#) (SDGs). The [2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#) was established in motion with the aim of "[leaving no one behind](#)" with inclusion and a shared prosperity as an overarching global aspiration.

Education is central to this agenda. Specifically, [SDG4](#) aims at ensuring that nations work to guarantee inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all. In particular, target 4.3 aims to ensure "equal access for all women and men to affordable quality technical, vocational and tertiary education, including university" by 2030. The sustainable financing of public higher education provision is thus critical for safeguarding the equitable access to, and quality enhancement of, higher education systems and to adequately reflect the vital role the sector plays in long-term national development strategies.

Higher education systems can contribute to the global agenda in several ways. They should not only prepare effective skilled labour and the creation, dissemination, and application of knowledge for the construction of professional, institutional, and technological capacities, but also retain the ethical and academic values and purposes that lay at the foundation of higher learning. It is important to recognise diverse paradigms, including local and indigenous knowledge system for sustainability as well as addressing environmental crises and growing inequalities. HEIs must also address the needs of an increasingly diverse population including working adults, elderly people, non-traditional students, graduates seeking further studies, refugees and migrants.

UNESCO's response

Through its wide network including global, regional and field offices; specialised institutes; and diverse programmes and partners, UNESCO has developed numerous initiatives aimed at strengthening the quality, inclusion and relevance of higher education.

UNESCO has actively responded to the new trends by revising its Regional Conventions on the Recognition of Higher Education Qualifications and the adoption by the 40th Session of UNESCO's General Conference of the [Global Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education](#).

Action towards achieving each of the SDGs by the higher education community and fostering international (North-South-South) cooperation in higher education has been galvanised by the [UNITWIN/ UNESCO Chairs Programme](#), which involves over 850 institutions in 117 countries and advances sustainable solutions to the global agenda via their collective research and study programmes.

UNESCO has also called the Member States to see education as a continuum and to adopt the principles of the right to education ("non-discrimination", "equality of opportunities") within their policies and programmes. In this context, UNESCO is also leading the [Qualifications Passport for Refugees and Vulnerable Migrants Initiative](#), aimed at supporting access opportunities to higher education of migrants and refugees.

Looking beyond 2030, UNESCO has launched a major global initiative to foster international cooperation and rethink education. [The Futures of Education](#) aims at catalysing a global debate on how knowledge, education and learning need to be reimagined in a world of increasing complexity, uncertainty, and precarity. Higher education is central to this debate, and higher education networks and institutions have the opportunity to contribute significantly to this initiative.

Conference focus

All of the above points to the need for a new vision, a reinvention of what higher education will mean in the future. If higher education and the university were to be invented today – what would they look like? Who would participate and complete his/her higher education? How would participants learn? Where would they learn? What knowledge, skills, competencies, and values would they need to develop to work, become global citizens, and live with dignity? What would meaningful research and knowledge production involve? Who would guide these changes: institutional leaders, policy makers, researchers, students, professors, employers, community leaders, civil society groups?

The 3rd World Higher Education Conference (WHEC2022) will bring together all relevant stakeholders to define and prepare their roadmap for a new era of higher education systems and institutions. This roadmap will be responsive to the challenges faced by humanity and the planet, as a result of diverse forms of crises, with special attention to the global disruption created by COVID-19. Furthermore, higher education must anticipate and prepare for its role in societies that goes beyond the next decade, inspired by the Futures of Education initiative, mentioned above.

The WHEC2022 aims at breaking away from the traditional models of higher education and opening doors to new, innovative, creative, and visionary conceptions that not only serve current agendas for sustainable development, but also pave the way for future learning communities that overcome barriers, speak to all and are inclusive of all lifelong learners.

The WHEC2022 process & programme: A global conversation

The WHEC2022 process is expected to activate a global conversation nurtured by diverse narratives on higher education. It will include the following activities: the generation of data, information and knowledge; formulation of updated policy recommendations; identification and dissemination of innovative practices; networking and strengthening of partnerships; broad participation of country stakeholders (highlighting diversity and inclusiveness of higher education stakeholders, within and outside higher education systems, including professors, researchers, administrators, youth, entrepreneurs, policy makers, social leaders, etc.); elaboration and dissemination of a Higher Education Roadmap (HED Roadmap) that is framed by the 2030 Agenda and looks at the Futures of Education.

