Our Common Agenda
Policy Brief 10
Transforming Education

JULY 2023

United
Nations

Introduction

CHAPEAU

The challenges that we are facing can be addressed only through stronger international cooperation. The Summit of the Future, to be held in 2024, is an opportunity to agree on multilateral solutions for a better tomorrow, strengthening global governance for both present and future generations (General Assembly resolution 76/307). In my capacity as Secretary-General, I have been invited to provide inputs to the preparations for the Summit in the form of action-oriented recommendations, building on the proposals contained in my report entitled "Our Common Agenda" (A/75/982), which was itself a response to the declaration on the commemoration of the seventy-fifth anniversary of the United Nations (Assembly resolution 75/1). The present policy brief is one such input. It serves to elaborate on the ideas first proposed in Our Common Agenda, taking into account subsequent guidance from Member States and more than one year of intergovernmental and multi-stakeholder consultations, and rooted in the purposes and the principles of the Charter of the United Nations, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other international instruments.

PURPOSE OF THIS POLICY BRIEF

The right to education and lifelong learning is at the very heart of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development because education, knowledge and learning are central to the dignity, growth and development of the individual. For centuries, education has been the great equalizer, a driving force of nation-building, and the engine of social, cultural, economic and technological progress. Today, however, beset by twin crises of equity and relevance, education as we know it is no longer fit for purpose.

Against a global backdrop of unprecedented wealth and severe inequalities, progress towards the education-related Sustainable Development Goals and targets has faltered. Hundreds of millions of children and young people remain out of school. Billions of those in school are not even acquiring the basics. Girls continue to encounter discrimination in education and, as elsewhere, the most vulnerable and marginalized – low-income groups, persons with disabilities, Indigenous Peoples, migrants, refugees and displaced persons, among others – are being hit hardest. All the while, global inequities in education financing are making it almost impossible for low- and middle-income countries to catch up.

Moreover, as our world grapples with exponential technological change, existential climate challenges and growing polarization, uncertainty and distrust, the very relevance of contemporary education systems is being questioned like never before. For the most part, education systems remain geared to prepare children and young people for their adult life, rather than supporting them and learners of all ages to acquire the capacities to learn throughout their lives. Education systems remain rooted in rote learning and focused on teaching students what society believes they need to know, rather than assisting them to learn how to thrive in an uncertain future. In some instances, education systems may even be working against our common goals by reinforcing harmful stereotypes and practices that drive inequality, division and environmental degradation.

These twin crises of equity and relevance in education are of enormous consequence for individual rights, for national Governments and, increasingly, for the international community as a whole. As the movement of goods, services, capital and people becomes increasingly global, and as the digital and green transitions urgently call on our collective action, so too will the need increase for people in every corner of the world to possess an evolving pool of knowledge, skills and capacities. Failure to reset education systems globally to ensure everyone is prepared for the markets and uncertain future risks further entrenching a two-speed world, deepening inequalities and exacerbating global instability.

As outlined in Our Common Agenda, our world is faced with a stark and urgent choice between breakdown or breakthrough. By overhauling how we learn, what we learn, when we learn and where we learn, and by equipping societies with new skills, capacities and mindsets for a sustainable and just future, we can create the driving force we need to break through to a better future for all.

In short, if we are to transform our world, then education systems themselves must be transformed across the world.

Building on the Transforming Education Summit and the report of the International Commission on the Futures of Education, the present policy brief examines the current crisis in education in more detail and puts forward a vision and a set of guiding actions for countries and the international community to transform education. It concludes with two overarching recommendations for the consideration of Member States in their preparations for the Summit of the Future:

a) **Deliver on the commitments made in the 2030 Agenda and at the 2022 Transforming Education Summit and commit, in A Pact for the Future, to a new vision for the creation of learning societies centred on the following six principles:**

   i) Building an integrated system of education and lifelong learning in a world of uncertainty;

   ii) Ensuring equity, access and inclusion in and through education;

   iii) Making curricula and pedagogies relevant for today and for tomorrow;

   iv) Repositioning the teaching profession to ensure that teachers increasingly serve as creative guides and facilitators in the learning process;

   v) Harnessing digital tools and resources to expand access, improve learning and increase capacities to navigate the future and avoid the digital divide;

   vi) Investing more, more equitably and more efficiently in education.

b) **Recognize education and lifelong learning as a global public good and galvanize international cooperation to invest in and transform education while achieving Sustainable Development Goal 4.**

Transforming education contributes to sustainable development and the broader goals of the United Nations

Education is central to the work of the United Nations. Ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all is both the overarching focus of Sustainable Development Goal 4 and fundamental to the achievement of all 17 Goals (see table below). Education is also a crucial instrument for responding to the 2030 Agenda's defining principle of leaving no one behind, by empowering marginalized groups, Indigenous Peoples, minorities, refugees and other forcibly displaced persons, persons with disabilities and others. Furthermore, education is critical for empowering individuals and societies to be active agents in the pursuit of social, economic and environmental justice.

