



United Nations
Educational, Scientific and
Cultural Organization

Executive Board

Two hundred and ninth session

209 EX/6.I

PARIS, 26 February 2020
Original: English

Item 6 of the provisional agenda

SDG 4 – EDUCATION 2030

PART I

GLOBAL/REGIONAL COORDINATION AND SUPPORT

SUMMARY

Pursuant to 40 C/Resolution 17 and 206 EX/Decision 6.I, the Director-General submits to the Executive Board the report on UNESCO's lead role in the coordination of and support for SDG 4 – Education 2030, including the celebration of the International Day of Education on 24 January 2020, in line with 206 EX/Decision 35.

The financial and administrative implications of this document have been covered in document 40 C/5.

Decision required: paragraph 26.



Background

1. Since the last report to the Executive Board at its 206th session, UNESCO has further asserted its mandated leadership and coordinating role on SDG 4 – Education 2030. Pursuant to 40 C/Resolution 17 and 206 EX/Decision 6.I, this document reports on progress made over the past year and the challenges ahead, and also includes an update on the celebration of the International Day of Education in line with 206 EX/Decision 35.

2. Overall, the SDG-Education Steering Committee framed the debate at the United Nations High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF), which reviewed SDG 4 for the first time, around urgency and transformation to accelerate progress, reaffirming that investment in education is the catalyst for achieving all the global goals. The Organization also actively engaged in moving the global education architecture from fragmentation towards cooperation for acceleration by (i) establishing the Multilateral Education Partners' Platform, with swift agreement on areas for joint action, starting with the establishment of the Global Coalition for Education Data, and (ii) as Co-chair of the Global Education Forum. This convening function was mirrored at regional level, with countries and development partners coalescing around common challenges and acceleration strategies, as well as through global advocacy. UNESCO will continue to scale up and strengthen its SDG 4 leadership role.

3. On the eve of a new decade that will call for a surge in mobilization, UNESCO convened some 300 civil society partners in education around the inclusion imperative. On 24 January 2020, the International Day of Education generated strong enthusiasm and high-level participation, including through events at UNESCO Headquarters and United Nations Headquarters, setting the ground for stronger momentum and political support.

Setting the tone at the High-Level Political Forum

4. The 2019 HLPF (United Nations Headquarters, 8-19 July 2019) under the theme “Empowering People and Ensuring Inclusiveness and Equity” constituted the conclusion of a first four-year cycle to take stock of progress achieved in the advancement of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. On the occasion of the HLPF's in-depth review of SDG 4, the SDG-Education 2030 Steering Committee, in line with its mandated role to provide strategic guidance and recommendations to Member States and the education community on the advancement of the Education 2030 Agenda, elaborated a joint submission to the HLPF.

5. The Steering Committee's submission provided a thorough review of progress, shedding light on persisting key challenges to the implementation of SDG 4. It further highlighted the centrality of education for the achievement of all 17 SDGs by putting particular emphasis on interlinkages between SDG 4 and decent work and economic growth (SDG 8), reduced inequalities (SDG 10), climate action (SDG 13), as well as peace, justice and strong institutions (SDG 16); the Goals under review in 2019. Reflecting the sense of urgency, which ran through the HLPF's review of SDG 4, the Steering Committee's submission put forward a set of concrete policy recommendations, inspired by the key messages of the 2018 Brussels Declaration, calling for transformation, innovation, political responsibility and commitment, as well as a true paradigm shift to move:

- Beyond averages: to leave no one behind
- Beyond access: to ensure relevant learning outcomes
- Beyond basics: to diversify and broaden the contents of education
- Beyond schooling: to lifelong and lifewide (across multiple learning spaces) learning
- Beyond education: to expand multi-sectoral planning
- Beyond countries: to foster peer learning mechanisms

6. The inclusion of the key findings of the Steering Committee's submission in the advance release of the United Nations Secretary-General's annual report to the United Nations Economic and

Social Council (ECOSOC) on progress towards the SDGs testifies to the document's added value, its forward-looking, solution oriented approach and overall scope.

