



# BEYOND COMMITMENTS

HOW COUNTRIES IMPLEMENT SDG 4



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Report



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A special publication on the occasion of the 2019 High-level Political Forum, prepared by the *Global Education Monitoring Report* team under the auspices of the SDG-Education 2030 Steering Committee.

The Education 2030 Incheon Declaration and Framework for Action specifies that the mandate of the *Global Education Monitoring Report* is to be “the mechanism for monitoring and reporting on SDG 4 and on education in the other SDGs” with the responsibility to “report on the implementation of national and international strategies to help hold all relevant partners to account for their commitments as part of the overall SDG follow-up and review”. It is prepared by an independent team hosted by UNESCO.

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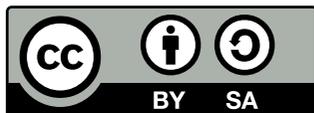
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# Executive summary

Almost one-third of the time set to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) has elapsed. The 2019 High-level Political Forum (HLPF), the global SDG follow-up and review mechanism, represents a major stock-taking moment for countries, especially as regards SDG 4, the education goal, which is being reviewed for the first time.

The international community relies primarily on quantitative measures to assess progress towards the SDGs. A companion publication by the UNESCO Institute for Statistics and the *Global Education Monitoring Report* for the 2019 HLPF, titled 'Meeting commitments: Are countries on track to achieve SDG 4?', shows that there are major challenges ahead.

But increasingly, member states demand more than quantitative information. They ask for guidance on how to respond when their education systems do not reach their targets. To respond to this demand, this publication has the following purposes:

- Understand countries' perceptions of SDG 4 based on responses to a questionnaire prepared for this publication, which asked countries to report on their flagship SDG 4 policies
- Distil those perceptions into a framework of the types of national policies that are best aligned with SDG 4 and whose implementation should be monitored
- Communicate the framework succinctly and provide a complementary input for the review of SDG 4 at the 2019 HLPF
- Provide an opportunity for countries to engage in dialogue on how they approach SDG 4.

An analysis of the questionnaires submitted by 72 governments shows that most countries refer to SDG 4 as a framework in which they place their education planning. A core recommendation is that countries should align their education plans and policies with their international commitments. While countries align their national targets with SDG 4 in a variety of ways, six areas are well geared for accelerating progress to reach the goal.

## ■ BEYOND AVERAGES: equity and inclusion

1. Inclusive education should encompass all learners. Yet over a third of countries mentioning policies on inclusion referred to a single group only, mostly learners with disabilities or special education needs.
2. Education and social assistance policies need to be designed jointly to promote equity, as is the case with school vouchers for indigenous students in Bolivia or the abolition of tuition fees for the poorest in Viet Nam.
3. Ministries of education must monitor disparity to elaborate inclusion policies. South Africa screens students to identify the nature and level of support they need, and Thailand maintains an individual database for the Equitable Education Fund.

## ■ BEYOND ACCESS: quality and learning

1. Countries including the Philippines and Spain are increasingly developing national assessment systems that provide robust diagnoses of trends over time and are not just a mechanism to manage transition from one level to the next.
2. Selective participation in cross-national assessments, as in Bhutan and Pakistan, is a valuable complementary tool to develop capacity and benchmark a national system.
3. Information from national monitoring frameworks should be used to inform curriculum, textbook and teacher development and drive policy evaluation, as in the Bahamas, China, the Czech Republic and Panama.

### ■ BEYOND BASICS: content fit for sustainable development

1. Curricula are being updated to promote sustainable development, human rights, gender equality, a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship and cultural diversity.
2. Curriculum development needs to be participatory to encourage national ownership, from the central to the school level. In Germany, multiple stakeholders took part in a new national action plan for sustainable development, and Mexico ran a national consultation for its new curriculum.
3. Curricula, teacher preparation and assessment need to be aligned, as in Portugal, whose new citizenship curriculum is being monitored to assess how schools respond to additional autonomy, and the Republic of Korea, where curriculum changes are combined with teacher education.

### ■ BEYOND SCHOOLING: lifelong learning

1. All countries need to define their response to their commitment under SDG 4 to provide 'lifelong learning opportunities for all'. At present, poorer countries, such as Afghanistan and Burkina Faso, focus on adult literacy and richer countries on training for work or non-work purposes.
2. A continuum of approaches is needed to link formal and non-formal education opportunities, as in Armenia's national register of training opportunities, Estonia's lifelong learning strategy, Japan's community learning centres and the sustainable development plan of Montréal, Canada.
3. Governments need to address the challenge that the more educated are more likely to receive further education opportunities.

### ■ BEYOND EDUCATION: cross-sector cooperation

1. Ministries of education need to engage in stronger partnerships with other sectors that extend beyond planning to implementation to achieve SDG 4. Countries referred to multisector partnerships mostly regarding links between education and the labour market, as in Honduras, Palestine and Saudi Arabia, and to a lesser extent inclusive education, as in Ecuador and Iceland, or early childhood care, as in Colombia and Lebanon.
2. Partnerships should not be limited to other ministries but also include other government tiers, non-government organizations and the private sector, as in Albania's national action plan for sexual minorities and Kenya's school feeding programme.
3. Education ministries should actively remove administrative hurdles that stand in the way of multisector partnerships. In Norway, four ministries joined forces to coordinate their work supporting vulnerable children and youth.

### ■ BEYOND COUNTRIES: regional and global cooperation

1. Regional organizations need to have clear education agendas, align them to SDG 4, monitor commitments and develop environments conducive to policy dialogue. Such efforts by the European Union and the Council of Europe inspire similar moves in other regions.
2. Governments should seek opportunities for peer learning. The Pacific Islands Literacy and Numeracy Assessment helps share costs in the collection of data on learning outcomes and in their analysis and use across participating countries.
3. Peer networks for education are global public goods whose coordination and communication functions need to be properly funded. For instance, the Technical Cooperation Group that develops the SDG 4 monitoring framework requires more resources to strengthen country participation.

# SDG 4, our global education goal

At the 70th Session of the United Nations (UN) General Assembly in September 2015, member states adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. At the heart of the Agenda are 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), including SDG 4 on education with its 10 targets (Table 1). SDG 4 aims to support learning that influences people's choices to create more just, inclusive and sustainable societies. To advance progress towards SDG 4, the global education community adopted the Education 2030 Framework for Action in November 2015, a roadmap that outlines implementation strategies on issues ranging from teachers and finance to monitoring indicators and coordination mechanisms.

The High-level Political Forum (HLPF) is the apex institution of the SDG follow-up and review mechanism. It oversees a network of processes to 'facilitate sharing of experiences, including successes, challenges and lessons learned, and provide political leadership, guidance and recommendations for follow-up'. The HLPF meets each July under the auspices of the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) and also convenes every four years in September at the level of heads of state under the auspices of the General Assembly. Each year, the HLPF reviews a set of five to six goals, ensuring that all are reviewed within a four-year cycle. SDG 4 is being reviewed for the first time in 2019.

This review could not have been more timely. Almost one-third of the time set to achieve SDG 4 has elapsed. Yet, the Brussels Declaration, issued at the Global Education Meeting in December 2018, noted that the world was not on track to meet the SDG 4 targets by 2030. A companion publication by the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS) and the *Global Education Monitoring Report*, titled 'Meeting commitments: Are countries on track to achieve SDG 4?', which is being launched on the occasion of the 2019 HLPF, shows that, on current trends, barely 6 in 10 young people will be completing secondary school by 2030, while in some regions, such as sub-Saharan Africa, fewer students will be achieving minimum proficiency in reading at the end of primary school.

**TABLE 1:**  
SDG 4 — the education goal and targets

*Goal 4: Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all*

**Target 4.1:** By 2030, ensure that all girl and boys complete free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education leading to relevant and effective learning outcomes

**Target 4.2:** By 2030, ensure that all girls and boys have access to quality early childhood development, care and pre-primary education so that they are ready for primary education

**Target 4.3:** By 2030, ensure equal access for all women and men to affordable and quality technical, vocational and tertiary education, including university

**Target 4.4:** By 2030, substantially increase the number of youth and adults who have relevant skills, including technical and vocational skills, for employment, decent jobs and entrepreneurship

**Target 4.5:** By 2030, eliminate gender disparities in education and ensure equal access to all levels of education and vocational training for the vulnerable, including persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples and children in vulnerable situations

**Target 4.6:** By 2030, ensure that all youth and a substantial proportion of adults, both men and women, achieve literacy and numeracy

**Target 4.7:** By 2030, ensure that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including, among others, through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture's contribution to sustainable development

**Target 4.a:** Build and upgrade education facilities that are child, disability and gender sensitive and provide safe, non-violent, inclusive and effective learning environments for all

**Target 4.b:** By 2020, substantially expand globally the number of scholarships available to developing countries, in particular least developed countries, small island developing States and African countries, for enrolment in higher education, including vocational training and information and communications technology, technical, engineering and scientific programmes, in developed countries and other developing countries

**Target 4.c:** By 2030, substantially increase the supply of qualified teachers, including through international cooperation for teacher training in developing countries, especially least developed countries and small island developing States

Failing to ensure that all young people complete secondary school and achieve ‘relevant and effective learning outcomes’ will jeopardize the achievement of the other SDGs. In this context, it is impossible to overstate the political importance of the 2019 HLPF, which is the key opportunity for voices to be heard loud and clear in a wake-up call for the planet to be steered towards sustainable development, a process in which the role of education is critical.

Yet, while the quantitative assessment of SDG 4 monitoring indicators, despite controversies and debates, clearly points at what constitutes progress in certain areas, the same cannot be said for a qualitative assessment of SDG 4-oriented policies. Indeed, as SDG 4 encompasses almost every level and dimension of education, there is a risk that it could mean anything to anyone. If the agenda is not sufficiently prioritized to guide countries, it is difficult to assess whether policies are moving in the right direction.

## HOW TO READ THIS PUBLICATION

To respond to this demand, this publication has seized the HLPF moment to offer countries an opportunity to reflect on their collective efforts and whether they prioritize appropriate policies. It draws primarily on a short questionnaire administered to all countries, mainly as part of the regional SDG 4 consultation process; 72 governments submitted responses (**Figure 1**). As it is not only national governments that pursue education policies, an adjusted questionnaire was also administered to members of the International Coalition of Inclusive and Sustainable Cities; 22 municipal authorities replied.

Countries and cities were asked to share their views of what is unique about SDG 4, report whether the SDG 4 agenda has influenced their education policy planning and implementation, and highlight the policies that, in their view, best exemplify their commitment to SDG 4. The analysis of these responses informs this publication, whose purpose is to:

**FIGURE 1:**

**One in three countries responded to the questionnaire for this publication**



- Understand countries’ perceptions of SDG 4 based on questions about their flagship policies
- Distil those perceptions into a framework of the types of national policies that are best aligned with SDG 4 and whose implementation should be monitored
- Communicate the framework succinctly and provide a complementary input for the review of SDG 4 at the 2019 HLPF
- Provide an opportunity for countries to engage in dialogue on how they approach SDG 4.

This publication argues that countries need to look into making progress in six areas to increase their chances of achieving SDG 4:

### ■ Beyond **AVERAGES**:

Equity is a driver of the agenda – notably with the principle of leaving no one behind. While concern for equity was limited to a few countries when the international education agenda focused on primary education, it has become far more important, strongly supported by the availability of relevant data on education indicators disaggregated by individual characteristics.

### ■ Beyond **ACCESS**:

The SDGs address a standard criticism of the international agenda, especially under the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) – that attention was limited to enrolment to the detriment of quality. The adoption of multiple quality indicators, from teachers to learning, signifies a shift and recognizes the need to engage with questions of process and outcomes.

### ■ Beyond **BASICS**:

Although literacy and numeracy are the foundation for other skills, the range of desirable education outcomes is expanding in view of the wider challenges of sustainable development. The SDG 4 targets refer, for instance, to skills for work, including creativity, problem solving, and social and emotional skills, but also to global citizenship and to respect for cultural diversity.

### ■ Beyond **SCHOOLING**:

Such skills are not acquired only in school. In any case, most decisions needed to increase the chances of meeting 2030 Agenda targets (e.g. to consume sustainably) have to be taken by adults whose skills need to be developed outside school. The SDG 4 agenda makes a strong case for lifelong learning.

### ■ Beyond **EDUCATION**:

The interplay between education and the other development targets, whether on agriculture, gender or justice, is the key to sustainable development. While the international community realized this interdependency towards the end of the MDG period, the SDG agenda is very much built on the interlinkages that the education sector is being called upon to explore.

### ■ Beyond **COUNTRIES**:

The common aspects of education system challenges and the opening of more communication platforms mean both the demand and opportunities for governments to learn from their peers through policy dialogue and shared projects are increasing at the regional and global levels.

Using this framework, examples of policies and practices from around the world showcase the emerging shared understanding of how the SDG 4 agenda is taking education forward. This publication makes no claim that the policies selected are the best or that there is sufficient evidence that they are succeeding at achieving SDG 4 targets. Rather, it attempts to showcase policies that capture the spirit of SDG 4 in various contexts and that appear important to monitor in the coming years. The aim on the occasion of the next SDG 4 review in four years' time is to see whether the needle has moved.

