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8<sup>th</sup> meeting of the TCG  
2 November 2021

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TCG-8/W/5

## **UPDATE ON THE PROCESS OF DEFINING NATIONAL SDG 4 BENCHMARKS**

## Background

The Education 2030 Framework for Action calls 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, most countries have not translated the global targets into national ones to serve as references to report their progress in a regular manner. To fill this gap, the Technical Cooperation Group on the Indicators for SDG 4 (TCG) agreed in 2019 on seven indicators to be benchmarked. The agreement was based on a review of proposals by TCG members, which concluded that it would be possible to set benchmarks for 6 of the 43 SDG 4 indicators plus the Framework for Action public expenditure indicators, based on past trends, country coverage, frequency of data and policy relevance. The selected SDG 4 benchmark indicators are listed below:

- Indicator 4.1.1. Proportion of children and young people (a) in grades 2/3; (b) at the end of primary; and (c) at the end of lower secondary achieving at least a minimum proficiency level in (i) reading and (ii) mathematics, by sex
- Indicator 4.1.2. Completion rate (primary education, lower secondary education, upper secondary education)
- Indicator 4.1.4. Out-of-school rate (1 year before primary, primary education, lower secondary education, upper secondary education)
- Indicator 4.2.2. Participation rate in organized learning (one year before the official primary entry age), by sex
- Indicator 4.c.1. Proportion of teachers with the minimum required qualifications, by education level
- Equity indicator (to be defined)
- Education expenditure as a share of GDP/total public expenditure ([Education 2030 Framework for Action](#), §105)

The extraordinary session of the Global Education Meeting in October 2020 reminded Member States and the international community of this pending commitment and called on UNESCO and its partners, together with the SDG-Education 2030 Steering Committee to “propose relevant and realistic benchmarks of key SDG 4 indicators for subsequent monitoring” (§10).

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

- First, political commitment is needed. Setting benchmarks as requested by the Framework for Action cannot be done at the global level, given the very large differences in starting points between countries. Benchmarks need to be realistic and based on national ownership. A global process may undermine these objectives and it was therefore proposed to define benchmarks at the regional level as a starting point: countries within each region tend to have more challenges in common and more opportunities to enter into policy dialogue and learn from each other.
- Second, technical challenges of measurement need to be overcome and therefore an approach to benchmarking SDG 4 indicators was proposed to help and guide regional entities and national governments in setting national benchmarks for the selected

indicators. The approach is based on the principles of fairness, efficiency, relevance, simplicity, and transparency.

The UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS) and the Global Education Monitoring Report (GEM Report) proposed a two-step political and technical process consisting of, first, regional benchmarks and, second, national benchmarks, and this was endorsed by the TCG:

- The regional benchmark level, with the definition of a common regional minimum reference, offers a balance when countries in a region share many of the same challenges. A regional approach in conjunction with a national benchmark enables engagement across countries and offers opportunities to countries to be inspired and to learn from each other.
- The national benchmark levels for the selected indicators shall reflect countries' realities and will be based on their starting points, contexts, plans and ambitions.

The aim of benchmarking SDG 4 indicators is to serve as a framework to identify and support national actions to fill data and policy gaps and to help address common challenges by prompting an exchange of best practices, mutual learning, gathering and dissemination of information and evidence of what works, as well as advice and support for policy reforms. The progress on SDG 4 and its targets depends on the contribution of each country for each policy area by defining a quantitative target and the set of actions and policies to support the achievement.

The benchmarking process is also responding to the United Nations Secretary General's Synthesis Report (UNSG, 2014)<sup>1</sup>, which recommended that four levels of monitoring should be considered: global, regional, thematic and national. This process aims to align these four indicator levels.

Table 1 provides an overview of the globally benchmarked SDG 4 indicators and the proposed regionally benchmarked indicators.

**Table 1: Overview of the benchmarked indicators in the SDG 4 monitoring framework and the proposed benchmarked indicators in regional monitoring frameworks**

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<sup>1</sup> UN Secretary-General, (2014), [The Road to Dignity by 2030: Ending Poverty, Transforming All Lives and Protecting the Planet, Synthesis Report of the Secretary-General on the Post-2015 Agenda](#), §149.