Education was declared a human right under the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, ratified by the General Assembly on 10 December 1948. The right to education was reaffirmed in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and in several other international human rights instruments. To date, 107 countries have enshrined the right to education in their national constitutions.[1]

Education is one of the most effective strategies for empowering women and girls and drastically reducing gender inequality, which is vital to a sustainable future, and it was a major focus of the sixty-seventh session of the Commission on the Status of Women held in March 2023. According to the World Bank, girls who complete secondary school are better equipped to become healthier, more prosperous adults, with smaller families and children who are less at risk of illness and death and who are more likely to succeed.[2] Moreover, integrating a gender equality perspective into education systems can help to tackle harmful gender norms and stereotypes for the benefit of boys, girls and societies more broadly.

By increasing our individual and collective capacity to appreciate inclusive human diversity, understand and respect differences, and confront and resolve conflicts, quality education is also an essential ingredient in promoting, building and sustaining peace, as recognized in United Nations resolutions on sustaining peace, on advancing a culture of peace and on youth, peace and security. Education, in turn, can also be deeply affected by conflict. In 2022, some 222 million school-aged children were affected by crises globally.[3] Between January 2020 and December 2021, there were over 5,000 attacks on education and cases of military use of schools, with 9,000 students and educators abducted, arrested, injured or killed in 85 countries.[4]

Education is also key to predicting, preventing and managing future risks. This is reflected in the connection between education and the many issues under consideration in the context of the Summit of the Future, including the advancement of meaningful youth engagement in decision-making, the protection of the rights of future generations, ensuring information integrity and the development of the Global Digital Compact.

FIGURE I

TRANSFORMING EDUCATION AND THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

1 NO POVERTY
The impact of more and better education on future incomes and poverty eradication has been abundantly demonstrated. Students from low-income families tend to face more barriers to achieving educational success.
We can help to break this cycle by promoting universal and free access to quality education with adequate support to vulnerable students, and by providing the skills and knowledge necessary to access decent and better-paid jobs.

2 ZERO HUNGER
Aside from its impact on future income and purchasing power, and, therefore, on hunger, a relevant and well-contextualized education can also promote sustainable agriculture practices, food security and nutrition education, leading to better food systems and healthier lifestyles. In addition, providing free school meals can be transformative for children and young people.

3 GOOD HEALTH AND WELL-BEING
Education helps individuals make informed decisions about their health, promotes disease prevention and control and can reduce the stigma associated with health issues. Furthermore, healthy schools can play a role in promoting their students' own health and nutrition and in teaching them how to live a healthy life.

4 QUALITY EDUCATION
This Goal directly relates to education and highlights the importance of improving access to quality and relevant education for all individuals, without any exclusion; promoting lifelong learning opportunities; and ensuring equitable and inclusive education systems.

5 GENDER EQUALITY
Education promotes gender equality and empowers women and girls by increasing their access to learning and life opportunities, as well as through a gender-sensitive curriculum free of harmful gender stereotypes. It helps to reduce child marriage, gender-based violence and discrimination against women and sexually diverse persons.

6 CLEAN WATER AND SANITATION
Education can promote good hygiene practices, increase awareness and understanding of responsible water management and improve access to safe water and sanitation facilities. In addition, providing safe drinking water in all schools and sanitation facilities can transform children's lives.

7 AFFORDABLE AND CLEAN ENERGY
Education is essential to understanding the contribution of various energy sources to the climate crisis and promoting sustainability and renewable energy technologies. Schools can also play a positive role by promoting energy efficiency and conservation.

8 DECENT WORK AND ECONOMIC GROWTH
Education is key to providing individuals with the knowledge and skills needed to access increasingly sophisticated and more productive and decent jobs. Education also promotes entrepreneurship, generates new jobs and drives economic growth. In addition, the working conditions of the educational working force will have an impact on the quality of education.

9 INDUSTRY, INNOVATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE
Innovation depends on knowledge, critical thinking and scientific attitudes. By fostering such traits in learners, education can promote innovation, technological advancements and the development of sustainable infrastructure. By leveraging digital technologies, education can foster innovation, enhance industrial growth and build resilience infrastructure.

10 REDUCED INEQUALITIES
As with poverty, there is a strong two-way relation between education and inequality. By confronting the differential access of low-income and high-income students to good-quality learning that arises from the many sources of inequality, public education becomes the most powerful tool for reducing inequalities, promoting social inclusion and building cohesion.

11 SUSTAINABLE CITIES AND COMMUNITIES
Education teaches us how to better live together and can therefore promote sustainable urban planning and management, increase awareness and understanding of sustainable living, and foster community engagement and participation.

12 RESPONSIBLE CONSUMPTION AND PRODUCTION
By teaching about the risks of unethical, harmful and unsustainable consumption, education can promote responsible and sustainable consumption and influence production patterns, thus reducing waste and pollution and promoting sustainable resource use.

13 CLIMATE ACTION
Education is key to promoting climate literacy, increasing awareness and understanding of climate change, promoting sustainable practices to mitigate the impact of climate change and empowering civic participation.

14 LIFE BELOW WATER
By promoting learners' understanding of marine ecosystems and how they are affected by human activity, education can promote marine conservation and awareness and increase and promote sustainable marine resource management.