# Framing SDG 4

Developing a framework for a shared vision of priorities under SDG 4 is a necessary first step for analysing whether countries are moving in that direction. The analysis entails a review of the evolution of the international education agenda, a description of the HLPF and a synthesis of the education-related messages emerging from the key input to the HLPF in the past three years, and a summary of responses to two questions in the short questionnaire administered to countries.

## A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE SHOWS HOW THE EDUCATION AGENDA IS CHANGING UNDER SDG 4

Assessing what is new for the education sector under the 2030 Agenda requires an understanding of how the education development agenda has evolved and responded to countries' needs.

The 1990 World Conference on Education for All (EFA) in Jomtien, Thailand, first established an international agenda on education. Stagnating schooling rates in much of the world, a belief that human development should be at the core of all development, and optimism generated by the end of the Cold War prompted the conference and led to an ambitious call to support EFA. The 'expanded vision' of Jomtien's World Declaration on Education for All succinctly expressed policy concerns, on issues such as equity, learning and non-formal education provision, that remain valid. Progress in the 1990s was sluggish, however. The forces that had led to stagnation, especially structural adjustment policies in the poorest countries, were still operating. Frustration with the slow progress increased external pressure on the international community to act. Civil society organizations raised their voices and lobbied strongly to put public pressure on governments.

The 2000 World Education Forum in Dakar reaffirmed the six EFA goals but also tried to bring positive change to global education through resource mobilization, as well as coordination and monitoring mechanisms. The Dakar Framework for Action stated that the 'heart of EFA activity lies at the country level' but also argued that strong national strategies would benefit from increased effective development cooperation support. The partners committed to 'ensure that the Dakar Framework for Action is on the agenda of every international and regional organization, every national legislature and every local decision-making forum'. Coordination and monitoring mechanisms would ensure regular oversight and provide accountability; countries would be aware that they were observed and that actions found lacking could raise questions at home and abroad.

Five months later, the MDGs were approved. Their broader, poverty-focused development agenda had a much narrower education scope: universal access to primary education, youth literacy (MDG 2) and gender parity across all levels of education (MDG 3). As the MDGs became the dominant development narrative, they diluted the EFA message. Emphasis on universal primary education appealed to the poorest countries that were furthest from it, as well as rich countries that were prepared to finance its achievement, but less to many countries that had already or nearly achieved it. As these countries' interest waned, so also did the universal appeal of the EFA agenda, despite its goals on issues such as early childhood care and education and adult literacy.

The 2030 Agenda adopted by UN member states in 2015 addresses many of these weaknesses by bringing together the poverty arm (MDGs) and environment arm (Rio process) of the previous development agenda. That education is one of the goals (SDG 4) and is explicitly or implicitly incorporated into most other goals is a key difference: Education is interlinked with other development outcomes. Further, the universality of the SDGs recognizes that education systems around the world face similar challenges as they try to respond to the requirements of sustainable development.

The SDG 4 targets draw on the EFA vision but include further commitments, for instance on universal secondary education completion, equal access to tertiary education, inclusive learning environments and qualified teachers.

Moreover, there is a distinct emphasis in the SDG 4 monitoring framework on outcomes – in other words, the consequences of the experience of education on children, youth and adults. These outcomes include minimum proficiency levels in reading and mathematics, readiness for school and digital literacy skills.

Another change is the clear shift to disaggregation: analysing education participation and outcome indicators by individual demographic and socio-economic characteristics. The only equivalent MDG indicator was the gender parity index in enrolment rates by level of education. The inclusion of other characteristics, notably location and wealth, is a consequence of increasing availability of information sources from school and household surveys in the last two decades, which now permit comparisons within and across countries.

A further change from the MDG era is an interest in the content of education – in particular, the mainstreaming of education for sustainable development and global citizenship through curricula, textbooks and teacher preparation. Finally, the SDG 4 formulation's reference to lifelong learning opportunities indicates that education is interpreted broadly, as both formal schooling and its non-formal and informal dimensions.

## MULTIPLE VOICES ARE EXPRESSED AT THE HIGH-LEVEL POLITICAL FORUM

While there was remarkable mobilization by UN member states to agree on the global challenges, there was less consensus on the means of achieving the goals and the sharing of responsibility. As a result, there was less desire among member states to be pinned down and held to account for not contributing enough to the joint effort. Instead, the follow-up and review process for tracking progress towards the SDGs is a soft mechanism with the HLPF at its head.

The HLPF reviews several inputs in its deliberations. At the **government** level, countries' voluntary national reviews (VNRs) are the main input, as responsibility for the 2030 Agenda was placed squarely on countries. Countries are therefore encouraged to share experiences, challenges and lessons learned. It is too early to tell how effective this country-led, hands-off approach is in advancing the 2030 Agenda. While experience indicates that normative pressures by other countries can encourage progress in ensuring the fulfilment of rights, including the right to education, country reporting on UN human rights treaties suggests that lack of external enforcement may delay progress. Countries face various resource constraints in preparing and presenting their VNRs. Moreover, despite receiving guidance, countries follow diverse approaches and cover goals in varying degrees of depth in their VNRs. While this diversity provides a valuable perspective that deserves further comparative analysis (which the next section provides), it weakens the role of VNRs as a tool for monitoring progress towards a single goal, such as that on education.

At the **cross-government** level, the HLPF invites inputs from 'intergovernmental bodies and forums'. The SDG-Education 2030 Steering Committee derives its authority from the World Education Forum and is co-chaired by UNESCO and a member state, currently Japan. Intergovernmental bodies complement the single-country perspective of VNRs by providing a thematic perspective, focusing on the set of goals under review and highlighting the SDGs' intersectoral nature. The inputs, prepared under clear instructions from ECOSOC, collect key points to guide the HLPF final declaration. The effectiveness of the inputs depends on the strength of these bodies' mechanisms to consult and reach consensus with their members and on the sharpness of their communication and messaging.

The contribution of the Steering Committee for the 2019 HLPF complements this publication in its call for coherent and targeted policies and legislation that focus on equity, learning, content, a life-cycle perspective and cross-sectoral partnerships. In addition, it calls on countries to mobilize adequate domestic financing and

invest in teachers. Finally, it calls on development partners to mobilize adequate external resources, coordinate collective action, collect data and help develop monitoring capacity to achieve inclusion and equity. A set of recommendations is based on the nine key messages of the Brussels Declaration at the Global Education Meeting in December 2018.

At the **non-government** level, 'major groups and other stakeholders' are also invited to report, an official recognition of the value of their global-level perspective. There has been a tradition of non-government organizations (NGOs) participating in the environment arm of the sustainable development agenda since the 1992 Rio Conference, which recognized nine segments of society as vital for sustainable development. The Education and Academia Stakeholder Group, which brings together education NGOs, teachers, adult education advocates and university students, was created in 2013.

At the **supra-government** level, the UN system produces a range of inputs to monitor progress towards the SDGs. The narrative UN Secretary-General report and the SDG Report are the flagship publications. UNESCO, the UN agency responsible for education, supports the education components of these publications, mainly through the UIS. In addition, the international education community has at its disposal 'an independent *Global Education Monitoring Report ...*, hosted and published by UNESCO, as the mechanism for monitoring and reporting on ... SDG 4 and on education in the other ... SDGs, within the mechanism to ... review the implementation of the ... SDGs'.

## VOLUNTARY NATIONAL REVIEWS SUGGEST COUNTRIES ARE PAYING ATTENTION TO EQUITY AND LINKS WITH OTHER SECTORS

Of those inputs to the HLPF, the VNRs, which are prepared with varying degrees of participation within and beyond governments, are the most important. They are expected to follow guidelines set and annually updated by the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA). The reviews include national perspectives, priorities and approaches for SDG implementation.

The VNRs, available on the Sustainable Development Knowledge Platform, represent the most substantive, publicly available information base on SDG implementation. There are 111 VNRs now and 47 more are expected in the 2019 HLPF (**Table 2**). Eight countries produced multiple VNRs between 2016 and 2018 (Benin, Colombia, Egypt, Mexico, Qatar, Switzerland, Togo and Uruguay), and a further eight will submit a second VNR in 2019 (Azerbaijan, Chile, El Salvador, Guatemala, Indonesia, the Philippines, Sierra Leone and Turkey).

**TABLE 2:**  
Voluntary national reviews submitted, by HLPF year, theme and goals reviewed

	HLPF theme	Goals reviewed	Number of VNRs
2016	Ensuring that no one is left behind	Not specified	22
2017	Eradicating poverty and promoting prosperity in a changing world	1, 2, 3, 5, 9, 14, 17	43
2018	Transformation towards sustainable and resilient societies	6, 7, 11, 12, 15, 17	46
2019	Empowering people and ensuring inclusiveness and equality	4, 8, 10, 13, 16, 17	47*

\* Number planned.

Although education was not a focus goal in 2016–2018, it is one of the goals most consistently discussed, having been directly analysed in 56 VNRs. Of those, 51 analysed all goals, while 5 had a special focus on education (Andorra, Belarus, Monaco, Nigeria and Qatar). Education is a stated central priority in many countries, with some, such as Slovakia and Viet Nam, mentioning education as a top development priority.

Most countries use the VNR exercise to assess how their national development strategies map onto the SDGs. Education is typically linked to the human capital and social pillars of development strategies. Coverage of education in the VNRs strongly highlights two cross-cutting issues that characterize the SDGs: education's role in leaving no one behind and in achieving the other SDGs.

## Education is a key component of efforts to leave no one behind

Leaving no one behind is the most prioritized cross-cutting principle discussed in the VNRs. Countries identified gender, sexual orientation, disability, ethnicity, language, and migration and displacement status as characteristics for which groups should not be left behind or discriminated against. An analysis by DESA of the 43 VNRs submitted in 2017 found that, while 39 mentioned the principle, only 19 referred to explicit strategies to implement it. No VNR committed to reaching the furthest behind first. Another analysis by the Overseas Development Institute found that most provided no detail on what leaving no one behind meant in their countries. In 2018, the official synthesis report by DESA found that more countries included in-depth analysis, but only Benin, Bhutan and Jamaica specifically mentioned reaching the furthest behind first.

Countries whose VNRs discussed education-related efforts to leave no one behind frequently wove inclusion of vulnerable groups in education into broader social inclusion issues. For instance, Brazil initiated the Happy Child programme in 2016 to expand the well-known Bolsa Familia social assistance programme, which supports women from early pregnancy to ensure early childhood development. Over 2,500 municipalities have joined and more than 600,000 children are benefiting, the aim being to reach 1 million children. In 2017, the government established an early childhood committee with ministry and civil society representatives from the health, education, culture, planning and development sectors. In Egypt, the Takaful (Solidarity) programme, initiated in 2015, provides a monthly cash transfer to households whose children attend school at least 80% of the time, among other conditions. In 2018, almost 2.3 million families were enrolled, more than tripling 2015/16 enrolment. The Ministry of Social Solidarity has also developed interventions to train women on technical, vocational and financial aspects of starting and managing small income-generating projects, in collaboration with NGOs; in 2017, over 30,000 women received such training.

Efforts to include children and adolescents with disabilities had a strong emphasis on education. In Australia, the National Disability Strategy 2010–2020 includes policies on health, education, employment, income support systems and infrastructure to ensure the inclusion of people with disabilities. Government school funding formulas take disability into account in their estimation of school disadvantage. Computers and internet in schools are adapted for students with disabilities. In Bahrain, the ministries of labour and social development, health and education collaborate with non-state actors in rehabilitation and training activities to facilitate integration of people with disabilities into the labour market and society. The Egypt ICT Trust Fund, the Ministry of Communications and Information Technology and the United Nations Development Programme implemented education and training programmes targeting people with disabilities in 112 slums in Cairo. The Malta Inspire Foundation focuses on children aged 2 to 5 with special needs, and supports training programmes for people with intellectual disabilities to improve their employability.

With respect to ethnic and linguistic minorities, some European countries highlighted inclusion of the Roma. Albania mentioned discriminatory teacher attitudes alongside issues of poverty and birth registration. Hungary reported on the implementation of a programme to prevent Roma girls from leaving school early. Indigenous groups were also covered. In Australia, the ConnXtions programme supports job readiness interventions for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander populations. Canada is developing a Recognition and Implementation of Rights Framework for indigenous peoples, in full partnership with First Nations, Inuit and Metis, including actions to improve primary and secondary education on reserves.

## Countries recognize the role of education in sustainable development

While interconnectedness is a major feature of the SDGs, education is rarely central in the sustainable development discourse. For instance, the Cabo Verde VNR mentioned that the education project under way at the Ministry of Education should contribute to the 'overall achievement of all the objectives in the transversal areas of poverty reduction, gender equality, inequality reduction, sustainable consumption and health'.

In other instances, education was considered key to achieving individual goals to, for instance, overcome exclusion barriers (SDG 1 or 10), reduce malnourishment through school feeding programmes (SDG 2), achieve behavioural change for sustainable consumption (SDG 12), raise environmental awareness (SDG 13 or 14) and improve employability (SDG 8), especially of marginalized women and girls (SDG 5). Armenia acknowledged the need for education and training on water knowledge (SDG 6) and energy efficiency (SDG 7). In Togo, vocational training is expected to support agricultural transformation.

Several interventions focused on schools and universities. In Sri Lanka, the Ministry of Education plans to integrate digital literacy into curricula developed jointly with the Ministry of Telecommunication and Digital Infrastructure. Uruguay noted that it was the first Latin American country to ensure full electric power in all schools. Zimbabwe, with support from development partners, launched participatory health and hygiene education programmes in schools in some cities.