7. Furthermore, in an attempt to respond to the demand of Member States for qualitative data, the Global Education Monitoring Report prepared the special publication "Beyond commitments – How countries implement SDG 4" on the occasion of the HLPF under the auspices of the Steering Committee. The publication sheds light on countries' perceptions and flagship policies related to the advancement of SDG 4 at national level, analysed on the basis of Voluntary National Reports and a survey questionnaire directed to countries. On a quantitative note, the complementary publication of the UIS and the Global Education Monitoring Report, entitled "Meeting Commitments", captures concisely how far the world is from achieving its education targets, making a call for countries and their international development partners to coordinate and finance the collection of data to monitor and deliver on SDG 4.

8. Echoing the urgency to address the learning crisis through innovative and inclusive policies, strengthened partnerships, upscaled political commitment and enhanced financial resources for education, UNESCO, in cooperation with the Steering Committee and the Group of Friends for Education and Lifelong Learning, organized a special side event during the HLPF. Dedicated to the theme "Relevant, equitable and inclusive quality education for all: an imperative for the 21st century" and opened by the Director-General, it provided an inclusive platform for dialogue among key education stakeholders, focusing on concrete policy directions and recommendations to accelerate progress and ensure no one is left behind by 2030.

9. Through the joint advocacy efforts of UNESCO, the Steering Committee and other Member States, the SDG Summit's Political Declaration, the main outcome document of the SDG Summit held during the 74th session of the United Nations General Assembly (United Nations Headquarters, 24-25 September 2019), included two references to education, highlighting in particular the inclusion, quality and lifelong learning dimensions. Reflecting the Declaration's spirit that education is key for the empowerment of children, youth and adults, the special exhibition "Education Transforms Lives" was organized at United Nations Headquarters on the occasion of HLPF in partnership with the co-chairs of the Group of Friends for Lifelong Learning and with the financial support of Education Above All, the Qatar Fund for Development and the Permanent Mission of Qatar to the United Nations.

Global and regional partnerships

10. The 7th meeting of the Steering Committee was organized back to back with the 40th session of the UNESCO General Conference (UNESCO Headquarters, 11-12 November 2019), thereby providing a unique opportunity to take stock of key 2019 events, reflect on strategies to accelerate progress in the last decade of the SDGs and increase the visibility of the Committee's work. A special address by the President of the 74th session of the United Nations General Assembly, Mr Tijjani Muhammad-Bande, as well as a high-level panel in which 18 Member State representatives and 16 Ministers and Vice-Ministers participated, were among the meeting's highlights, underscoring the Steering Committee's central asset, its convening power.

11. With the objective of strengthening synergies for joint action and greater impact at country level, UNESCO also initiated a Multilateral Education Partners platform, which met for the first time on 4 July 2019 at UNESCO Headquarters. In the resulting Paris Outcome Statement, participants committed to maintain a strategic dialogue among United Nations principals by meeting bi-annually to align work on a set of concrete priority areas and accelerate progress through improved efficiency, greater accountability, joint advocacy, capacity development and data harmonization.

12. Building on the last point, partners agreed at their second meeting, held in September 2019 at the margins of the United Nations General Assembly, on a concrete action plan to improve the education data necessary to monitor and achieve SDG 4. In this regard, partners supported the establishment of a Global Coalition for Education Data, led by UIS, which seeks to connect countries, multilateral organizations and donors to align financial and technical resources available and take a

coordinated approach to improve the data challenge of implementing SDG 4, with a particular focus on sub-Saharan Africa. Bringing together one of the SDG-Education 2030 Steering Committee's constituency groups around a joint mission, the Multilateral Education Partners platform will be closely linked to the work and activities of the Steering Committee.

13. UNESCO also agreed to co-chair the Global Education Forum, an initiative of the United Nations Special Envoy for Global Education Gordon Brown, established with a view to mobilize additional resources for education through bringing together multilateral and bilateral donors. At the first meeting held on the margins of the United Nations General Assembly in September 2019, participants supported the initiative while cautioning against duplication of efforts, and recognized UNESCO's role in coordinating, monitoring and reporting on SDG 4.