15 LIFE ON LAND
Through education, people can be both equipped with and empowered by the knowledge and skills necessary to actively engage in conservation efforts; identify and mitigate the drivers of deforestation and land degradation; and promote sustainable land use practices. Education also plays a key role in raising awareness about the importance of biodiversity and the consequences of its loss.

16 PEACE, JUSTICE AND STRONG INSTITUTIONS
Education can help to prevent violence and promote peaceful societies by teaching learners respect for human rights in the context of human diversity; by instilling in them the importance of institutions and the rule of law; and by developing the skills and attitudes for peaceful conflict resolution. Education can also promote transparency and accountability, key components of strong institutions.

17 PARTNERSHIPS FOR THE GOALS
Learners are equipped with the knowledge, skills and values needed to effectively collaborate and build partnerships across sectors, communities and nations. Education is essential for raising awareness and promoting understanding of the interconnectedness of issues related to sustainable development, fostering a sense of global citizenship and promoting the values and principles of sustainability.

Education at a crossroads

Although education has a crucial role to play in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, confronting broader societal challenges and preparing society for uncertain futures, contemporary education systems are no longer fit for purpose, severely underfunded and beset by twin crises of equity and relevance.

CRISIS OF EQUITY

The first educational crisis is one of equity and access, grounded in persistent and widespread exclusion from learning opportunities. Despite recent progress made in expanding overall access to education worldwide, the impacts of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, multiple armed conflicts, climate change, economic downturns and associated displacement are having a profound effect on progress towards achieving Sustainable Development Goal 4.

Some 244 million children are out of school today, including nearly half of all school-age refugee children.[5] According to the International Labour Organization, one in four young people is excluded from education, employment or training. Data from the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Institute for Statistics show that over 770 million young people and adults are nonliterate, the majority of whom are female. In sub-Saharan Africa, North Africa and Western Asia, only about half of children are enrolled in pre-primary education.[6] Beyond access, many of those in school are not acquiring the necessary building blocks of foundational literacy and numeracy, let alone creative, critical and scientific thinking, and digital, social and emotional skills. It is estimated that learning poverty – defined as the proportion of children unable to read and understand a simple text by age 10 – worsened from 58 per cent to 70 per cent in low- and lower-middle-income countries during the pandemic.[7] Overall, even if countries meet their national benchmarks for Sustainable Development Goal 4, an estimated 84 million children and young people will still be out of school in 2030 and an estimated 300 million students will not have the basic numeracy and literacy skills they need to succeed in life.[8]

Inequity, exclusion and challenges relating to effective learning are the result of complex and often interrelated issues. Personal and social circumstances, including the ability to afford the core and ancillary costs of education, the effects of poor nutrition and health, and the impacts of gender-based norms, can have a significant effect on both school attendance and outcomes. Educational exclusion can also be intergenerational and historic. Indeed, one of the main predictors of educational performance of children and adolescents is the level of income and schooling of the adults responsible for the household. Countries also face significant teacher shortages – at least 69 million more teachers are needed globally to deliver on Sustainable Development Goal 4, according to UNESCO[9] – yet widespread fiscal restraints on

public sector wage bills often lead to cuts and freezes that severely hinder the recruitment of new high-quality teachers.[10]
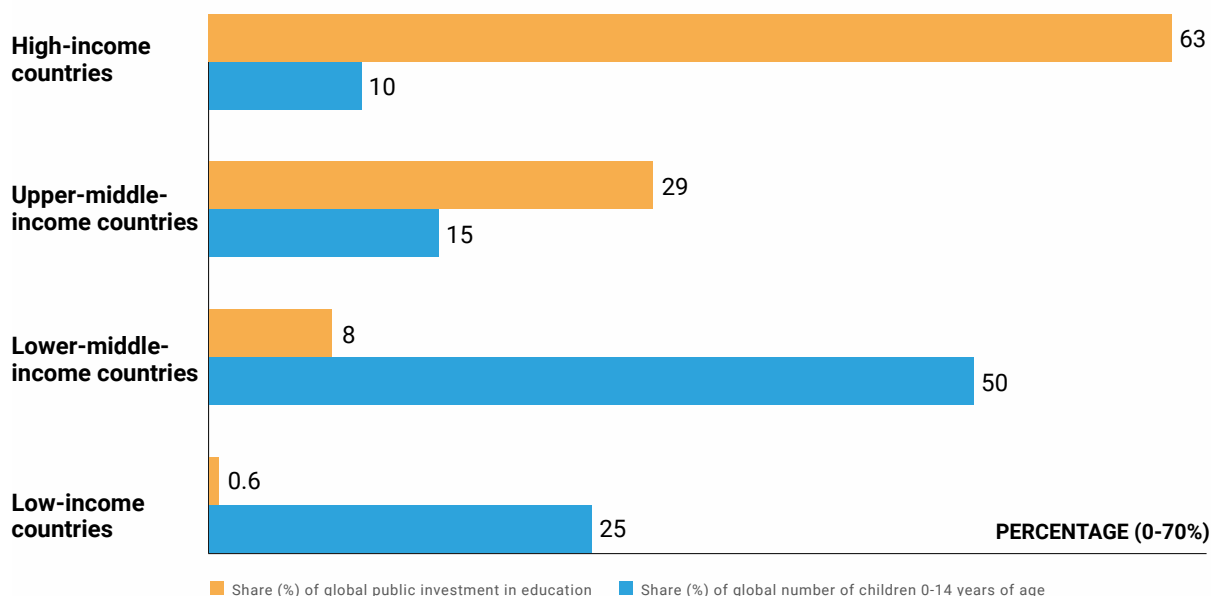
Gaps in access to high-quality education are also deeply connected to both underinvestment and unequal investment in education. According to the latest data from the Global Education Monitoring Report Team, low- and lower-middle-income countries face an annual financing gap of $97 billion to achieve the Sustainable Development Goal 4 targets by 2030.[11] That gap reflects dramatic inequities in educational spending between wealthy and poor countries. As highlighted in the figure below, high-income countries account for 63 per cent of global investment in education, but only 10 per cent of the school-age population.[12] This translates into deep inequalities in terms of investment per learner: per capita spending is over $8,000 per year in high-income countries, just $300 in lower-middle-income countries and a mere $50 in low-income countries.[13]