Several countries referred to the link between education, governance and peace (SDG 16). Jamaica highlighted a citizen security and justice programme to develop 16- to 29-year-olds' technical and soft skills to improve their employability. Kenya described an initiative to support community monitoring of water quality and supply. Kiribati identified a need to train police and judicial officers.

Countries often viewed gender equality and women's empowerment (SDG 5) as a cross-sectoral challenge with a key role for education. In Ethiopia, more than 1.3 million female farmers reportedly benefited from agricultural extension services, which also provided training for nearly 100,000 women to join small and medium-sized enterprises. In India, a programme in Bihar state provided a bicycle to every girl entering grade 9 or 10 to reduce their dropout rates, and the national Mahila Shakti Kendra initiative supported village-level Women Empowerment Centres offering a comprehensive package of services, including development of skills such as digital literacy. In Uruguay, the Ministry of Education launched a student support programme for pregnant women to promote their school retention.

## COUNTRIES SEE SDG 4 AS A TOOL TO FRAME EDUCATION PLANNING

Units preparing VNRs are steeped in SDG language. It may be relatively easy for them to make connections between education and such key SDG features as leaving no one behind and identifying links with other development goals. By contrast, education officials may be less familiar with SDG 4 nuances but better placed to talk about education policies, which may be less familiar to some VNR authors. The introductory questions on SDG 4 administered to education ministries were purposefully open-ended so as not to guide responses.

### Most countries refer to SDG 4 in their plans

The first question invited respondents to report on how the SDG 4 agenda influenced planning and implementation in their countries. The objective was not to attribute policy changes to SDG 4; education policy changes are the result of multiple, mostly domestic factors and are often not related strictly to education considerations. Moreover, the global education goal is so all-encompassing and lacking in clear prioritization that it would be inappropriate to assume countries switched to new policies once SDG 4 came into effect.

Rather, the objective was only to record responses, observe any tendencies or patterns and infer how SDG 4 was perceived.

In discussing how the SDGs influenced education plans and policies, countries from Afghanistan to China, Germany and Qatar identified strong alignment between existing national education policy and the SDG 4 goal, targets and indicators. Most responses referred to SDG 4 as a framework used or being considered as a basis for planning:

- Angola noted that its national education development was determined by the government's Agenda 2025 and reinforced by the 2030 Agenda.
- Benin said SDG 4 provided a 'scaffolding for the review and amendment of legislation, regulations and policy' to inform education sector strategy and goals and guide data collection.
- In the Plurinational State of Bolivia, the 2030 Agenda was consistent with national efforts to broaden the interpretation of education quality, in strong alignment with education law.
- Colombia built its National Decennial Education Plan for 2016–2026 in collaboration with the private sector, academia and civil society, with the SDGs as one of the benchmarks.
- Comoros aligned the development of the Accelerated Growth and Sustainable Development Strategy with SDG 4. The Education Sector Transition Plan, developed in 2017, was further aligned with SDG requirements.
- The Democratic Republic of the Congo revised the education sector plan with the adoption of SDG 4, and changed the time horizon from 2025 to 2030. This led to the establishment of a multisector national team involving the ministries of education, finance, and budget and planning, the Congolese Observatory of Sustainable Development, and civil society organizations.
- Finland mentioned that SDG 4 objectives had strengthened the ideas of equity, inclusion, participation and global citizenship.
- Kazakhstan described SDG 4 as a key priority in the 2025 Strategic Development Plan.
- Lithuania's parliament adopted a resolution on SDG implementation in 2018. SDG 4 will be a cornerstone for setting new strategic directions.
- Taking initial results of a constitutional education reform into account, Mexico's Ministry of Education will introduce adjustments to initiatives where improvement areas were recognized and reflect on new strategies to strengthen programmes' linkage with SDG 4.
- Montserrat stated that SDG 4 was raising awareness and fostering community discussions of issues otherwise not considered.
- Myanmar had already developed the National Education Strategic Plan 2016–21 but expected to align it further with 2030 Agenda targets and priorities when updating it beyond 2021.
- In Norway, sustainable development was one of three interdisciplinary topics in the general section on values and principles of the new core curriculum for primary and secondary schools. The Ministry of Education and Research budget proposal to parliament included a chapter on the SDG 4 targets from both a quantitative and a qualitative perspective, highlighting new initiatives.

- The Education 2030 Framework for Action was among documents used to prepare the ninth five-year plan in Oman.
- Provincial education sector plans in Pakistan were based on SDG 4 gap analyses.
- For the Philippines, SDG 4 stressed the importance of strategic planning to achieve goals consistent with international commitments. The Department of Education embarked on its first long-term education plan, going beyond the usual medium-term planning aligned with the six-year presidency.
- The new agenda brought to light education sector data gaps in South Africa and prompted action to ensure that progress could be measured.
- SDG 4 raised awareness of sustainable development as a framework for education planning in Suriname.
- In Tunisia, the SDG 4 goal, targets and indicators were fully considered at all stages of preparing the 2016–2020 strategic education plan. SDG 4 also prompted an integrated multisector system bringing together various ministries, agencies and civil society.
- In Vanuatu, the SDG 4 agenda influenced the restructuring of the Ministry of Education and Training, whose planning approach was evolving from an activity focus to a results focus, in alignment with the national sustainable development plan for 2016–2030.

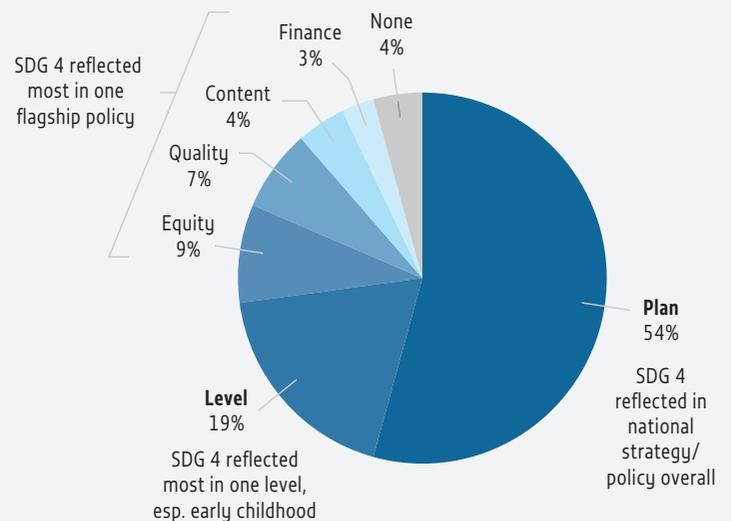
### Countries associate SDG 4 with equity, quality and early childhood

The second question invited respondents to select a policy or programme that, in their view, best reflected the national commitment to SDG 4. The question did not prove as helpful as expected since just over half the countries suggested that their entire education strategy, plan or policy was evidence of that commitment (**Figure 2**). This is indicative of SDG 4's broad scope, but also shows countries may struggle to identify the aspect they associate with most. However, the remaining responses hinted at issues countries considered their main current priority, which they also saw captured by SDG 4. Note that this is a summary of responses to this particular question; other countries may have covered some of these issues in other questions.

One in five countries signalled that progress at a given level of education demonstrated the commitment, with most referring to early childhood. The Democratic Republic of the Congo introduced a programme to expand enrolment and school preparation of 5-year-olds by developing pre-primary

**FIGURE 2:**

**Countries that singled out a policy as demonstrating their commitment to SDG 4 focused on inclusion, quality and early childhood**



Note: The figure reports responses to the question: 'Please name and describe the policy or programme, which in your opinion best reflects the commitment of your government to achieving SDG 4.'

Source: GEM Report team, based on analysis of questionnaires submitted by 72 countries.

classes in primary school and hiring trained, state-paid teachers. To fulfil the commitment made in its education law, Honduras wanted to universalize 5-year-old enrolment through formal or non-formal alternatives, such as community centres offering pre-basic education. Libya aimed to mainstream pre-primary education, improve content and pedagogy, design model buildings in harmony with their surroundings and train pre-primary teachers at education faculties and Training and Development Centres. The Republic of Korea cited an increase in public pre-school enrolment to 40%, with priority on children from low-income households, multicultural families and children with special needs, as the best sign of its commitment to SDG 4.

Almost one in four countries argued that a flagship programme targeting equity, quality, content or finance was their best proof of commitment. The Flemish Community of Belgium noted its equal education opportunity monitoring system using information on students' and schools' socio-economic status (e.g. language spoken at home, maternal education, parental employment, area of residence and proxy measures of income) to track performance through connected databases and to develop school funding policies. Bulgaria showcased inclusion, an overarching education priority and key policy since adoption of the Pre-school and School Education Law in 2016. With low levels of proficiency in reading and mathematics, the Marshall Islands highlighted its basic education quality programme, which focuses on teacher preparation, capacity to use assessment for learning, access to and use of teaching and learning resources, and education leadership and school management, including community engagement. Saudi Arabia mentioned that its Education Evaluation Commission, responsible for issuing evaluation rules and standards from basic to tertiary education, now also dealt with assessment and accreditation.

To summarize, the review of responses to a simple questionnaire on how countries perceived SDG 4 and its influence on their education plans and policies suggested that about half could not distinguish between the goal and their overall policy frameworks. Countries that did link SDG 4 with a specific policy provided insight into how progress towards SDG 4 could be understood from a qualitative perspective, an issue addressed in the next six sections.



Pastoralist children on their way to school in Kyrgyzstan.

CREDIT: GEM Report/Askar Nuraken

# Beyond averages

## Key recommendations

- Adopt a definition of inclusive education that encompasses all learners.
- Design education and social assistance policies jointly to promote equity.
- Ensure that education ministries monitor disparity to help elaborate inclusion policies.

Inclusion and equity have a central place in SDG 4: The goal formulation calls on countries to ensure 'inclusive and equitable quality education ... for all'. Countries around the world are making considerable efforts to apply the concept of leaving no one behind in education by monitoring disparity and inequality and using the evidence to develop policies that promote equity and inclusion. Nevertheless, a common understanding of the concept of equity and, especially, inclusion is elusive.

An analysis of policy and programme examples submitted by countries for this publication showed that 37% referred to a single group (Figure 3). In most cases, including in Fiji, Iraq and Kazakhstan, these were children, youth or adults with disabilities or special education needs. Disability was also mentioned by the 20% of countries that referred to multiple groups in their responses, such as Bhutan, Curaçao and France.

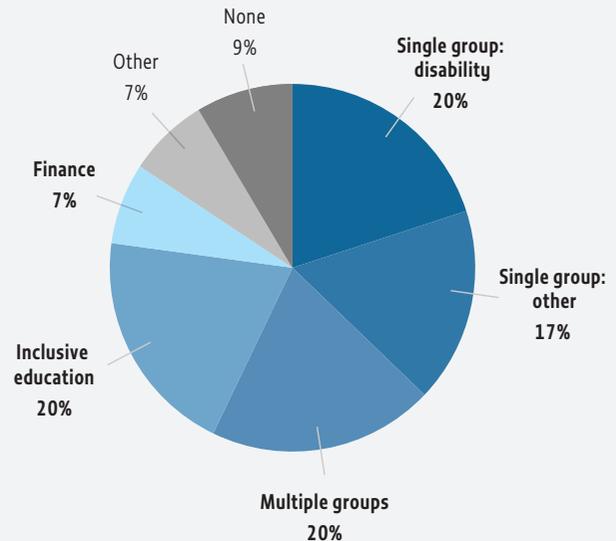
Among other groups that received attention, populations in rural and remote areas figured prominently. As part of its New School approach, Ecuador is reopening previously consolidated rural multigrade schools. Myanmar mentioned a programme to increase access in remote and rural areas both to formal long-term technical and vocational education and training (TVET) and to competence-based modular short-term training courses and mobile training programmes. Other groups mentioned were refugees (Djibouti), immigrants (Iceland), nomads (Kenya), girls (Mali) and the Roma (Slovakia).

About 27% of countries referred to deeper reforms, including in finance, to promote equity and inclusion. In Argentina, the 3,000-plus schools taking part in the Escuelas Faro programme were selected based on results of a 2016 learning assessment and indicators of education vulnerability (e.g. enrolment, over-age rates). They received support to prevent dropout and improve learning outcomes. Armenia intends to include children with special education needs in general education by creating pedagogical psychological support structures and introducing appropriate services in general schools. In Australia, the Inclusion Support Programme promotes inclusive practices in early childhood and child care services and provides additional English language support.

In China, a nutrition improvement plan in rural compulsory education targets all key counties for poverty alleviation. Finland plans to achieve equity in early childhood care and education through a new core curriculum emphasizing pedagogy, a guarantee of 20 hours of education weekly for all children, grants for children from socio-economically challenging areas, and qualification upgrades so that two-thirds of staff will have tertiary-level degrees by 2030. In Vanuatu, the Ministry of Education and Training and the Ministry of Justice and Social Services are collaborating on an inclusive education policy that addresses the needs of all learners, regardless of gender, religion, nationality, race, language or disability.

**FIGURE 3:**

**Many countries view inclusion more as an issue concerning one or more groups than an approach to education of good quality**



Note: The figure reports responses to the question: 'Please name and describe a key policy or programme [related to] targeting vulnerable groups.'