Target	SDG 4 monitoring framework		Regional monitoring frameworks		
	Global indicators	Thematic indicators	Africa	Asia/Pacific	Europe
4.1 Basic education	2	5			
Of which, benchmark:	<b>i. Learning proficiency</b>	<b>iii. Out of school rate</b>			
	<b>ii. Completion rate</b>				
4.2 Early childhood	2	3			
Of which benchmark:	<b>iv. Pre-primary enrolment rate</b>				
4.3 TVET/Higher/Adult education	1	2		Youth/Adult education participation Tertiary enrolment	Adult education participation
4.4 Skills for work	1	2			Tertiary attainment Digital skills
4.5 Equity	1	4			
Of which, benchmark:	<b>v. Equity indicator (to be defined)</b>				
4.6 Adult literacy	1	2			
4.7 Sustainable development	1	4			
4.a Learning environment	1	2	Schools with electricity, computer, internet; WASH		
4.b Scholarships	1	1			
4.c Teachers	1	6			
Of which, benchmark:	<b>vi. Percentage of trained teachers</b>				
TOTAL	12	31			
Finance	1	1			
Of which, benchmark:	<b>vii.a. Education spending as %GDP</b>	<b>vii.b. Education spending as %total public spending</b>	7	R&D spending; TVET spending	
Other				Youth not in education, employment, training STEM TVET graduates in labour force	STEM TVET on the job learning

Note (1): Indicators in red are the global benchmarked indicators.

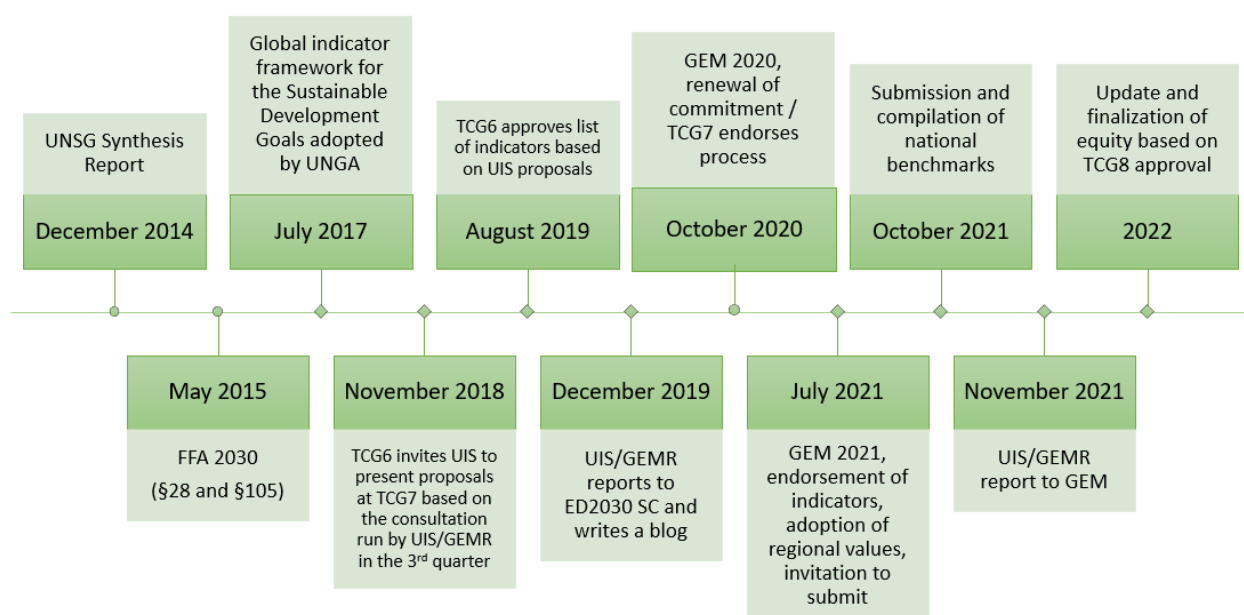
Note (2): The European Union has adopted only 3 of the 7 benchmarked indicators: (i) learning proficiency (ii) completion rate and (iv) pre-primary enrolment rate.