Education financing gaps today reflect the severe pressure on public revenues and the dramatic fiscal constraints that many developing countries are facing. This is particularly the case for the 52 developing countries, home to half of the world's extreme poor, that are suffering from severe debt problems. According to a recent study, 25 heavily indebted poor countries spend 20 per cent or more of their public revenue just to service their external public debt.[14]

At the same time, some Governments face trade-offs that oblige them to forgo long-term investment decisions and instead prioritize short-term economic and political objectives. Some developing countries find themselves in low-level equilibriums or poverty traps, where low wages tend to attract unsophisticated, low-productivity investments with little need for a skilled workforce, which in turn disincentivizes revenue generation to finance education. Yet, increasing tax-to-GDP ratios would be critical to widen the fiscal space

FIGURE II

SHARE OF GLOBAL INVESTMENT IN EDUCATION AND SHARE OF THE 0–14-YEAR-OLD POPULATION, BY LEVEL OF NATIONAL INCOME

High-income countries — 63 / 10
Upper-middle-income countries — 29 / 15
Lower-middle-income countries — 8 / 50
Low-income countries — 0.6 / 25

PERCENTAGE (0-70%)

■ Share (%) of global public investment in education   ■ Share (%) of global number of children 0-14 years of age

Source: World Bank and UNESCO, "Education finance watch 2022", 2022; Population Division data.

and significantly increase the budget for both education and health.[15,16] The International Monetary Fund suggests that this is feasible in most countries. However, too often, prevailing economic and political dynamics skew decision-making towards the wealthy, re-enforcing regressive tax regimes and further weakening States' ability to deliver quality education for all.[17] According to the United Nations Children's Fund, in low-income countries, only 11 per cent of public education resources go to the poorest 20 per cent of the learning population, while 42 per cent go to the richest 20 per cent.[18]

Inadequate support at scale from the international community in the area of education is another challenge. Not only are most high-income countries not delivering on their overall official development assistance commitments, according to the Development Assistance Committee of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, but donor spending on education has remained largely static since 2018, despite the significant increase in needs. Today, aid for education represents a mere 8 per cent of total aid spending and 3 per cent of global humanitarian funding.[19] In addition, only about 20 per cent of assistance goes to low-income countries, and donors exhibit a huge diversity of priorities in their spending.[20] Recently, education ministers representing 86 partner countries of the Global Partnership for Education called for the education aid financing architecture to reinforce "country-led transformation by harmonizing and aligning external aid behind national priorities and commitments, eliminating fragmentation and reducing transaction costs".[21]

CRISIS OF RELEVANCE

Alongside the crisis in equity, a severe and deep crisis of relevance calls into question the ability of contemporary education systems to respond to the learning needs of individuals, societies and economies in a rapidly changing world. Drawing on the analysis of the International Commission on the Futures of Education and other sources, four major interconnected global trends underscore the need for root-and-branch reform of education systems as we know them.

First, a rapidly changing world of work poses major questions for the "what, how and when" of education. Automation, artificial intelligence and the emergence of the gig economy are already having major structural impacts on the world of work and could cause significant job displacement and the emergence of a more vulnerable and transient workforce. These trends could also call for new and renewable skill sets and profoundly shift the relationship between work and leisure. Education systems are ill-prepared for these shifts. According to a UNESCO report, only 5 per cent of those aged 15 and above participated in formal or informal education in 2019, although over 70 per cent of the 159 countries surveyed reported making progress in this area in 2022.[22] In addition, employers report major mismatches among graduates of vocational and higher education programmes in relation to the skills needed in the world of work.[23] The continued emphasis in education on rote learning and on teaching students what society believes they need to know, rather than assisting them in learning how to learn, how to do, how to live together and how to enjoy a full and meaningful life, will also undermine their capacity to thrive in the future.