Source: GEM Report team, based on analysis of questionnaires submitted by 72 countries.

## BEYOND AVERAGES

## Community-based education policy in AFGHANISTAN

For decades, community-based classes and accelerated learning programmes have been the main means of education provision to children who lack regular access to government schools in Afghanistan, either because schools were too far away or because children's education trajectories were interrupted and they were too old to go back to school.

A community-based education policy was developed in 2018 through multi-stakeholder consultations to improve existing practices, define standards and articulate the roles and responsibilities of institutional stakeholders. The policy applies to provision of all community-based education, including classes, accelerated learning programmes and other pathways. In addition, an understanding between the Citizens' Charter project and the Ministry of Education will link community-based education policy to existing community development councils, opening up potential additional funding and management through community block grants.

The expectation is that institutionalizing community-based education will help sustain education delivery in villages, improve working conditions of community-based teachers and increase coordination of community-based education within the ministry. The goal is to bring financing from all sources on-budget through a Community-Based Education Transition Unit to improve the sustainability and national ownership of the ministry.

The policy document specifies criteria to be met when establishing new community-based classes. For instance, a community can request a class if the nearest public school is more than 3 km away and there are 20 to 35 school-aged students. The ministry is responsible for oversight of textbooks and learning materials, but an implementation partner can provide government textbooks and additional books if so agreed.

## Girls' education and women's empowerment in BANGLADESH

Bangladesh has a remarkable history of progress in girls' education through legislation, policies and initiatives, such as a stipend and financial support programme for female secondary and higher secondary students. Women's empowerment features prominently in the Constitution and in regulations in accordance with the 2011 National Women Development Policy. Several initiatives aim to improve women's empowerment further, both in and through education.

The government drafted a National Plan of Action on Ending Child Marriage in 2017 after approval of the Child Marriage Restraint Act 2017. The prime minister pledged to end marriage of children under 15 by 2021 and under 18 by 2041.

The Adolescent Student Programme, being implemented jointly by the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare between 2018 and 2023, is part of the Secondary Education Development Programme. It will introduce regulations on water and sanitation facilities for girls and boys, adequate materials and teacher counselling for menstrual hygiene management, and guidance to parents, teachers and students on adolescent sexual and reproductive health. School sexual harassment redress policies and complaint committees will be developed. With respect to accountability, the subdistrict education office will regularly monitor teachers on issues of adolescent well-being.

The Bangladesh Generation Breakthrough campaign, based on the United Nations Population Fund's adolescent and youth flagship project, combines media and community-level interventions to reach adolescents, religious and community leaders and school management committees through radio programmes, events, street dramas, social media, games and community advocacy meetings. It includes a two-year gender equity and violence prevention curriculum to help 12- to 14-year-olds build healthy relationships and gender-equitable attitudes.

The seventh Five-Year Plan (2016–2020) aims to improve gender equality in TVET by providing student stipends and other government incentives. The government set a target of 40% female enrolment in TVET by 2020. To encourage enrolment, four new polytechnical institutes were set up for women in four divisional headquarters. Three further institutes and seven women's technical schools and colleges are planned.

## Equality of education opportunity in IRELAND

Ireland launched a new Action Plan for Education in 2019. Adopting as its motto the phrase *Cumasú: Empowering through Learning*, the plan sets out the Department of Education and Skills' mission to help individuals achieve their full potential through learning and contribute to national development. A range of instruments across education levels and groups contribute to this mission.

The 2005 Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) Plan was the main policy instrument to support schools with higher concentrations of disadvantaged students. Having received positive evaluations, it was relaunched in 2017 with more than 100 actions to tackle disadvantage as part of a continuum of interventions to increase participation by under-represented groups, including second chance education and training. DEIS Plan 2017 focuses on the education needs of 3- to 18-year-olds, with targets that include literacy and numeracy, retention and higher education transition. Some actions support teachers and head teachers of DEIS schools in gaining access to professional leadership, mentoring and national education psychology services. As of 2019, almost 900 schools take part in the programme. DEIS Plan 2017 also includes parent engagement and community-based activities, with a home-school-community liaison programme that targets vulnerable children by empowering a key adult in their lives and offering adult and family literacy training opportunities. While the Department of Education and Skills is the main funder, an interagency approach sees the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection fund school meals and the Department of Children and Youth Affairs fund the Educational Welfare Services of the Child and Family Agency.

Travellers and Roma constitute one vulnerable group. The Department of Justice and Equality coordinates the cross-government National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy. The strategy adopts an inclusive approach to education, with the support of the Department of Education and Skills, the Department of Children and Youth Affairs and the Child and Family Agency, to improve attendance, participation and engagement and reduce early school leaving.

Various programmes support people with disabilities. At the pre-primary level, the Access and Inclusion Model, introduced in 2016, is a child-centred programme involving seven levels of support, from universal to targeted. Universal elements include lower staff/child ratios and training on the new Diversity, Equality and Inclusion Charter and Guidelines for Early Childhood Care and Education. The Leadership for Inclusion (LINC) higher education programme also supports pre-schools and encourages participation through additional funding for pre-schools with LINC graduates. Over 9,000 children have access to targeted supports, with the level of support based not on diagnosis but on the needs of the child and the pre-school.

## BEYOND AVERAGES

At the post-secondary, non-tertiary level, the Further Education and Training Authority supports inclusion of people with disabilities through strategic performance agreements with 16 Education and Training Boards, in line with the 2015–2024 Comprehensive Employment Strategy for People with Disabilities and 2017–2021 National Disability Inclusion Strategy. Programmes are made available through specialist training providers, adapted course content and teaching with reasonable accommodation. For learners with disabilities on Post Leaving Certificate programmes, which offer school leavers and adults the opportunity to take part in one- or two-year full-time courses, funding for support can be obtained via the Higher Education Authority's Fund for Students with Disabilities. A review of the fund in 2017 led to recommendations for a new funding allocation model and for institutional support for learners on part-time courses and pilot projects.

The 2015–2019 National Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education aims to increase access to initial teacher education for targeted disadvantaged groups, award higher education bursaries to disadvantaged students identified by their institutions and support higher education institutions in attracting additional students from under-represented groups.

## Structural transformation for the education rights of all in BOLIVIA

The Plurinational State of Bolivia's 2010 'Avelino Siñani – Elizardo Pérez' Education Law sought to revolutionize the education system's contents and accessibility, based on the values of equity, solidarity, complementarity, reciprocity and social justice. The government is endeavouring to support a plurinational education system that is inclusive, productive, multilingual and intercultural, and takes a lifelong learning approach. The law is subject to the 2009 Constitution, which devotes a chapter to education, interculturality and cultural rights, establishing education as a fundamental right and the state's prime financial responsibility.

Within the context of the Institutional Strategic Plan for the Ministry of Education and the Sectoral Plan for the Integral Development of Education for Living Well 2016–2020, historically excluded groups, including indigenous populations, people with disabilities, rural and remote populations, street children and pregnant teenagers who drop out of school, are targeted through a range of programmes. These include the Juancito Pinto school voucher, which facilitates school attendance for poor children by offsetting transport, books and uniform costs; the National Programme on Complementary School Feeding, which began in 2015; the Technical and Humanistic Baccalaureate, aimed at providing an integral approach for human development; and teacher education and professional development programmes.

Alternative education programmes target indigenous and native populations for productive or occupational skills development or young urban workers for additional pedagogical support. In addition, the government established the Plurinational Competency Certification System to certify skills and experiences gained in trades or occupations outside formal education. An average of 25,000 people a year, especially from previously neglected indigenous groups and rural areas, receive post-literacy certification.

## The Equitable Education Fund in THAILAND

In response to limited progress in reaching the last 10% of out-of-school children and youth, Thailand's Independent Committee for Education Reform set up the Equitable Education Fund in 2018 as part of the national reform agenda in the 2017 Constitution. Article 54 requires that the fund be independently managed and financed both by the government and through fundraising campaigns with special tax incentives. The independent executive board has 17 members: the chairperson, 7 non-government and non-political members appointed by the cabinet, 8 permanent secretaries from the Ministry of Education and related ministries, and a board-appointed chief executive officer who also serves as secretary. This governance structure ensures the fund's independence but also its consistent partnership with related government agencies to promote equitable education.

The fund's objectives and strategies were developed through an extensive six-month consultative process with all key stakeholders, including international partners such as UNESCO and UNICEF. Lessons learned from the MDGs and SDGs were also used to ensure the use of multidisciplinary and multisector approaches. The fund will employ an area-based approach to catalyse and empower local partners and key stakeholders to take ownership of the equitable education agenda in their areas. The fund's 10-year goal is to help Thailand achieve SDG 4 by 2030 by improving the school readiness of the pre-school population in the bottom 40% of the income distribution, reducing out-of-school and dropout rates, reducing wealth disparities in higher education access, and improving teachers and schools to help the socio-economically disadvantaged. It will also promote an equity-based budgeting model through policy research, and develop a database, connected over six ministries, to ensure identification and tracking of target groups, which will also be used to ensure accountability.

The fund targets 4.3 million children and youth. In 2018, it developed a poverty-screening programme that uses proxy means tests and a smartphone application to allow every school to apply for conditional cash transfers (based on school attendance and body mass index) for 3- to 15-year-old students from poor families. Most of the budget comes from the education and interior ministries. The fund contributes to research and development activities and an additional conditional cash transfer programme for 600,000 extremely poor students. In 2019, it will also provide the Homegrown Teacher Scholarship for poor secondary school students who want to become teachers in schools in their disadvantaged communities.

## Inclusion of Syrian refugees in TURKEY

Faced with an influx of Syrian refugees, the Ministry of National Education in Turkey established a regulatory framework for temporary education centres in 2014. Education provision, data management and regulation of organizations supporting the centres were further standardized in the following two years, and centres not meeting regulations were closed. In August 2016, the government announced that all Syrian refugee children would be integrated into the national education system over the following three years and the separate provision phased out. It required the centres to offer 15 hours of Turkish language instruction per week to prepare students for the transition.

**BEYOND AVERAGES**

Inclusion has significant implications for school infrastructure and teacher preparation. The process has been supported by a project that received EUR 300 million as part of the European Union's EUR 3 billion Facility for Refugees in Turkey. Two-fifths of the funds financed school construction; the rest was allocated to Turkish and Arabic language courses, catch-up and remedial classes, free school transport, education materials, examinations, guidance and counselling, training of 15,000 teachers and hiring of administrative personnel.

In May 2017, the government extended the conditional cash transfer for education to reach Syrian and other refugee children. It is implemented through a partnership of the Ministry of Family, Work and Social Services, the Ministry of National Education, the Turkish Red Crescent, the European Commission and UNICEF. By March 2019, more than 400,000 students who were regularly attending school were receiving a transfer every two months.

To integrate Syrian refugees into tertiary education, the Turkish Council of Higher Education allowed eight universities to conduct equivalency examinations and accept applicants without necessary documents as guest students. These universities have also opened Arabic language programmes. About 4,000 Syrian students have received a full scholarship that includes a monthly stipend, accommodation and health insurance in addition to tuition fees. More than 28,000 Syrian students are enrolled in universities in 2018/19.

## Targeting of ethnic minorities in VIET NAM

Viet Nam's education sector action plan for SDG 4 is based on the national 2030 Agenda. The country views education as the top national priority and allocates 20% of the budget to education and training. Despite major successes improving education equity in the MDG era, a 2015 situation analysis showed that multidimensional poverty among ethnic minorities was 3.5 times the national average, leading to early marriage for girls, poor education access and fewer livelihood options. Lack of appropriate infrastructure and facilities, especially in remote areas, was a key challenge. Hence 2030 education sector plan objectives include gender equality and support for vulnerable groups, such as ethnic minorities, people with disabilities, children in remote areas and the poor.

Multiple regulations and interventions support ethnic minorities and children in remote areas. Several recent programmes increase attention to pre-school children, focusing on facilities and classroom resources. A 2014 decision targeted the building of classrooms and homes for pre-school teachers in poor districts in remote areas. A 2018 decision approved investment in boarding and semi-boarding schools for ethnic minority students in remote areas, including infrastructure and teaching materials. As of 2018, 5-year-olds in socio-economically disadvantaged areas have been exempted from tuition fees and receive school meals. To improve literacy among ethnic minority children, the Ministry of Education and Training replicated or scaled up projects in targeted provinces that were shown to improve writing and reading, such as an experiential learning cycle model, children's reading clubs in villages and mother assistants in classrooms.

## Quality of education for children with disabilities in **SOUTH AFRICA**

South Africa recently established several policies to include children with special needs in education. Inclusive education is a priority and a cross-cutting theme of the 2015–2020 strategic plan, with the aim of raising the number of schools effectively implementing the inclusive education policy and increasing access to centres offering specialist services.

In 2014, a policy to overhaul the screening, identification, assessment and support process was established. One advancement was organizing support not by disability category but according to the level and nature of support needs. The policy aims to limit unnecessary placement in special schools, improve support quality, promote early identification, strengthen the role of parents and teachers and streamline services provided by various sectors. Curricular guidelines for responding to learner diversity in the classroom were revised. The special school curriculum is under review to ensure that more learners have access to higher education learning opportunities.