The WHEC2022 programme will include a youth engagement strategy to involve, empower and inspire youth worldwide. This strategy will provide opportunities for youth to express their thoughts, feelings, aspirations and commitment regarding higher education challenges and options. Activities will include knowledge production, e-learning, activation of entrepreneurial talent (in technology, arts, sports), podcast and storytelling production, policy dialogue and calls for action.

The programme will take advantage of digital technologies; hybrid delivery formats; and dynamical, engaging meetings (HED Talks, dialogue with active participation, hands-on sessions). Virtual communication will be key to maximise global (synchronous, asynchronous) participation and face the potential effects of the current COVID-19 pandemic. Knowledge production, dialogue spaces and consultation activities will be developed throughout 2021 and 2022. The 3-day Conference will take place on May 18-20, 2022, as part of a week that will also include a variety of side-events, informal meetings, and exhibitions (technology, innovation, good practices, arts, science, culture) to expand learning and exchange opportunities for all stakeholders.

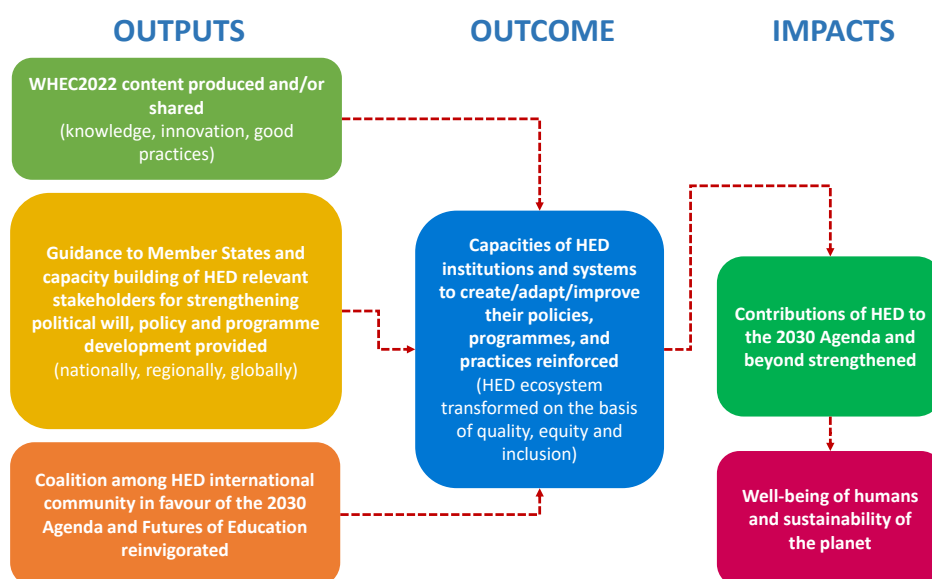
Key themes of the Conference

Impact of Covid-19 on Higher Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Impacts of COVID-19 pandemic on the global economy and society. • Disruption effects on higher education (public, private). • Response of higher education to COVID-19 crisis. • Moving ahead to the “new normality” and facing new emergencies. • Innovative solutions and lessons learned from COVID-19 disruption.
Higher Education and the SDGs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relevant research agendas for human development. • Global citizenship: embedding the 17 SDGs in teaching, learning, research. • SDG4: progress, gaps, and options (role of higher education to improve the whole education system and the teaching profession). • Capacity building for research in higher education institutions and other actors. • Third mission of higher education institutions: community services and local practices adopting global perspectives.
Inclusion in Higher Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leaving no one behind: enabling vulnerable groups to enter, transit and complete higher education. • Equity policies and equal distribution of opportunities; right to higher education. • Financial support to youth from low-income families (including scholarships). • Enhancing gender equality in higher education. • The value of ethnic diversity and multiculturalism in higher education. • Universal service and design to ensure inclusion of individuals leaving with disabilities. • Diminishing inequities, promoting diversity and maximising outcomes for all graduates.
Quality and Relevance of Programmes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Diversification and flexibility of curriculum, programmes, and courses. • Expanding use of ICTs and AI to enhance learning and collaboration. • Quality assurance of innovative higher learning modalities and spaces. • Partnerships for success: students, teachers, employers, communities. • Advancing learning skills for evolving workforce paths. • Innovative post-secondary options in tertiary education.
Academic Mobility in Higher Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National and institutional policies and practices for widening access to students with different backgrounds. • Institutions as lifelong learning communities for all. • Teachers and researchers in an increasingly diverse campus. • Building a global campus of learning, teaching and research. • Acknowledging talents, skills, knowledge, and competences for diversity. • Recognition of qualifications concerning higher education.
Higher Education Governance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • System level governance in higher education. • Higher education institutions governance and responsiveness to dynamic contexts. • Participation, diversity, and pluralism in higher education. • Institutional autonomy, organisational effectiveness, and accountability.
Financing Higher Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Financial options for access, quality, equity and inclusion in higher education. • Per-student investment in higher education. • Optimising public investment in higher education: impact and accountability. • Private sector investment in higher education. • Cost-effectiveness in higher education. • Developing/sustaining a global fund for higher education.
Data and Knowledge Production	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monitoring higher education in the framework of SDG4 and the 2030 Agenda. • Towards global quality standards of data collection, processing and delivery. • Machine learning, big data and data analysis in higher education. • Use of information for policy decision making and organisational quality improvement. • Mapping global quality, equity and inclusion.
International Cooperation to Enhance Synergies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Articulating inter-governmental initiatives in favour of higher education. • Collaboration strategies of international donors and sponsors in higher education. • Higher education and Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). • Links with open sciences and open learning movements. • Networks, platforms and knowledge management for advancing international cooperation. • Use of knowledge, technology, and innovation to promote collaboration.
The Futures of Higher Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Higher education for the global common good beyond 2030. • Critical risks and challenges for higher education beyond 2030. • Long term trajectories in higher education for sustainable societies. • Implications of disruptive change for educational, research, and civic missions. • Epistemologies, research and knowledge for the common good.