Second, the digital age and the pace of developments in powerful generative artificial intelligence represent an inflection point for education

and research, opening up important new horizons, as well as risks that are not yet fully understood. The debate on this issue is often quite polarizing. Some point to the potential of educational technology and digital learning to radically reduce educational inequalities, to increase access to vast educational resources and to support improved learning outcomes, including by allowing for greater insights into the development of every learner and by empowering teachers to facilitate more dynamic and autonomous learning processes. Others fear that digital education technologies could in fact widen inequalities, pose challenges for learner attentiveness, increase isolation, and lead to the overcommercialization of education, the privileging of numerical data sets over other types of information and the dominance of a particular strain of Western knowledge over that of other cultures. Neither of these binary outcomes is inevitable, but as currently configured, most education systems are insufficiently prepared to navigate the digitalization of education and to equip teachers and students with what they need to thrive in an increasingly digital world. According to a recent UNESCO survey of over 450 schools and universities, fewer than 10 per cent have developed institutional policies or formal guidance concerning the use of generative artificial intelligence applications.

Third, the global climate crisis threatens to have a severe impact on education, which calls for a significant response from the education sector. Extreme weather events, disaster-related displacement, the destruction or repurposing of educational buildings and the indirect economic pressures on families are having a negative impact on access to education at all levels, especially for women and girls. For those who remain in education, rising temperatures could impact learning and cognition, with most of the world's schools and homes ill-equipped to respond. Simultaneously, education must pivot towards greener, more inclusive and just development

pathways. It needs to cultivate and develop the capabilities of learners to adapt to and mitigate climate change, to demand climate justice and to thrive in the green economy.[24] However, data from UNESCO show that only half of the world's national education curricula make any reference to climate change and when it is mentioned, it is almost always given very low priority.[25] Furthermore, fewer than 40 per cent of teachers were confident in teaching about the severity of climate change and only one third felt able to explain the effects of climate change on their region or locality.[26]

The fourth trend affecting education is increased polarization and division in society and weakened trust in Governments and other institutions. Education is critical for the emergence of a stronger social fabric, the advancement of gender equality and greater social cohesion. It can do this by empowering people from all backgrounds and by advancing values that cherish diversity, human rights, equality, learning and knowledge. Today, however, as divisions grow within and between communities and countries, some educational practices can be seen to foster regressive attitudes that reinforce socially, economically and environmentally unsustainable development trends. Some curricula and methodologies, for instance, perpetuate bias, discrimination, polarization and harmful gender norms and stereotypes. Others neglect key issues such as climate change or are informed by a narrow materialistic approach and by models based on individualistic accomplishment, competition, a winner-takes-all mentality and exceptionalism that exacerbate social inequalities and environmental degradation. If the world is to break through to a better future for all, it is essential that education systems better support an urgent shift towards more just, equitable and sustainable development pathways.

Transforming education to transform the world: principles and actions

My report on Our Common Agenda called for a global effort to strengthen the social contract and secure access to quality learning for all throughout their lives. The 2022 Transforming Education Summit placed a much-needed spotlight on education, leading to the submission by 130 Member States of their national commitments, the emergence of a range of complementary multilateral initiatives and a strong call from young people through the Youth Declaration on Transforming Education. The Summit has laid a solid foundation for accelerated action towards the achievement of Sustainable Development Goal 4 between now and 2030. For education to become one of our strongest assets in shifting the world onto a better path, however, we must go much further by truly embracing education transformation.

The time has come to move away from the traditional static vision of education and towards adaptable and effective lifelong learning systems and the emergence of a true learning society as a major contribution to nation-building, peace, human rights and broader sustainable development. It is essential also to reshape the learning environment to pursue radical inclusion and the achievement of equality within and through education. A fresh national and global consensus is needed around the knowledge, skills, mindsets and capacities that learners should acquire from education for a world that is changing so fundamentally. The role of teachers in this new education system should also be reimagined, as should

the relationship between education and digital technologies. All of that demands a fundamental shifting of priorities and thinking around the financing of education, in recognition of education's role as a long-term investment in national development and in our individual and collective futures. While education remains primarily a national endeavour, its importance internationally and its many increasingly global dimensions mean that education must be recognized as a global public good with corresponding global responsibilities.

While the nature of education means that its transformation will be gradual and context-specific, it will necessarily incorporate the following seven essential building blocks and related actions.

A. SHIFTING TOWARDS AN INTEGRATED AND COMPREHENSIVE SYSTEM OF EDUCATION AND LIFELONG LEARNING

In order to promote a true learning society, education systems must shift away from rigid, fragmented structures and towards a process of lifelong learning built on learning, reskilling, and upskilling opportunities throughout life in both formal and informal spaces. It also requires a

learner-centred approach that focuses on learning pathways and learning achievements. This calls for decisive action in the following key areas:

a) Integrating early childhood care and education, technical and vocational education and higher education into a comprehensive lifelong learning system, alongside traditional primary and secondary levels;

b) Recognizing the right to education and lifelong learning in national constitutions, legislation, norms, policies, budgets and governance architecture;

c) Establishing lifelong learning entitlements, learning accounts and other delivery systems that enhance access to lifelong learning opportunities for citizens of all ages;

d) Repositioning education and lifelong learning as a whole-of-government responsibility, with clear roles across ministries and public authorities;

e) Improving and scaling-up recognition, validation, and accreditation mechanisms that value formal, non-formal and informal learning in various contexts;

f) Building an all-of-society approach to education through involvement in the education transformation process of learners, parents, families, teachers, principals, local governments, political leaders, community elders, youth, labour and business groups.