A conditional grant introduced in 2017 offers support, resources and equipment to care centres and schools to provide education to children with severe intellectual disabilities. In addition, a 2018 regulation on boarding accommodation for special needs learners deals with safety measures, funding requirements and human resource needs, among other issues.



A teacher at work at a Des Moines Public School in the United States.

CREDIT: Des Moines Public Schools

# Beyond access

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## Key recommendations

- Countries need to develop a national assessment system that provides a robust diagnosis of trends over time and not just a mechanism to manage transition from one level to the next.
- Selective participation in cross-national assessments is a valuable complementary tool to develop capacity and benchmark a national system.
- Information from national monitoring frameworks should be used to inform curricular, textbook and teacher development and drive policy evaluation.

A common criticism of the EFA and MDG era was overemphasis on outputs, such as enrolment, at the expense of outcomes, such as learning. Yet there was rapid expansion in the number of countries assessing learning outcomes by developing national assessment systems or participating in cross-national assessments.

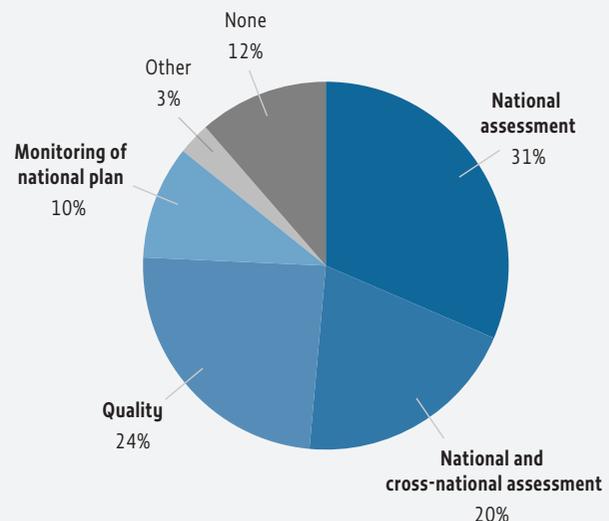
In the analysis of policy and programme examples submitted for this publication, 31% of countries cited development of national assessments (**Figure 4**). Pakistan institutionalized a national education assessment system, with the cooperation of provincial assessment centres. The Philippines has two policies to assess student learning, at the classroom and system levels, and its Department of Education is drafting a basic education monitoring and evaluation framework to set performance measures aligned with planning commitments. Although regions in Spain can administer their own tests, common education indicators produce a solid and stable diagnosis and contribute to decision-making, system improvement and equity.

One in five countries mentioned that, in addition to national capacity development efforts, they benefited from participation in cross-national assessments. In Albania, the National Centre for Testing and Exams introduced a national assessment for grades 3 to 5 in 2015, in addition to national exams in grades 9 and 12. The country has participated regularly in the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) since 2009 and is preparing to participate in the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) in 2019. Bhutan monitors education system performance through indicators in its Government Performance Management System, relying on end-of-year examinations, periodic national assessments and cross-national assessments. In addition, it took part in PISA for Development in 2017.

One in four countries focused not just on the measurement but also on the use of learning outcome results for school support and system reforms. To ensure quality, Germany revised its education monitoring strategy so that information on outcomes both describes system developments and leads to implementation of education standards from primary through to upper secondary education. Norway introduced a school improvement guidance corps. Exemplary school leaders volunteer to intervene in municipalities needing capacity development. Since 2017, the corps has tailored support further.

**FIGURE 4:**

**Many countries featured their investment in learning assessments, but fewer focused on the use of results to improve quality**



Note: The figure reports responses to the question: 'Please name and describe a key policy or programme [related to] monitoring learning outcomes.'

Source: GEM Report team, based on analysis of questionnaires submitted by 72 countries.

## BEYOND ACCESS

## Use of learning achievement data to improve education in the **BAHAMAS**

The Shared Vision for Education 2030 in the Bahamas has set as its target to increase the proportion of students receiving the Bahamas High School Diploma from 50% to 85% by 2030. This new diploma establishes minimum performance standards. The inaugural graduation ceremony was celebrated in 2017. Multiple pathways were created for students at the high school level that allow for college, apprenticeship and workplace learning.

The Ministry of Education is implementing various initiatives, informed by data, to improve academic outcomes under the newly established Prime Minister's Delivery Unit. Capacity is being built in the teaching of reading in grades 1–3 with the aim to improve student performance in the National Third Grade Assessment Tests for Language Arts. Continuous training is being provided to school administrators, focused on tools to help them support teachers and ensure an increase in the proportion of students achieving the top four levels on a seven-point scale in this assessment. The Curriculum Office is supporting the development of digital content. Tablets are being distributed to each student to access this content and additional digital resources, while each teacher is being equipped with a laptop and multimedia projector.

A monitoring and evaluation mechanism, involving the use of technology, has been developed. Data on achievement of learning outcomes in standardised national assessments and seven other criteria for attaining the Bahamas High School Diploma are collected and reported on systematically to inform policies.

## A system of evaluation in the **CZECH REPUBLIC**

A project in the Czech Republic, the National Inspection Evaluation System, realized between 2011 and 2015, led to several innovations and new methods. The Czech School Inspectorate launched a new comprehensive evaluation system project in 2017, co-financed by the European Union and the state budget.

The project aims to connect findings from internal school evaluations by the inspectorate with external evaluations of the school system (e.g. PISA, TIMSS). At the school level, it focuses on connecting school self-evaluations with evaluations by the inspectorate. Others will include analytical reports, national reports on student achievement, e-learning courses, methodology handbooks and publications. One objective is to use tools to identify and better take into account the socio-economic background and location of students and schools in order to monitor equity and prevent inequality. All outputs will be used in a comprehensive evaluation of education quality and effectiveness.

The inspectorate developed a set of evaluation criteria called Quality School in the early phase of the project. An important aspect of the project is to develop and describe these criteria further and enable schools to use them to guide self-evaluation. In addition, examples of good practice are developed for each criterion, describing schools in which specific criteria work well. About 70 examples of good practice are being prepared and will be made public when finished.

## The Compulsory Education Quality Monitoring Report in CHINA

China's first Compulsory Education Quality Monitoring Report, released in 2018, provides a holistic review of students' moral, intellectual and aesthetic development. Monitoring tools and indicators were based on national curricular standards for knowledge and skills, processes and methods, and attitudes and values. The assessment's development involved thousands of stakeholders, including education administrators, researchers, and head teachers and teachers, along with experts on curricular design, teaching theory, education measurement and evaluation, and education policy and management.

The results revealed strengths in academic performance but also an overemphasis on academic achievement, an excessive homework load and insufficient priority on art education, sport, and time to develop hands-on skills. The survey also revealed issues with school resource use. For instance, while 97% of junior secondary schools had libraries, only half of grade 8 students had used them.

## Assessment of student achievement in DJIBOUTI

Historically, student evaluation in Djibouti has had an administrative focus: for instance, annual end-of-cycle examinations to award diplomas and determine students' trajectories. There are examinations at the end of primary (Objectif terminal d'intégration), compulsory (Brevet de fin de l'enseignement fondamental) and secondary education (general, technical and professional baccalaureate). The Ministry of National Education will carry out a detailed analysis of the examination results to identify corrective measures to improve learning quality.

In addition, within the framework of its 2017–2020 action plan, the ministry decided to restructure its evaluation policy and better orient itself to learning quality and the SDG 4 targets through independent assessments. In 2018, it launched a preliminary study of a representative sample of 2,000 grade 4 and 6 students in French and mathematics. Results at the technical and practical levels are being processed and will be used to implement a project aimed at improving education quality.

## BEYOND ACCESS

## Commitment to quality education in PANAMA

Panama's efforts concentrate on minimizing dropout through scholarships, nutrition and health care at schools. SDG 4 also provides the impetus for establishing a new system of evaluation of schools and learning outcomes. Overall improvement of the education system includes updating the curriculum, developing teacher professional capacity and improving infrastructure. To improve education quality, teacher union representatives, members of the private sector, and political and government actors debated for eight months through five working groups on challenges the country must address to achieve equitable, quality education. The result was establishment of the Permanent Multisectoral Council for the Implementation of the National Commitment for Education as a monitoring mechanism.

The council developed a comprehensive system for the improvement of education quality after 42 work sessions with participation from teacher unions and civil society. It has three components: a school quality improvement programme in which the whole education community participates in evaluating the improvement process; evaluation of learning through the national assessment system; and evaluation of regional managers, supervisors, principals, teachers and other actors. The objectives are to design pedagogical strategies, train teachers, establish indicators and quality standards, develop a periodic measurement plan, promote research, design instruments and procedures to carry out evaluations, publish results and promote administration of resources.

Several initiatives demonstrate this commitment. One is a four-year intensive infrastructure improvement programme for selected schools in inaccessible and vulnerable areas, using an innovative model for regular and preventive maintenance, as well as construction of new schools. In addition, CRECER, a nationally representative assessment administered to more than 70,000 grade 3 students in more than 3,000 schools, led to a first phase of intensive interventions in basic learning in the 200 schools with the lowest scores. In the English language domain, the Panamá Bilingüe programme has been developed in 140 schools with a total student population of 12,000, and 750 teachers have been certified as specialists.

## Teacher training and professional development in GUATEMALA

Primary school teachers in Guatemala were trained only up to secondary education until 2012, when a curricular transformation of initial teacher education began. Secondary school teachers used to be graduates of the preparatory stage of a bachelor's degree and received diversified instruction with orientation in education.

A 2011 ministerial agreement led to an education policy proposed by the National Education Council, a collegiate body that also represents civil society. The policy emphasizes strengthening training, evaluation and management of the national education system's human resources.

A strategic axis of the 2016–2021 Ministry of Education strategic plan, which draws on the ministerial agreement, is to strengthen teacher capacity by reforming initial training, ensuring professionalization and upgrading of teachers in service, and assisting teachers in implementing the national curriculum.

A 2017 government agreement specified two steps in initial primary school teacher training: a diversified step at the secondary education level, followed by a complementary and specialized step at the tertiary education level. A new ministerial agreement then established the Programa de Formación Inicial Docente (Initial Teacher Training Programme), which introduced processes to develop teachers' basic competences to support students in the multi-ethnic, multilingual and pluricultural context of Guatemalan society.

The programme's objectives are to develop teacher autonomy and shared reflection on the meaning of pedagogical practice; rethink management, processes and curricular organization so that teachers can organize and execute an enriched curriculum in accordance with the sociocultural and linguistic characteristics of the regions and communities where they work; promote application of research-action-reflection as an instrument of professional development; and develop knowledge, skills, values and attitudes, as well as scientific maturity, capacity for innovation and creativity, to solve and direct the solution of education problems with responsibility and independence.



Children in Aalen, a German municipality, honoured with an Education for Sustainable Development Award.

CREDIT: German Commission for UNESCO/  
Thomas Müller

# Beyond basics

## Key recommendations

- All countries need to respond to the commitments undertaken as part of SDG 4 to promote sustainable development, human rights, gender equality, a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship and cultural diversity through their curricula.
- Curricular development needs to be participatory for national ownership, from the central to the school level.
- Curriculum, teacher preparation, professional development and assessment need to be aligned.

One strength of global development agendas is their ability to focus attention on issues of major significance through solid monitoring indicators to review progress. At the same time, not all issues can be assessed through numbers and doing so could be misleading. This is the usual tension between what is valued and what is measured. Education is particularly sensitive to such questions. A common criticism is that SDG 4's emphasis on learning outcomes could narrow the focus to measurable targets that may not be sufficiently relevant to sustainable development.

The answer is somewhere in the middle. The situation in which almost 90% of children in sub-Saharan Africa do not achieve minimum proficiency in basic subjects is not economically and socially sustainable. Yet while the vast majority of adults in high-income countries reach these minimums, their behaviour is not environmentally sustainable. Even if there is scant evidence on what type of education helps learners consume sustainably (for example), it is commonly assumed that the answers lie in curricular and pedagogical reforms.

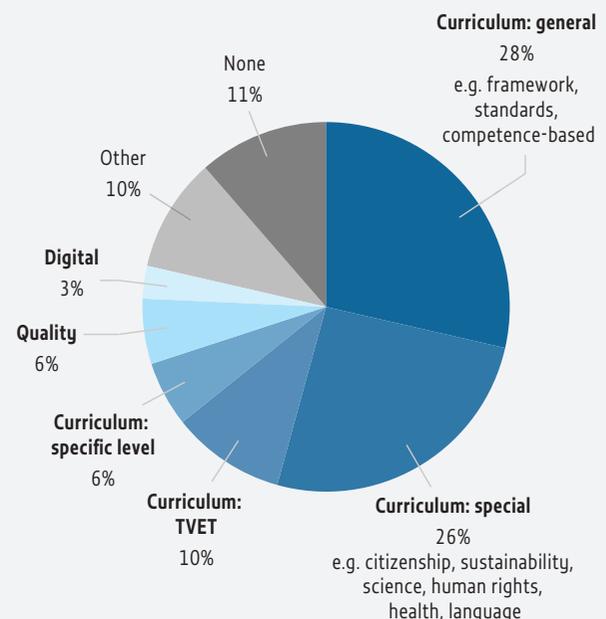
About 29% of countries stated that they were carrying out wide-ranging curricular reforms (**Figure 5**). Some focused on standards (Japan and Kyrgyzstan), others on transition to a competence-based curriculum (Senegal and Tunisia), still others on a new curricular framework (Kenya and Pakistan). One in ten countries, including the Czech Republic and Kazakhstan, prioritized TVET curricula.