The UIS has produced a series of reports intended to bring a regional focus to SDG 4 monitoring by highlighting work being done in the regions while comparing SDG 4 targets with those established by regional and subregional bodies. In addition to this series of reports, there are many data resources in the UIS TCG microsite, including a section devoted to benchmarking with regional and country Dashboards for each of the seven SDG 4 indicators identified for benchmarking among others and a Data Book that highlights how each region performs across SDG 4 indicators. A summary of the progress in setting benchmarks at the regional level is presented in Annex 1.

## Consensus building process

The main point is to reassure that this is a coherent and fully articulated process that aligns national (i.e. national plan), regional (i.e. EU, AU, AP, CARICOM, etc.) and global (i.e. SDG 4) education agendas (Figure 1). Countries are expected to submit targets/benchmarks they already have. In case countries do not have such targets, they are expected to submit ones to which they would be willing to commit. This process reminds all countries that they signed up to submit targets that represent their contribution to the global effort to achieve SDG 4 by 2030.

**Figure 1: Consensus building workflow**



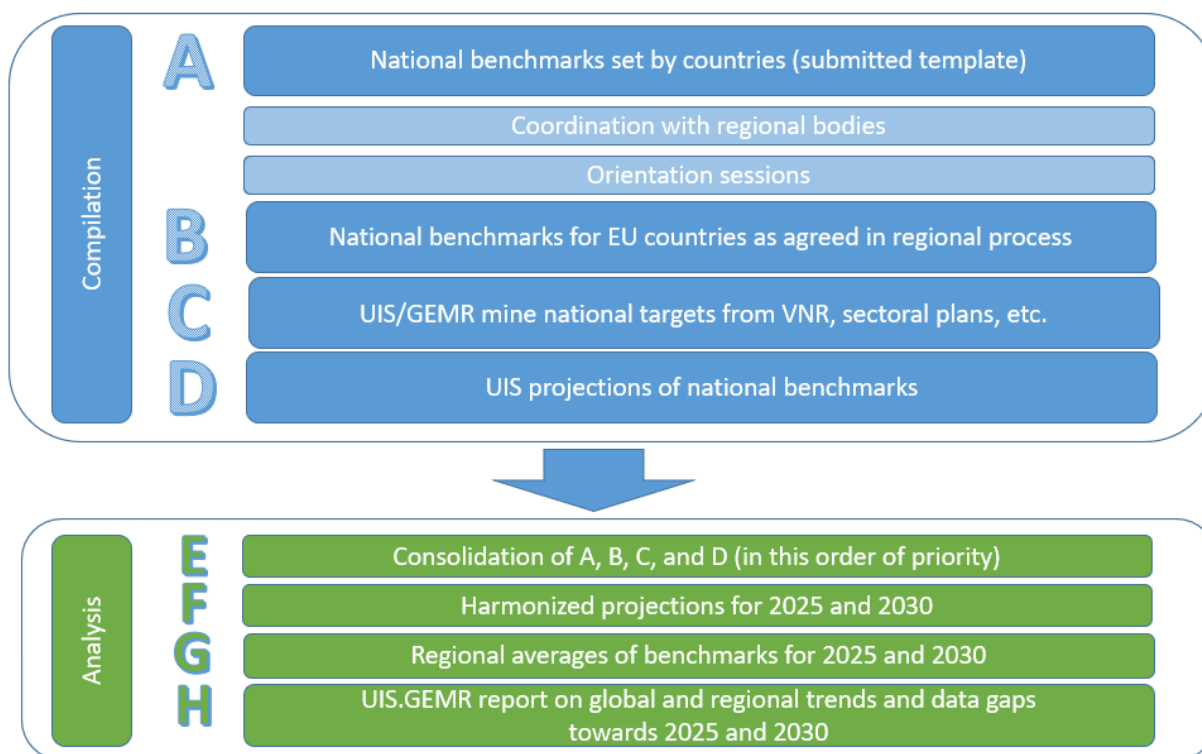
## Compilation process

Countries were invited to submit their national benchmark values for 2025 and 2030 for each of the seven global and thematic benchmark indicators. On 4 August 2021, Ms Stefania Giannini, Assistant Director-General for Education at UNESCO, invited them to submit these values for the seven indicators for both years agreed at the Global Education Meeting on 13 July 2021. To facilitate this exercise, the UIS and the GEMR shared with countries a template with projected benchmark values to serve as a basis for discussion and help in decision-making. It might be the case that a country did not currently have targets set for the selected benchmark indicators in the template: this would be either because there is no national plan or the national information system has not generated the values for those indicators yet.