B. ENSURING EQUALITY AND INCLUSION IN AND THROUGH EDUCATION

In order for everyone to champion a learning society, every person and every family must see that they will benefit from it, especially the most vulnerable. Schools and all learning environments must evolve to become more inclusive, safe, healthy and stimulating places that advance curricula and pedagogy and support equality and inclusion. This will require action in the following areas:

a) Orienting legislation, policies and resources towards ensuring inclusion in the education system for all groups, especially those often marginalized or excluded, such as rural populations; low-income households; migrants, refugees and displaced persons; and persons experiencing discrimination on the grounds of sex, disability, ethnicity, religion, language, sexual orientation, gender identity and legal status;

b) Supporting girls' education, especially in areas such as science, technology, engineering and mathematics; eliminating gender stereotypes at all levels of education; and transforming curricula and pedagogies from a gender perspective;

c) Prioritizing learner health, including mental health, as well as nutrition and well-being;

d) Improving the availability of comprehensive data on the learning and skills pathways in various contexts and settings.

C. MAKING CURRICULA AND PEDAGOGIES RELEVANT FOR TODAY AND TOMORROW

Equal access to a truly holistic system of lifelong learning is critical, but it is not enough. Lifelong learning systems must deliver effective and relevant learning, facilitating knowledge, skills, values and capacities that correspond to the four pillars of education: learning to learn, learning to do, learning to live together and learning to be.

This calls for the transformation of curricula, pedagogy and assessments by:

a) Prioritizing the delivery of foundational learning and expanding what is understood to be foundational to include creative, critical and scientific thinking, digital literacy and socio-emotional skills alongside traditional literacy and numeracy skills;

b) Making curricula relevant for today and for the future, with a particular focus on education for sustainable development in science, technology, innovation and skills that are relevant for future economies and the world of work; on fostering a culture of civic responsibility, peace and respect for human diversity; and on building on the needs and traditions of the local context and preparing learners to be global citizens;

c) Shifting away from rigid rote learning to promote flexible, learner-centred and well-structured pedagogies based on enquiry, experience, curiosity, cooperation and collaborative problem-solving in the context of an uncertain world.

D. REPOSITIONING THE ROLE OF TEACHERS AS CREATIVE GUIDES AND FACILITATORS IN THE LEARNING PROCESS

Revisiting the "what and how" of education and lifelong learning will result in true learning only through the right interaction between teachers and learners. That is why, in order to transform education, teaching itself must be transformed.

The recently established High-Level Panel on the Teaching Profession will help to further articulate a vision for the teaching profession and education workforce of the future and put forward a clear set of recommendations to deliver on that vision. At this point, however, transforming teaching will require the incorporation of the following elements:

a) Repositioning the role of teachers as creative guides and facilitators in learning so that their approach is transformed from passive to active and from unidirectional to collaborative, and so that they are better equipped to help learners to gather, identify and critically analyse relevant and useful knowledge from a vast and growing repository;

b) Empowering teachers to interpret and manage the curriculum and to adapt and prioritize content and pedagogy;

c) Conducting regular and formative professional development and evaluation of teachers to ensure improvement of learning processes and outcomes;

d) Tackling global teacher shortages by improving working conditions and by ensuring fair pay and a fulfilling and engaging professional experience;

e) Avoiding public sector wage constraints that block both recruitment of new teachers and improvements in teacher pay;

f) Protecting the right to freedom of association and expression and collective bargaining of teachers and ensuring that teachers' voices and experiences are at the centre of education decision-making, with particular attention paid to the usually invisible members of the teaching profession such as support teachers and special education teachers.

E. HARNESSING DIGITAL TOOLS AND RESOURCES TO EXPAND ACCESS, IMPROVE LEARNING AND INCREASE CAPACITIES TO NAVIGATE THE FUTURE

To perform their role as guides and promoters of their students' learning, teachers need adequate resources. This includes access to digital tools and resources, which are changing learning, both in terms of access and in terms of content and pedagogy. As envisaged in the proposals for a Global Digital Compact, our collective ambition must be to advance an open, free, secure and human-centred digital future for all. This is particularly true with respect to education and learning. As the recent debate on artificial intelligence tools has made clear, it is essential that we truly understand and contextualize new technologies and make them accessible and responsive to the needs of teachers and learners everywhere, especially the most marginalized, without exclusion. Building on the Rewired Global Declaration on Connectivity for Education,[27] the Transforming Education Summit Call to Action on Quality Public Digital Learning for All,[28] and the foundation provided by the 2021 UNESCO Recommendation on the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence, it is essential that national efforts on digital education address the following key issues:

a) Ensuring that high-quality, curriculum-relevant digital content is available to all learners, teachers and caregivers through affordable access to digital learning platforms and by giving due attention to access for teachers and students with disabilities and those from disadvantaged and diverse backgrounds, including Indigenous communities;

b) Strengthening the capacity, skills and knowledge of teachers, learners and education stakeholders to effectively leverage digital tools for evidence-based and increasingly independent and self-directed learning throughout life;

c) Promoting adequate digital connectivity to enable educational institutions and individuals to effectively benefit from the educational advantages of the digital revolution and avoid the digital divide;

d) Ensuring that digital teaching and learning resources and overall educational content and methods dovetail effectively and ensuring that they confront negative online phenomena such as cyberbullying; harmful gender stereotypes and gender-based or other kinds of discrimination and violence; and invasion of privacy;

e) Incorporating practices that strengthen the ability of learners and teachers to navigate the increasing flow of false and fake information.