A more direct influence of SDG 4 appears among the 26% of countries that adjusted curricula in specific areas, often in relation to target 4.7 on education for sustainable development and global citizenship. In some countries, the objectives were multiple. For instance, Slovakia is considering a wide range of interventions from support for reading literacy to promotion of healthy lifestyles and prevention of racism, xenophobia, anti-Semitism, extremism and other forms of intolerance. Other countries focused on single issues, such as bilingualism (Mali), citizenship (Oman), comprehensive sexuality education (the Philippines) and prevention of school violence (Viet Nam).

A few countries linked curricular reforms to overall interventions to improve education quality. In Colombia, the Todos a Aprender (All to Learn) programme, which aims to transform pedagogical practices, has been developing communication, problem-solving, socio-emotional and citizen competences. The 2018–2022 national development plan proposes to strengthen these transversal life competences further, especially in the country's plurinational and multicultural context; develop the national reading and writing plan; extend the public library network; introduce a new policy on textbooks and learning materials; promote language teaching and learning; and introduce innovations through digital transformation. Indeed, information and communication technology (ICT) and digital literacy often appear in curricular reforms either as an exclusive focus or a package of interventions.

**FIGURE 5:**

**Many countries are involved in curricular reforms on issues related to SDG 4**



Note: The figure reports responses to the question: 'Please name and describe a key policy or programme [related to] broadening the content of education.'

Source: GEM Report team, based on analysis of questionnaires submitted by 72 countries.

## BEYOND BASICS

## A digital literacy initiative in ARGENTINA

Aprender Conectados (Learning Connected) is an innovation plan launched in 2018 by Argentina's Ministry of Education, Culture, Science and Technology to prepare students for life and work in an increasingly digital world powered by artificial intelligence. With a focus on digital literacy, it combines curricular reform; development of relevant, engaging content to guarantee education quality and learning outcomes; teacher training; and distribution of innovative and disruptive technology to schools, together with provision of full connectivity to all state schools.

The new curriculum integrates programming and robotics into the national standards from pre-primary to secondary education. The Federal Education Council approved the new standards after a consultative process engaging academics and national and international experts, and a participatory drafting process that lasted almost three years. All provinces are expected to integrate the standards into their curricula by 2020, reaching almost 10 million students, over 950,000 teachers and 57,000 schools.

The ministry produced age-appropriate curricular content and teaching materials using emerging storytelling techniques to match students' cultural experiences, increase engagement and enhance learning outcomes. This first national systematized digital literacy collection now gathers more than 500 resources, including animated films with characters collaboratively created by students; video games; interactive activities; guides for students, teachers and families; and resources for programming and robotics projects.

Activities promote creation of education communities and grass-roots initiatives to leverage and expand knowledge throughout the education system. As part of the national programming and robotics marathon, a formative contest for primary and secondary state schools introduced in 2018, students are invited to develop education content in the form of games and robotics projects to be used by their peers. A special category is aimed at increasing girls' participation in programming activities. These activities strengthen learning outcomes, reduce digital and gender gaps and increase collaborative learning communities.

Since 2017, the ministry has progressively provided digital technology to all state schools at all levels of compulsory education. It includes robots for pre-school children and various types of programming and robotics kits for primary and secondary students, including drones and three-dimensional printers. The plan promotes the use of digital technology to solve real-world problems and look for creative ways to contribute to local communities and sustainable development. Awards are given to teachers involved in innovative projects in order to share best practice and raise awareness of the ICT national plan.

## Online resources for students and teachers in the RUSSIAN FEDERATION

Within the scope of the Russian Federation's education system goals, the national education project encompasses 10 federal projects, one of which focuses on digital education environments. Modern technology is used to provide opportunities for continuous training and a wide range of open education e-resources. These include distance learning in pre-school education, general education (children and adults) and additional education (children and adults); virtual groups and individual lessons, with independent study and study with a teacher; a broad range of programmes in line with user demand and the education services market; and evaluation of open education programme users' academic achievements.

Educators can also be trained and participate in professional associations and complementary professional education through modern technology. In the Teacher of the Future project, around 50% of teachers will receive training through Centres of Lifelong Support of Professional Skills, Centres of Technological Support of Education for Teachers' Advanced Training, and online education. At least 70% of teachers up to age 35 will receive various forms of support during the first three years of their careers.

Two other projects use online resources:

- Launched in 2018, the Russian e-school website features secondary-level lessons and a wide range of teaching and learning materials in all subjects. The website also helps teachers establish professional communities, develop skills and link to government bodies and scientific communities.
- The Proectoria website focuses on open lessons in Russian, which can be reviewed and uploaded.

## Education for Sustainable Development in GERMANY

The National Action Plan on Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) was adopted in 2017 by Germany's National Platform, a steering body responsible for implementation of the Global Action Programme, and endorsed by the federal government. The main goal is to provide ESD across the education system. The Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF) launched a comprehensive participatory process involving several federal ministries, the federal states (Länder) and local authorities, and stakeholders from the education community, academia, the private sector and civil society. The National Action Plan was prepared by representatives of more than 300 organizations working in six expert forums: early childhood education, schools, higher education, vocational education and training, non-formal and informal learning, and local communities.

The plan defines 130 goals and 349 measures, which are being monitored and evaluated. The plan targets curricula, as well as pre- and in-service educator training in formal, non-formal and informal education. The Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs of the states launched a comprehensive curricular framework on ESD to support curricular development, make concrete recommendations and provide teaching and learning materials. Seen as an education concept and not just a list of topics, ESD has been or will be integrated into all states' curricula. It is also part of initial teacher training and continuing professional development.

The BMBF funds activities at multiple levels:

- The Haus der kleinen Forscher (House of Little Scientists) foundation provides a nationwide professional development programme to support educators in early childhood education institutions.
- An award system highlights good practice in whole-school approaches, network building and local authorities.
- Initiatives to implement sustainable action in vocational education and training focus on transforming small and medium-sized companies into sustainable learning venues.
- A youth forum carries out projects allowing young people to take part in local implementation.

## BEYOND BASICS

## Sustainable development and global citizenship in the REPUBLIC OF KOREA

The Ministry of Education of the Republic of Korea is making efforts to include global citizenship education in the national curriculum and strengthen teacher training on related content. In collaboration with the Asia-Pacific Centre of Education for International Understanding, it is also investing in implementation of global citizenship education programmes, including training for teachers from around the world and projects to incorporate global citizenship education into school curricula throughout the region.

In addition, the Korean National Commission for UNESCO operates the Korean National Committee on ESD, which manages the national ESD provision. It supports education institutions, local governments and schools in providing skills development and training programmes through the whole-school approach.

## Competence- and citizenship-based curricular reforms in PORTUGAL

Within a context of increasing school autonomy and flexibility, Portugal's government revised the curriculum for basic and secondary education in mid-2018. The revision introduced mandatory school-based strategies for the citizenship component, aimed at developing a broad range of active citizenship competences. The curriculum was based on two guiding documents developed in 2017: the Students' Profile by the End of Compulsory Schooling and the National Strategy for Citizenship Education.

The Students' Profile concept is structured on the basis of principles, vision, values and competence areas. Its humanistic approach views human dignity as a fundamental value, learning as the core of the education process, inclusion as a demand, and contribution to sustainable development as a challenge. Each curricular area contributes to the development of all competence areas. Syllabuses were reoriented to achieve core curricular competences for each subject.

The National Strategy for Citizenship Education is based on a proposal by a task force that involved government and local authority officials, academics and teachers, who consulted extensively with teachers, students and civil society groups. Citizenship education encompasses 17 domains, including sustainable development, human rights, gender equality and interculturality, which are distinctly expressed in SDG target 4.7. As part of the strategy, schools run many projects on citizenship and development, in partnership with public services and NGOs. For instance, most secondary schools apply to the government School Participatory Budget fund to pay for school improvement projects proposed, discussed and voted on by students.

Schools can develop the national curriculum according to their needs and interests. They were encouraged to change their organizational and pedagogical practices to develop the Students' Profile competences. Schools established principles and norms to assure the inclusion of all students, attending to each student's needs and potential.

The government created a national coordination structure, not to monitor learning outcomes directly but to assess how schools internalized their increased autonomy in curricular development, teaching strategies and allocation of time to subjects, and how schools dealt with the inclusion of all children, especially those with disabilities.

As part of the two-year process of curricular development, dissemination activities included an online platform with education resources and curricular guidelines. School visits and invitations for model (or 'lighthouse') schools to present their practices to other schools also promoted reflection.

A study at the end of the pilot project in 2018, before these measures became compulsory at the national level, showed that 56% of schools believed autonomy had enabled them to experiment with more articulated and collaborative ways of working. They also thought curricular flexibility promoted equal chances for all students to achieve education success because it ensured that all students' competences and individual needs and interests were appreciated, while allowing schools to respect each student's learning pace. Schools also felt that an interdisciplinary approach to subjects and implementation of more student-centred methodologies improved the quality of education and increased learning.

## Curricular reform in MEXICO

In 2014, Mexico's Secretariat of Public Education (SEP) convened a national consultation on challenges facing the education system. Using its conclusions, SEP presented a first version of the New Educational Model in 2016, which included Goals of 21st Century Education and a curricular proposal for compulsory education (basic and upper secondary).

After a second round of consultations, SEP released a final version of the New Educational Model in 2017. The model organized the national education system around five axes: curricular proposal; schools at the centre of the educational system; teacher training and professional development; inclusion and equity; and governance of the education system. The model included *Aprendizajes Clave para la Educación Integral* (Key Learning Outcomes for Comprehensive Education), which contribute to the development of the whole human being. The curricular proposal was structured around 3 components and 11 basic spheres:

- Academic knowledge: language and communication, mathematical thinking and natural and social worlds
- Social and personal development: arts, socio-emotional education and physical education
- Curricular autonomy: broader academic learning, further personal and social development, innovative learning content, regional knowledge and community projects.

Some textbooks were rewritten, and a significant share of teachers participated in training to become familiarized with the New Educational Model and the School Autonomy programme. Implementation began in 2018/19.

The main challenge will be to strike a balance between continuity and evolution. Issues such as equity, equality and inclusion in education will be strengthened with the introduction of enhanced participation, active pedagogies, curricular flexibility, and citizenship and peace education.



India. Health education in Hindi in a village.

CREDIT: GEM Report/Dipayan Bhar

# Beyond schooling

## Key recommendations

- All countries need to define their response to the commitment they made under SDG 4 to provide lifelong learning opportunities for all.
- A continuum of approaches is needed to link formal and non-formal education opportunities.
- Countries need to address the challenge that the more educated are more likely to receive further education opportunities.

The commitment to lifelong learning opportunities for all is a cornerstone of the new agenda, as it constitutes half of the SDG 4 formulation. Yet definitions of lifelong learning vary, from narrow interpretations linked exclusively with adult education to broad perceptions of developing individual abilities to pursue learning, and to education modalities outside the formal system. Even using the narrow interpretation, poorer countries associate it with adult literacy programmes and richer countries with elaborate training systems for work or non-work purposes.

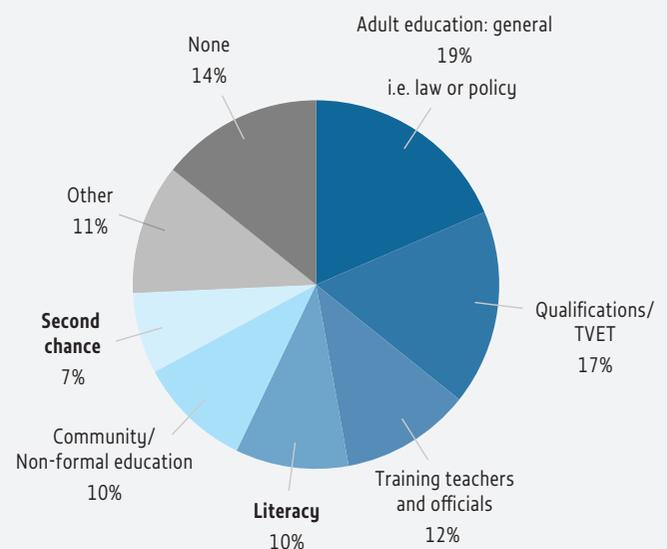
As lifelong learning is a relatively recent concept, the international education agenda tends to focus on the challenges of educating children in the world's poorest countries to protect future generations from illiteracy and exclusion. With the exception of parts of SDG targets 4.4 on skills for work and 4.6 on adult literacy and numeracy, the international community did not even include a target on adult education. This omission was partly offset by the SDG target 4.3 global indicator on adult formal and non-formal education and training participation, although monitoring it will be a challenge, as few surveys cover the topic outside rich countries.