In parallel, the UIS and the GEMR started a mining process to collect national targets from publicly available official documents (Voluntary National Reviews, Planipolis, Global Partnership for Education, national sector plans, etc.) to identify national benchmarks (Figure 2).

In June 2021, a letter from the European Commission confirmed that three of the seven indicators for which the targets have been set for 2030, indeed correspond to the seven monitoring areas of the SDG-4 benchmarking process, and merit to be considered as the EU regional contribution<sup>2</sup>.

**Figure 2: Benchmarking process: compilation and analysis**



The status of the benchmarking process is described in Table 2. As of October 20, 71 countries have submitted their national benchmark values and 19 of EU countries go with the EU benchmarks. A completed template with national benchmarks is still expected to be submitted by at least 16 countries shortly and only 3 countries have declared that they will not submit any national benchmarks. The extensive data mining process covered 147 countries and found an average of 11 indicators per year per country.

<sup>2</sup>

1. The share of low-achieving 15-year-olds in reading, mathematics and science should be less than 15%, which is equivalent with SDG indicator 4.1.1c (expressed as one minus this share).
2. The share of early leavers from education and training aged 18-24 should be less than 9%, which is equivalent to UN SDG indicator 4.1.2.
3. At least 96% of children between 3 years old and the starting age for compulsory primary education should participate in early childhood education, which is similar to the SDG indicator 4.2.2.

**Table 2: Status of Submission as of October 20<sup>th</sup>.**

<b>Indicator</b>	<b>Value</b>
Total number of countries	213
Number of countries that submitted templates	71
Number of EU countries taking regional EU benchmarks (out of 27 EU countries)	19
Number of countries that will submit completed templates	16
Number of countries that will not participate	3
Number of countries for which there is at least 1 target set	126
Average number of benchmarked indicators per country (max=19)	11

### **Dissemination and monitoring**

**Dashboard of national benchmarks:** to enhance visibility and impact, a dashboard with national benchmarks and projected regional averages for all benchmark indicators will be widely disseminated in the Global Education Observatory.

**Monitoring progress:** a short report informing of the progress and data gaps will be elaborated based on collected data in order to:

- Ensure a transparent approach in relation to progress against the committed benchmarks
- Share good practices and lessons learnt in relation to actions oriented towards achieving the 5 priority areas.

The baseline and subsequent monitoring reports will aim to inform:

- the regional organization and coordination bodies
- the broader international community.

**Annex 1: Summary of progress on regional benchmarks**

Benchmarks	Regional partners	Action executed	Next step	Indicators		
				Adopted	Level	Regional
Africa	African Union <u>Regional Economic Communities</u>	Meeting with Expert Group (February 25) 5 regional meetings Global indicators adopted	Report back to countries	Yes	Yes	Yes, 7 indicators identified in CESA framework
Arab States	UNESCO Beirut	Two regional meetings Country bilateral meetings	Adoption of regional levels	Yes	Yes	No
Asia/Pacific	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• UNESCO Bangkok</li> <li>• Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN)</li> <li>• Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organization (SEAMEO)</li> <li>• South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC)</li> <li>• Pacific Community (SPC)</li> </ul>	Five consultations Global indicators adopted Regional indicators identified	Report back to countries Feedback to confirm any additional regional indicators	Yes	Yes	4
Europe	European Commission	Meeting with EC Agreement on 3 of 7 indicators of the <u>European Education Area Council resolution</u> aligned	Note from EAC with contribution from European Education Area	Yes, 3 of 7 indicators	Yes, for some levels	Yes, 4 indicators identified in European Education Area
Latin America/ Caribbean	UNESCO Santiago CECC-SICA CARICOM	CECC-SICA	Meeting with coordination and Ministerial Meeting	Yes		No
		CARICOM	Meeting with coordination	Alignment with Indicators of first phase HRS	First phase defined	yes