F. INVESTING MORE, MORE EQUITABLY AND MORE EFFICIENTLY IN EDUCATION

The true transformation of education – in terms of both equity and relevance – will not be possible at current levels of spending. Member States must invest more, more equitably and more efficiently. Radical action is needed to prioritize the long-term and sustainable financing of public education. In order to do so, governments and societies must discard the short-term thinking that plagues education planning and reframe the global and national approaches to the financing of education as a public good and a crucial investment with high positive externalities and significant medium- and long-term returns. This calls for urgent action in the following areas:

a) Increasing investment in education and delivering on international commitments to allocate at least 6 per cent of gross domestic product and 20 per cent of

total government spending to education, including by undertaking required action to increase revenue and open fiscal space, and by measuring the increased public per capita investment in education;

b) Ensuring that investments are allocated equitably, taking into account factors that affect individual access, such as proximity to educational institutions, the availability of sufficient qualified teachers, the existence of school meal programmes, the availability of transportation and the use of conditional cash transfers to compensate for the opportunity cost that school attendance could involve for many students;

c) Ensuring efficient spending on education by drawing on the evidence from interventions and policies that maximize impact and results, advancing careful planning, relying on successful strategies and well-proven practices and by monitoring teacher performance and systematically assessing learning outcomes.

G. RAPIDLY INCREASING INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION TO ACHIEVE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOAL 4 AND TRANSFORM EDUCATION

While policymaking and financing responsibilities related to education are within the purview of national and subnational authorities, the international community also plays an important role. This is not just because of a sense of empathy, solidarity or global justice; it is because education is a global public good whose provision and quality affect us all in a world that is ever more connected through markets, technology and immigration as well as affected by climate change,

war and refugee crises. Transforming education and delivering on Goal 4 must therefore be understood as a collective global responsibility. This requires action in the following areas:

a) Creating greater space and opportunities for developing countries to invest more in education by delivering on the Secretary-General's call for a Sustainable Development Goal stimulus, reforming the international financial architecture and accelerating efforts to strengthen global tax cooperation;

b) Ensuring policy coherence across the global commitments on education and the work of international financial institutions, in particular with respect to restrictive fiscal policies and public sector wage constraints that directly curtail educational investment and harm teachers and learners;

c) Increasing official development assistance to 0.7 per cent of gross national income and increasing the share of aid for education to 20 per cent of all official development assistance to address the challenges of financing education in emergencies, crises and post-crisis situations;

d) Supporting equitable access to high-quality and contextualized digital learning by scaling up existing efforts to develop a public, open-source digital commons and to expand school connectivity in line with the proposals contained in the policy brief on a global digital compact;

e) Developing relevant international standards that provide responsible guardrails to effectively harness the digital revolution and its implications for education as a common good;

f) Establishing a global consensus on recognition of vocational qualifications, education and lifelong learning;

g) Strengthening the coherence and impact of support to developing countries

from the global education community, including by maximizing the contribution of the global education financing architecture and education funds, under the guidance of the SDG 4-Education 2030 High-Level Steering Committee;

h) Strengthening the contribution of the United Nations development system, in particular UNESCO, UNICEF and other key entities, in this area, including by capitalizing a dedicated window on transforming education in the Joint Sustainable Development Goals Fund.

Towards a learning society for a sustainable future: recommendations to Member States and international actors

The Transforming Education Summit provided an opportunity for the world to refocus its energy, restate its priorities and generate momentum for delivery on the 2030 Agenda while recognizing the imperative to transform into a new world. As we progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals Summit in 2023 and the Summit of the Future in 2024, it is essential that we do not lose this momentum.

The present policy brief lays out a vision and a set of priorities and proposals to bring the transformation of education to an even more ambitious goal: that of creating inclusive and true learning societies.

Given the dramatic and accelerating changes the world is experiencing, education cannot take a back seat and simply adapt to those changes: education must lead, by creating the necessary conditions to empower individuals and societies to harness those changes and steer the world towards a more inclusive, liveable and sustainable future.

To this end, I offer two key recommendations for the consideration of Member States in their preparations for the Summit of the Future:

a) **Deliver on the commitments made in the 2030 Agenda and at the 2022 Transforming Education Summit and commit, in A Pact for the Future, to a new vision for the creation of learning**

societies centred on the following six principles:

i) Building a comprehensive and integrated system of education and lifelong learning in a world of uncertainty;

ii) Ensuring equity, access and inclusion in and through education;

iii) Making curricula and pedagogies relevant for today and for tomorrow;

iv) Repositioning the teaching profession to ensure that teachers increasingly serve as creative guides and facilitators in the learning process;

v) Harnessing digital tools and resources to expand access, improve learning and increase capacities to navigate the future and avoid the digital divide;

vi) Investing more, more equitably and more efficiently in education;

b) **Recognize education and lifelong learning as a global public good and galvanize international cooperation to invest in and transform education while achieving Sustainable Development Goal 4.**