14. Furthermore, cooperation with key civil society actors was reinforced, notably in the context of the 9th Collective Consultation of NGOs on Education 2030 (CCNGO), (Hammamet, 3-4 December 2019). The meeting focused on the role and engagement of civil society organizations in supporting equity and inclusion in the implementation of SDG 4 – Education 2030. Following six plenaries and eight parallel sessions, the over 100 participating organizations adopted an outcome statement that urges governments to place systematic focus on the educational rights of the most marginalized and vulnerable groups and to respect financing benchmarks. They also committed to building the capacity of civil society organizations to defend the right to education, including through the collection and analysis of data, and reaffirmed the importance of the CCNGO as a key mechanism facilitated by UNESCO in pursuit of SDG 4.

15. At the regional level, UNESCO, through its regional bureaux and together with the SDG-Education 2030 co-conveners and other (sub-)regional organizations, continued to promote regional cooperation, knowledge-sharing, good practice and peer learning, as well as the strengthening of linkages between global and regional levels.

16. In Africa, there has been progress in strengthening synergies with the African Union Commission (AUC) for the joint coordination and monitoring of SDG 4 and the AU's Continental Education Strategy for Africa (CESA 16-25). In September 2019, a memorandum of understanding was signed by UIS and the AUC on the development of a joint mechanism for the monitoring and evaluation of SDG4-CESA. In December 2019, UNESCO participated in the AU's Third Ordinary Session for the Specialized Technical Committee Meeting on Education, Science and Technology (STC-EST) in Addis Ababa during which close cooperation was highlighted in key priority areas. UNESCO further defined areas of strengthened support to AUC, in alignment with CESA and SDG 4, in particular (i) evidence-based governance of policies, plans and strategies; (ii) enhancing girls' education through promoting pedagogical innovations; (iii) ensuring higher education opportunities for youth; (iv) promoting skills for work; (v) promoting skills for life.

17. Following the STC-EST, UNESCO, in collaboration with the AUC, UNICEF and UNHCR, organized in Nairobi a technical meeting of senior officials from 27 countries, including education planners, heads of Education Management Information Systems (EMIS) and statistics units. Participants agreed on the creation by AUC and UNESCO of a multi-partner platform to support the monitoring, evaluation and reporting on SDG 4 and CESA among many other recommendations. In West and Central Africa, the Regional Coordination Group on SDG 4-Education 2030 conveners has agreed on priorities for an SDG 4-CESA Acceleration Strategy for the subregion along with a consolidated multi-agency work plan for 2020-2021.

18. In the Asia-Pacific, representatives from 34 countries participated in the 5th Asia-Pacific Meeting on Education 2030 (Bangkok, 1-4 October 2019) with UNICEF and financial support from Japan, with a special focus on SDG targets 4.1 and 4.6. An outcome document put forward regional recommendations for action to accelerate progress towards these two targets and a ministerial conference is foreseen in the second half of 2020.

19. In the Arab region, the Arab Regional Support Group for Education 2030 (referred to as the Partners' Group), met in Sharjah, United Arab Emirates, in April 2019, hosted by the Regional Center for Education Planning. The Group agreed to launch a regional two-year initiative on national journeys undertaken since 2015 to integrate SDG 4 into policies, planning and legislation, and to review and monitor progress. A synthesis report is expected to form the basis for the Fourth Regional Meeting on Education 2030 to take place during the first half of 2020. The Arab Bureau of Education for the Gulf States (ABEGS), a Steering Committee member, also organized the first Consultative Meeting of Arab Regional Representatives in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia in October 2019 to foster stronger linkages between the region's representatives on the Steering Committee and prepare their participation.

20. The UNESCO Regional Office of Education for Latin America and the Caribbean convened the second meeting of the SDG-Education 2030 Regional Steering Committee to take stock of progress in the implementation of the regional roadmap adopted in Buenos Aires in 2017 by ministers from the region and the commitments made in Cochabamba in 2018 at the ministerial meeting.