Among responding countries, there were multiple interpretations of the lifelong learning question:

- One in six countries referred to general adult education reforms (**Figure 6**). In the Republic of Korea, the fourth Master Plan for Lifelong Learning provides paid leave to support self-motivated lifelong learning, including for the employed; establishes a lifelong learning centre for people with disabilities; and improves open online courses.
- One in six discussed technical and vocational qualifications. In Zambia, the TVET policy is under review, and the 2017 entrepreneurship policy outlines programmes to recognize prior learning through trade testing and other initiatives.
- One in eight mentioned initiatives to support professional development of teachers (Argentina) or education officials (Comoros).
- One in ten showcased adult literacy, as with Afghanistan's national literacy strategy and the 2019–2024 presidential programme on literacy and training in Burkina Faso.
- One in ten presented their work on community and non-formal education. China provides diversified education services for people of various ages, education levels and income levels through county vocational education centres, open universities, radio and television schools, popular science schools and community education institutions.
- One in ten focused on second chance programmes. Belize mentioned increasing adult and continuing education by expanding its school subsidy programme to adult and continuing education beneficiaries and providing grants to institutions offering high school equivalency and related opportunities.

**FIGURE 6:**

**The focus of lifelong learning policies varies considerably among countries**



Note: The figure reports responses to the question: 'Please name and describe a key policy or programme [related to] lifelong learning opportunities.'

Source: GEM Report team, based on analysis of questionnaires submitted by 72 countries.

A few countries (14%) did not provide a policy example on lifelong learning. This could reflect the fact that the questionnaire was administered to education ministries, but other ministries may have a leading responsibility for lifelong learning, as is the case with tertiary education.

## BEYOND SCHOOLING

## Lifelong learning strategy and skills-needs forecasting in ESTONIA

Estonia's 2014–2020 lifelong learning strategy covers all areas of initial and adult education, with five strategic goals: Change the learning approach, develop competent and motivated teachers and school leaders, improve labour market relevance, introduce a digital focus and improve equality of opportunity. Key indicators are adult participation rates in lifelong learning, share of adults with general education only, share of early leavers from education, share of the population performing at the highest levels in PISA, employment rates of recent graduates, share of adults with digital competences and ratio of a teacher's salary to that of a full-time worker with tertiary education.

The strategy was developed through a participatory multi-stakeholder process. It articulated the roles and responsibilities of learners, parents, teachers, heads of education institutions, and local governments. It also specified that employers needed to provide internship and apprenticeship positions for learners and lifelong learning opportunities for employees. The government is expected to guarantee access to high-quality upper secondary, vocational and higher education and provide career counselling and labour market information.

In 2016, the System of Labour Market Monitoring and Future Skills Forecasting (OSKA) began analysing the required labour and skills supply for Estonia's economic development over the next 10 years to improve forecasting of each sector's needs. A nine-member OSKA coordination council approves sectors to be analysed once every five or six years, or about five to six reports per year on sectors ranging from forestry and timber to the apparel, textile and leather industries. The council also prepares an annual report on labour market trends and changes in labour requirements. Sector expert panels monitor progress on recommendations made on the basis of the report conclusions.

## Recognition of non-formal and informal learning in ARMENIA

Armenia undertook several initiatives to improve its adult learning and education policies. The framework is provided by the 2014–2017 Supplementary and Continuing Education Strategy and Action Plan. In addition, following an amendment to the education law, the government addressed key adult education and learning issues in 2015, including procedures for organizing and implementing supplementary education programmes, and assessing and recognizing non-formal and informal learning outcomes. Related regulations concern the policy principles, organizational and legal basis, and relationships of individuals and legal entities participating in the education process. The government revised and updated the national qualification framework in 2016 in line with the European Qualifications Framework, with eight levels based on knowledge, skills and competences.

The Ministry of Education and Science developed a procedure to keep track of training opportunities through an electronic national register. The National Training Fund organizes and implements adult learning and education policy, including coordination, operation, organization and support to non-formal and informal education. It will also oversee validation of non-formal and informal learning outcomes, drawing on international expertise. Following a successful pilot to recognize non-formal and informal learning in one specialization, recognition of primary and middle-level vocational education in three specializations was adopted in 2016.

## Improving technical and vocational education in **JORDAN**

The Jordanian Ministry of Education is looking to improve the perception of vocational education among students and parents, develop more specializations and collaborate with the private sector. Its strategic plan has three components.

To improve vocational education system management, the ministry will review vocational education policies and structure, specializations for men and women, curricula, standards, and overall planning and management. Under the 2016–2025 National Human Resources Development Plan, the ministry and the National Council for Technical and Vocational Training will conduct a survey to assess labour market needs and identify new vocational training tracks. The ministry will establish incentives and bonuses for administrators and re-establish a system of allowances compensating for hazardous conditions as an incentive for trainers.

To increase access and transition to vocational education after grade 10, the ministry aims to improve supply and demand by influencing parent and student perceptions. Representatives of the general education directorate deliver lectures on the importance of vocational education to grade 10 students and parents at general schools. They will identify teacher training needs and appropriate content, find trainers and provide gender sensitivity training for guidance counsellors, teachers and students.

The ministry intends to establish 15 additional specialized vocational schools based on market studies and demand, of which 7 will be for girls. It also aims to improve strategic partnerships between vocational schools and the labour market. To improve infrastructure and facilities, it will inventory equipment and assess buildings in need of maintenance. It will develop a renovation plan for specialized schools and conduct workshops to develop a gender-safe and inclusive environment.

## Improving technical and vocational higher education in **SENEGAL**

Accelerated development of technical and vocational training is a flagship objective of the Emerging Senegal Plan. A 2015 vocational training law made training and qualification of human resources a policy priority. The percentage of girls in TVET increased to 52% in 2017, a success attributed to measures including adequate toilets at vocational institutes and scholarships and prizes to encourage women's participation. Affordability was promoted through partnership agreements between vocational institutes and businesses.

The Higher Education Programme seeks to improve access, quality and diversity by establishing new universities and vocational training institutes, improving training offers, using ICT in teaching and improving quality assurance. Other goals are to develop a short cycle of higher education for vocational training and to offer distance education through a Virtual University of Senegal and distance learning training institutes.

## BEYOND SCHOOLING

## A commitment to sustainable development through education in **MONTRÉAL, CANADA**

Montréal's long-standing commitment to sustainable development has always placed education and the sharing of information, best practice and aspirations at the forefront of its strategies. The city acknowledges the need for strong community education institutions and effective mechanisms to ensure social, environmental and economic progress and to support an ecological transition.

The city promotes tolerance, inclusion and non-discrimination in planning and policies, and views education as essential to equitable public participation and shared responsibility in decision-making. A youth council advises the mayor and executive committee on concerns of 12- to 30-year-olds. The Montréal Charter of Rights and Responsibilities includes commitments to provide credible information to all in open public consultation processes, combat discrimination and poverty, promote culture, disseminate knowledge and ensure the community's physical, mental and spiritual health. The charter also aims to develop and protect an extensive public library system and share information relating to sustainable development.

These values, and the central importance of education to sustainable development, are reflected in other policies and programmes. The Policy on Social Development establishes measures to develop the city on a human scale and foster social cohesion, citizen involvement and collaboration among stakeholders; it explicitly recognizes the need to maintain engagement with the school system.

The Policy on Children and its action plan, to which Montréal has committed over CAD 25 million over five years, focus on improving school perseverance, healthy eating and access to culture, sport and recreation. Following public consultation in 2018, the action plan, tailoring interventions to local opportunities and challenges, is to be formally adopted and implemented in close collaboration with local partners and stakeholders. Key among the education programmes related to this policy is Bibliothèque à la Rescousse (Library to the Rescue), in which municipal libraries help elementary school students develop their research and reading skills.

As part of Sustainable Montréal 2016–2020, the city's third sustainable development action plan, many programmes and projects concern sustainability education. Integrated Neighbourhoods seeks to improve community sustainability and resilience in vulnerable neighbourhoods through community awareness-building. The Montréal sustainable development course provides field training and networking for 20 small and medium-sized businesses looking for sustainable solutions to growth and marketing challenges.

Awareness-raising and social engagement with climate change and urban resilience issues are cornerstones of the Resilient City Strategy to improve community capacity to deal with rapid environmental, economic and social change. Actions include climate change leadership programmes for teenagers, community resilience workshops and support for volunteer organizations that train youth and adults.

## Sustainable development as a driver of lifelong learning in JAPAN

Japan cultivates actors for building sustainable societies through an interdisciplinary and holistic approach, an integral element of education quality. ESD is viewed as a key enabler of all SDGs and promoted accordingly.

Under its ESD National Implementation Plan and Promotion of Environmental Education Law, Japan encourages cooperation among diverse education actors to carry out initiatives in schools, homes, workplaces and local communities addressing elements of SDG target 4.7, such as environment, peacebuilding, human rights, gender equality, international understanding and cultural diversity.

The government set out new national curricular standards for elementary and junior secondary schools in 2017 and for upper secondary schools in 2018. Improvement of curricula, syllabuses and education materials is under way, with a view to equipping children with competences to build sustainable societies through education on the SDGs.

The Third Basic Plan for the Promotion of Education, formulated in June 2018, outlines policy for promoting lifelong learning, from pre-school to continuing education and learning after graduation, reflecting worldwide trends in pursuit of sustainable development through the SDGs.

The plan sets out quantitative targets and programmes for promotion of lifelong learning in an era of 100-year life expectancy, as well as education and learning to equip adults in the workforce with the knowledge and skills necessary for jobs. Community learning centres play an important role, not only for learning but also as places for interaction and local community formation. Nearly 15,000 such centres nationwide offer classes in accordance with residents' needs and regional circumstances.



Bangladesh. UNHCR and Sesame Workshop organize educational activities for Rohingya children at Kutupalong refugee sites. Part of the learning activities implemented by Sesame Workshop and UNHCR for Rohingya refugee children is putting together puzzles that carry awareness and messages.

CREDIT: UNHCR/Areez Tanbeen Rahman

# Beyond education

## Key recommendations

- Ministries of education need to engage in stronger partnerships with other sectors, extending beyond planning to implementation.
- Partnerships should not be limited to other ministries but extend to other government tiers, NGOs and the private sector.
- Education ministries should not only react but also seek to become partners in other sectors' initiatives, removing administrative hurdles.

Interlinkage between development goals and the need to break sectoral silos in policy formulation constitute the hallmark of an agenda that brought together the two arms of development strategy: one oriented to poverty reduction, the other to the environment. However, education ministries are still in the early stages of recognizing the need to collaborate with their peers in government and partners outside government. An inherited mindset, bureaucratic obstacles and practical constraints stand in the way of cross-sectoral partnerships in the spirit of the SDGs.

It is perhaps not surprising that the question on cross-sectoral partnerships had the highest non-response rate (16%) (**Figure 7**). One in six countries referred to collaboration in education planning or strategy formulation. This could indicate weak partnerships, although there were examples of closer engagement. With a view to multi-stakeholder collaboration, accountability, inclusiveness and government responsiveness, Lithuania participates in the Open Government Partnership movement. Education action plans (e.g. on quality, lifelong learning) result from collaboration and consultation with other sectors, government tiers and citizens. In South Africa, the National Education Collaboration Trust, established by the Department of Basic Education to strengthen partnerships within civil society and between civil society and government, has reached almost 15,000 schools.

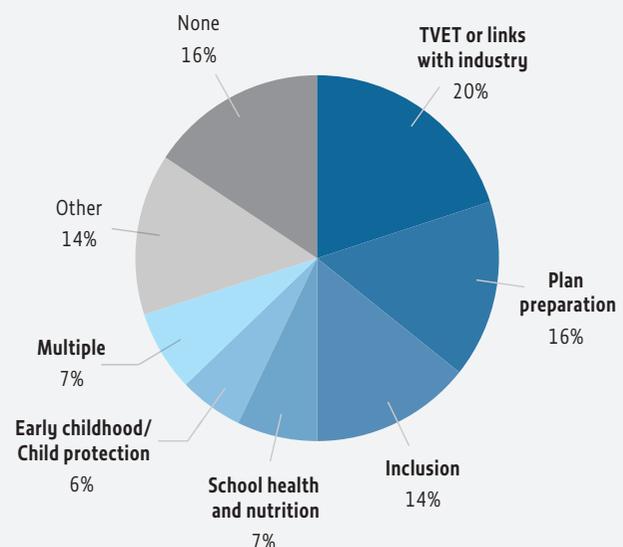
Some 20% of countries referred to partnerships linking the education system with the labour market. Honduras mentioned the experience of formulating a national qualification framework. Saudi Arabia referred to attracting students for training or employment in the 50 biggest companies in collaboration with the Public Investment Commission.

Inclusive education was another prominent area of multisector interventions. The secretariat of *Toda una Vida* (A Whole Life), the inclusive lifelong learning policy framework in Ecuador, is obliged to coordinate its programmes (covering the 0 to 5 age group, poor youth, people with disabilities and their families, and vulnerable adults over 65, among others) to ensure intersectoral and complementary management. In Iceland, following an external standards-based audit of the national inclusive education system, ministers and representatives of key stakeholder bodies signed a memorandum declaring their will to cooperate in implementing the audit recommendations, for instance on early childhood education and school health and nutrition.

Other responses included disaster risk management (Armenia), adolescent students (Bangladesh), artistic practice in schools (France), tree planting (Kenya), higher education and research (Norway) and secondary science education (Turkey).

**FIGURE 7:**

**Countries put relatively more emphasis on cross-sectoral partnerships linking education with the labour market**



Note: The figure reports responses to the question: 'Please name and describe a key policy or programme [related to] collaborating with other sectors.'

Source: GEM Report team, based on analysis of questionnaires submitted by 72 countries.