Annex

CONSULTATIONS WITH MEMBER STATES AND OTHER RELEVANT STAKEHOLDERS

The proposals put forward in the present policy brief draw upon the following:

a) National consultations on transforming education undertaken in 2022;

b) Youth consultations on transforming education in 2022 and 2023;

c) The Transforming Education Summit in September 2022;

d) Consultations on the future of education;

    i) Consultations with United Nations partners, including the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, the United Nations Children's Fund, the International Labour Organization and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees;

    ii) Consultations with other stakeholders, including the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, the Global Campaign for Education, the Global Partnership for Education, the LEGO Foundation, the International Monetary Fund, the Malala Fund for Girls' Right to Education and the World Bank;

e) Consultations with Member States.

Endnotes

1   See United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), *Right to education handbook* (Paris, 2019).

2   See World Bank, *Missed Opportunities: The High Cost of Not Educating Girls* (2018). Available at www.worldbank.org/en/news/factsheet/2018/07/11/missed-opportunities-the-high-cost-of-not-educating-girls.

3   See Education Cannot Wait, *Global Estimates: Number of crisis-affected children and adolescents in need of education support* (2022). Available at www.educationcannotwait.org/sites/default/files/2022-06/ecw_globalestimatesstudy_june2022.pdf.

4   See Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack, *Education Under Attack* (2022). Available at www.educationcannotwait.org/sites/default/files/2022-06/educationunderattack_2022.pdf.

5   UNESCO, New measurement shows that 244 million children and youth are out of school (2022). Available at https://world-education-blog.org/2022/09/01/new-measurement-shows-that-244-million-children-and-youth-are-out-of-school/.

6   See UNESCO, *Global Education Monitoring report 2021/2: Non-state actors in education. Who chooses? Who loses?* (Paris, 2021).

7   See World Bank and others, *The State of Global Learning Poverty: 2022 Update* (2022).

8   See UNESCO, *Setting commitments: national SDG 4 benchmarks to transform education* (Paris, 2022). Available at www.unesco.org/gem-report/en/2022-sdg4-benchmarks.

9   UNESCO, *The world needs almost 69 million new teachers to reach the 2030 Education goals* (2016). Available at https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000246124.

10   See ActionAid, *The Public Versus Austerity: Why public sector wage bill constraints must end* (2021). Available at https://actionaid.org/publications/2021/public-versus-austerity-why-public-sector-wage-bill-constraints-must-end.

11   See UNESCO, Global Education Monitoring Report Team, The annual financing gap to achieve SDG4 targets is almost $100 billion (2023). Available at https://world-education-blog.org/2023/04/14/the-annual-financing-gap-to-achieve-sdg-4-targets-is-almost-100-billion/#more-32023.

12   Using 0 to 14-year-olds as a proxy indicator for children of school-going age.

13   See Global Education Monitoring Report Team and others, *Education Finance Watch 2022* (2022).

14   See UNDP, *Building blocks out of the crisis: The UN's SDG Stimulus Plan* (2023). Available at www.undp.org/publications/dfs-building-blocks-out-crisis-uns-sdg-stimulus-plan.

15   See International Monetary Fund, *Fiscal Policy and Development: Human, Social, and Physical Investments for the SDGs (*2019).

16   See ActionAid, *Who Cares for the Future: finance gender responsive public services!* (2020). Available at https://actionaid.org/publications/2020/who-cares-future-finance-gender-responsive-public-services.

17   See Daron Acemoglu and James Robinson, *Why Nations Fail: The Origins of Power, Prosperity, and Poverty* (London, Random House, 2012).

18   See UNICEF, *Transforming Education with Equitable Financing* (New York, 2023).

19   See Global Education Monitoring Report Team and others, *Education Finance Watch 2022* (2022).

20   See Center for Global Development, *The state of global education finance in nine charts: another update* (2023). Available at www.cgdev.org/blog/state-global-education-finance-nine-charts-another-update?utm_source=20230621&utm_medium=cgd_email&utm_campaign=cgd_weekly.

21   Global Partnership for Education, *GPE education ministers call for education aid financing reform* (2023). Available at www.globalpartnership.org/news/gpe-education-ministers-call-education-aid-financing-reform.

22   See UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning, *Fifth Global Report on Adult Learning and Education* (Hamburg, 2022).

23   Boston Consulting Group, *Fixing the global skills mismatch* (2020). Available at www.bcg.com/publications/2020/fixing-global-skills-mismatch.

24   See United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, *What is the triple planetary crisis?* (2022). Available at https://unfccc.int/blog/what-is-the-triple-planetary-crisis.

25   UNESCO, *Getting every school climate-ready: how countries are integrating climate change issues in education* (Paris, 2021).

26   UNESCO, *Only half of the national curricula in the world have a reference to climate change, UNESCO warns* (2023). Available at www.unesco.org/en/articles/only-half-national-curricula-world-have-reference-climate-change-unesco-warns.

27   UNESCO, "The Rewired Global Declaration on Connectivity for Education: #ConnectivityDeclaration (Paris, 2022).

28   Available at www.un.org/en/transforming-education-summit/digital-learning-all.