Global advocacy and future perspectives

21. In addition to stepped up advocacy around the HLPF as indicated above through dedicated publications, outreach and a public exhibition at United Nations Headquarters, UNESCO facilitated the celebrations of the second International Day of Education, as proclaimed by the United Nations General Assembly in 2018 to honour education and its centrality to human well-being and sustainable development. UNESCO leveraged its convening power and engaged with education and development partners for a global celebration on 24 January 2020 focusing on the theme "Learning for people, planet, prosperity and peace", and as such, the many ways learning can empower *people*, strengthen a fragile *planet*, build shared *prosperity* and foster *peace*. In this regard, UNESCO supported the organization of a one-day high-level event by the President of the 74th session of the United Nations General Assembly, Mr Tijjani Muhammad-Bande, held at United Nations Headquarters in New York to celebrate the International Day of Education.

22. UNESCO also organized a half-day event at its Headquarters in collaboration with the Center for Research and Interdisciplinarity (CRI). Furthermore, UNESCO field offices and education-related category 1 institutes, together with their partners, as well as a selection of cities from among the UNESCO network of Learning Cities organized a series of events and festivals on 24 January 2020. On the same day, UNESCO also communicated on the Futures of Learning initiative through social media, video messages and articles, and launched a new online tool visualizing *Education Progress towards SDG 4*, prepared by the Global Education Monitoring Report.

23. Looking towards 2030, UNESCO is committed to scaling up its lead and coordination role to galvanize stronger political commitment and support accelerated progress towards SDG 4. This will also entail the strengthening of the SDG-Education 2030 Steering Committee to increase its leadership and relevance within an increasingly complex global education architecture with competing actors. The Steering Committee's strength depends on the one hand on the level of participation of Member States, which will be revisited in the context of the next rotation cycle of (2021-2022), with changes to the format and frequency of the meetings also under consideration, and more than this on the decision power of the body.

24. UNESCO will also continue to reinforce its leadership and coordination function through mechanisms such as the Multilateral Education Partners' Forum, and raise the profile of education at global and regional events, including through preparations for the next Global Education meeting. Further efforts will be made to enhance synergies between the global level on one hand and the regional and national levels on the other, to strengthen relevance, coherence and effective implementation. The uneven regional coordination processes and insufficient resources for supporting regional and national monitoring of progress represent a key challenge, in particular in Africa.

25. To take forward the message of urgency, acceleration and action, UNESCO is taking the initiative to launch a new approach to delivery and resource mobilization built around mission-oriented policies, as inspired by a model adopted for research and innovation in the European Union. It is proposed that these missions be built around critical areas requiring bold action, in particular teachers, school environments and skills for employment with a focus on sub-Saharan Africa. Further effort will be invested in strengthening regional coordination, providing strategic guidance in localizing SDG 4 and reinforcing multistakeholder partnerships for monitoring, reporting, data collection and analysis, advocacy and coordinated delivery.

Proposed draft decision

26. In light of the above, the Executive Board may wish to take the following decision:

The Executive Board,

1. Recalling 206 EX/Decision 6.I, 206 EX/Decision 35 and 40 C/Resolution 17,
2. Having examined document 209 EX/6.I,
3. Expresses its appreciation to the Director-General for her efforts to affirm and further strengthen UNESCO's lead within the evolving education architecture, and welcomes the leading role the Organization has played in the context of the in-depth review of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4 at the 2019 high-level political forum on sustainable development;
4. Strongly supports UNESCO in continuing to play its mandated role as the lead agency for the coordination of and support for the implementation of SDG 4 – Education 2030, and also welcomes the launch of the Multilateral Education Partners' platform and the Organization's overall engagement with recent initiatives aimed at strengthening multi-stakeholder partnerships;
5. Further welcomes continued efforts to reinforce and support regional coordination, reporting and monitoring and to strengthen linkages between the regional and global levels;
6. Calls on Member States to continue to support UNESCO activities on the advancement and implementation of SDG 4 – Education 2030, including through high-level participation in the SDG-Education 2030 Steering Committee and through extrabudgetary resources;
7. Requests the Director-General to report to it at its 211th session on UNESCO's coordination of and support for SDG 4 – Education 2030, including the celebration of International Day of Education.