Expected outputs, outcomes, and impacts

The WHEC2022 aspires to generate three key outputs: (1) production and dissemination of knowledge, innovation, and good practices; (2) guidance to UNESCO Member States and capacity building of higher education stakeholders to strengthen their political will, policy and programme development; (3) reinvigoration of an international coalition within the higher education community to achieve the goals of the 2030 Agenda and beyond. These three outputs are expected to reinforce the capacities (outcome) of higher education institutions, leaders, policymakers, and relevant stakeholders to create, adapt and/or improve higher education for sustainable futures.

WHEC2022. Strengthening higher education contributions to the 2030 Agenda and beyond



Participants

The Conference will involve a broad range of stakeholders with interest in higher education, such as: higher education-related intergovernmental organisations, including UNDP, ILO, World Bank, the OECD; UNESCO Sectors and entities, including UNESCO institutes (IESALC, IIEP, MGIEP, IICBA, UIS, UNEVOC, IITE, UIL), UNESCO Chairs and UNITWIN Networks; regional organisations and development banks; country policy makers responsible for higher education; university authorities; teaching and research staff; leaders of community service programmes; students and youth organisations; the private sector; professional associations; teachers' unions; non-governmental organisations; civil society groups; etc. In addition, international networks, think tanks, and entities active in the higher education field will be invited to contribute: Global University Network for Innovation (GUNI), International Association of Universities (IAU), National Committee for Agenda 2030 in the Higher Education Sector (SDG Norway), International Science Council (ISC), Higher Education Sustainability Initiative (HESI), Promotion of Sustainability in Postgraduate Education and Research Network (Prosper.Net), United Nations University (UNU), Association of Commonwealth Universities (ACU), Education Policies for Global Development (GLOBED), Worldwide Universities Network (WUN), others.

Information on participation and how to pre-register for the Conference will be made available on the [WHEC webpage](#). UNESCO reserves the right to confirmation of the definitive registration, which will be confirmed according to the participation criteria established for the Conference (considering regional representation, COVID-19 measures and others). All UNESCO Member States will be invited to attend the event and nominate a delegation of up to three individuals, including participants from diverse backgrounds.

Sponsorship

UNESCO invites global, regional and local organisations and the private sector to provide financial or in-kind support to the WHEC2022 preparatory events and the 3-day programme. Depending on their priorities and level of support, interested stakeholders may choose among three categories: partner/golden (3 stars), sponsor/silver (2 stars) or supporter/bronze (1 star). Correspondingly, they may access a variety of benefits, including visibility, participation, knowledge production, joint projects, exhibition spaces, and networking.

Working languages

English, French, and Spanish will be the working languages of the WHEC2022.

Learn more:

[WHEC2022](#)

[UNESCO Higher Education](#)

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