## BEYOND EDUCATION

## Integrated early childhood care and education in **COLOMBIA**

The early childhood care and education policy in Colombia has undergone significant revision and expansion. The Colombian Family Welfare Institute used to provide early childhood care. In 2016, the Ministry of National Education issued a law strengthening the institutional framework for recognition, protection and guarantee of the rights of pregnant women and children aged 0 to 6.

The aim is intersectoral management to provide comprehensive care for pregnant women and young children. The Intersectoral Commission for Early Childhood includes members from the presidency; the ministries of health and social protection, national education, culture, housing, and city and territory; the National Planning Department; the Colombian Family Welfare Institute; and the Unit for Attention and Integral Reparation of Victims. Its strategies to improve access to early childhood services of good quality include community homes and child development centres. Over 2010–2018, the number of child beneficiaries rose from 570,000 to 1.3 million.

Pact for Colombia, Pact for Equity, the 2018–2022 national development plan, makes initial education for integral development its first objective. It aims to provide comprehensive care, new materials and technical support for teachers, new and better infrastructure, 70% coverage of nutritional supplements, links between families and communities with initial education, and an improved monitoring system to capture transitions.

Its objectives include providing comprehensive care up to the point of transition to school at age 5 and improving teacher and assistant qualifications. The All to Learn programme to strengthen and transform teachers' pedagogical practices was successful in primary education and will be broadened to pre-school teachers and ease the transition between the pre-primary and primary levels.

## Child protection policy in **LEBANON**

Lebanon introduced a child protection referral system in 2017. A child protection policy launched in 2018 was a collaborative effort of the Ministry of Education and Higher Education, Ministry of Social Affairs, Ministry of Justice, UNICEF and other partners. Its objective is to identify violent behaviour early and prevent it.

The child protection policy for schools has four commitments: safeguard students' physical and mental health, safety and development in a risk-free environment; foster a violence-free environment, particularly for the most vulnerable; respond to cases of violence through early monitoring by skilled staff and active partnerships with civil society; and protect student and parent privacy.

The Justice for Children project will analyse laws, policies and mechanisms for handling children involved with the criminal justice system as victims, witnesses, survivors and perpetrators. It will strengthen social workers' capacity to prevent and respond to issues children face in the legal system and limit their stay in juvenile institutions as much as possible.

## School feeding in **KENYA**

Kenya's school feeding programme is a key initiative to increase school retention, especially in semiarid regions and slums. In 2009, the government launched Home-Grown School Meals to gradually take over a project run with the World Food Programme for the previous 40 years. In a major milestone, the handover was completed in 2018. The government's 2018/19 budget set aside US\$24 million for school meals.

The Ministry of Education is pivotal in running the programme, and its School Health, Nutrition and Meals Coordination Unit is mainly responsible for implementing strategy and promoting liaisons with all concerned ministries and agencies.

At the national level, the inter-ministerial committee on the national school meals and nutrition programme is chaired by the Ministry of Education and co-chaired by the ministries of health, agriculture, and livestock and fisheries, East African Community, and Labour and Social Protection, together with the Treasury.

At all levels of government (national, regional and local), the health, agriculture, water, irrigation and social protection departments provide support in planning, programme coordination and performance management, financing and budgeting, and standards, guidelines and quality assurance.

## Expanding technical and vocational education in secondary schools in **PALESTINE**

Palestine revised its Technical and Vocational Education Strategy in 2010, with the Ministry of Education and Higher Education and the Ministry of Labour overseeing the reforms. The Ministry of Education and Higher Education's 2017-2022 education strategic plan highlights the need to translate education into employability by adapting technical and vocational education and higher education to labour market needs and improving infrastructure and facilities.

The ministry recently began implementing a vocational integration policy incorporating TVET into grades 7 to 9, with a vocational and practical track starting in grade 10. The policy was piloted in 143 schools in 2016/17 and was to be scaled up to all schools in 2018/19. To facilitate the integration, the ministry conducted two assessment studies in 2017 to inform future planning: on the needs of the labour market and on the reality of vocational and technical education.

The vocational education strategy calls for substantial partnerships with the private sector to ensure that students can enter the workplace before graduation with the relevant skills and competences. The ministry worked with several labour market institutions to identify professions and the number of graduates needed. The Curriculum Centre amended curricula and created new course modules in 2018, taking into consideration the labour market competences identified. In its strategic plan, the ministry adopted a new methodology to develop education plans for all specializations based on competences and education scenarios needed in the workplace.

## BEYOND EDUCATION

## Fighting discrimination based on sexual orientation in ALBANIA

Albania has developed legislation to combat discrimination based on gender and sexual orientation, especially since becoming a candidate for EU membership. Its 2016–2020 National Action Plan for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Intersex (LGBTI) Persons covers a broad range of anti-discrimination issues. Adopted as part of the Policy Document for Social Inclusion, it sets strategic goals to improve the legal and institutional framework, eliminate all forms of discrimination and improve access to services. A national group on coordination and implementation of the plan includes the ministries of justice, interior, education and health, independent institutions such as the ombudsman and commissioner for non-discrimination, and civil society organizations. Within the framework of the plan, the Ministry of Education, Sports and Youth leads education-related agencies to develop curricular documents and deliver training to teachers and others to address gender stereotype and anti-discrimination issues.

As part of broader, competence-based curricular reforms in primary and secondary education, the curricular documents consider LGBTI-related issues not only as information in a subject or field of learning, but also as an interdisciplinary competence that requires complex efforts across subjects and areas of learning.

To support training, the ministry enhanced cooperation with partner institutions in the field of sexual education and training. The Institute for Education Development designed modules for teachers in basic education: The Skills for Life and Sexual Education toolkit helps teachers inform students and provide them with knowledge and skills to make responsible decisions about sexuality, intimate relationships, and HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases. Head teachers undertake further training modules and activities as part of the School of Directors.

An assessment of the situation of LGBTI people in Albania stressed various education needs, such as training law enforcement personnel and judges in gender-sensitive approaches to violations related to sexual orientation and gender identity, including training in protecting the safety of LGBTI detainees. It also highlighted the importance of raising awareness, supporting public education campaigns to counter homophobic and transphobic attitudes, and addressing negative portrayals in the media. The ministry is cooperating with other ministries to strengthen the gender equality local focal points network in 13 regions.

## 0-to-24 cooperation in **NORWAY**

The Norwegian ministries of education and research, health and care services, children and equality, and labour and social affairs joined forces in 2014 to improve service coordination for vulnerable children and young people under 24. The ministries asked their directorates to coordinate work and policies to fulfil the vision of all children and young people getting the support and help they need to be able to master their own lives. The Norwegian Directorate of Education and Training leads the steering group.

The 2017–2020 strategy for O24-Samarbeidet (0-to-24 Cooperation) envisions a more comprehensive and coordinated use of government instruments. It has two main goals: to improve inter-agency cooperation in municipalities to ensure sufficient support for vulnerable children and young people and their families, and to increase upper secondary school completion rates in order to prevent marginalization later in life. The directorates work in four priority areas: establish a common knowledge base, coordinate government instruments, develop cross-sectoral measures and build capacity for cross-sectoral efforts. The initiative will help develop cross-sectoral rules and regulations, ensure joint consideration of sector plans and promote cooperation for education and training for children and young people who need support from different services at the same time.

Since 2017, Norway has taken part in a diverse set of 0-to-24 initiatives in Nordic Council countries and territories to prevent social exclusion of the most vulnerable (the poor, early school leavers, and those not in employment, education or training). Norway is managing the Nordic project in 2017–2020. This is a network of seven municipalities working on cross-sectoral learning processes to develop indicators of good practice in service delivery. Schools, kindergartens, education-psychological services, child welfare services, public health centres, school health services, and the Norwegian Labour and Welfare Administration are collaborating.



Global Education Meeting,  
December 2018, Brussels

CREDIT: UNESCO/Eyecone

# Beyond countries

## Key recommendations

- Regional and international organizations need clear education agendas aligned with SDG 4 and to develop conducive environments for education policy dialogue.
- Governments should utilize opportunities for peer learning and informal comparisons.
- Peer learning networks for education are a global public good, and their coordination and communication costs need to be funded accordingly.

Education policy, perhaps more than most government domains, is a non-negotiable national prerogative. International agreements and conventions in the field of education are not legally binding, even when they serve as guiding frameworks for achieving shared objectives. However, countries increasingly recognize the need to collaborate to reap various benefits.

One obvious purpose for collaboration is financing. Poorer countries need to fund their education sector plans and engage in dialogue with donors and creditors in the preparation of project and programme documents that include monitoring frameworks and rules for disbursement. Both sides should abide by certain principles, notably those reflected in the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness and the Busan Partnership for Effective Development Co-operation. Priorities for financing the 2030 Agenda are outlined in the Addis Ababa Action Agenda. Two interesting aspects of this agenda for education are the stagnation of official development assistance to education since 2010 and, within this stagnant pool, the growing role of multilateral financing mechanisms, with calls emerging for establishing a global education financing coordination architecture.

A related purpose for collaboration is sharing expertise and developing capacity. Most countries, even the richest, lack the full set of skills and know-how to carry out activities important for their education systems. There are benefits from collaboration and economies of scale (see the example of the Pacific Islands Literacy and Numeracy Assessment in this section). Collaboration networks emerge either spontaneously on a bilateral basis or, more often, through facilitation by subregional, regional and international organizations.

These last have a role in setting standards in formal education processes, a task delegated to them by their member states. An obvious example is cross-border collaboration in tertiary education (see the example in this section of the Technical Cooperation Group for development of the SDG 4 monitoring framework). Cross-national organizations also have a growing role through non-formal processes when they set standards that countries adopt voluntarily because they are convinced by technical or political arguments.

Finally, countries occasionally agree to set common education or broader development goals, such as the SDGs. These are accompanied by looser or stricter accountability mechanisms to help parties achieve their commitments. In either case, countries increasingly recognize the benefits of structures, facilitated by regional or international organizations, to exchange experiences with their peers and hold policy dialogue to learn from each other (see the example of policy dialogue in Europe in this section). This tendency is expected to grow as a result of the SDGs.

## **REGIONAL ORGANIZATIONS PROMOTE EDUCATION POLICY DIALOGUE IN EUROPE**

While a robust monitoring framework is needed to inform and guide education decision-making, understanding how and why progress is made is also important. This requires opportunities for policy dialogue among peers. Peer learning may be defined as ‘public officials or other practitioners with some responsibility for reform design gaining practical insights into technical reform options and tactical modes of implementation from each other’ (Andrews and Manning, 2016). Such learning can occur through meetings, focused discussions (supported by expert papers or joint comparative assessments), experience sharing or formal training sessions.

Many regions have common education contexts and shared values, objectives and challenges. Members of regional organizations are therefore more likely to demonstrate stronger political commitment to regional or subregional peer learning. The results are more likely to be used in policy-making and sustained over time, not least because governments have an interest in neighbouring countries’ performance. Regional organizations with an education mandate can offer the conditions for countries to exchange information on their systems and reflect on policy priorities. Joint activities among member states can be strengthened when a regional education strategy document aligns and commits them to common goals, given that education is a national responsibility. Interesting lessons in that respect can be drawn from Europe.

The European Union is developing exchanges of information and experience on issues common to the education systems of its member countries. EU countries agreed to include this explicitly in the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union. To give shape to this ambition, the EU Council of Education Ministers and the European Commission

developed the Education and Training 2020 (ET 2020) strategic framework. It provides jointly agreed strategic objectives and common working methods, with priority areas for each work cycle. ET 2020 is a forum for mutual learning, gathering and dissemination of information, advice, peer learning activities and support for policy reforms. Countries can call on their EU partners for tailor-made peer counselling under ET 2020 to support a particular national reform agenda in education and training, and transfer knowledge to policy-makers at all levels.

As a means of monitoring progress and identifying challenges, as well as contributing to evidence-based policy-making, a set of reference levels of European average performance (European benchmarks) was established to support the ET 2020 strategic objectives; a new set of benchmarks for 2030 is being developed. Progress towards the benchmarks is charted in the annual *Education and Training Monitor*. The publication relies on a broad range of quantitative and qualitative sources, including the Eurydice network of 40 national units in 36 countries, which is an information hub on contextual factors and qualitative aspects of education systems in Europe. In addition to supporting the *Education and Training Monitor*, Eurydice produces an online database of national education systems, which is updated by national authorities, comparative thematic studies and statistical fact sheets in selected areas, such as education system structures, teacher salaries and higher education student fees.

Built on the foundation of the European Cultural Convention (1954), the Council of Europe has an education programme combining standard setting and monitoring with cooperation and capacity-building. The 47 member countries adopted recommendations setting standards on topics such as quality education (2012), academic freedom and institutional autonomy (2012), education for democratic citizenship and human rights (2010) and higher education and research (2007). Monitoring is mostly based on qualitative indicators and data, such as the five-year review cycle of the Recommendation on Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education, whose last round was concluded in June 2017.

Council of Europe policy measures supporting implementation include rapid response or short-term interventions to help with one-off processes, such as reviews of legislation; and thematic or longer-term support on issues such as curricular reform, inclusive education and tools to support national progress monitoring. A new tool, the Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture, supports development of indicators and data collection on curriculum, assessment, teacher education and pedagogy. All this activity is subject to intergovernmental peer review through regular ministerial-level meetings and twice-yearly meetings of education ministry officials.

Most European countries are also members of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), which provides another cross-country mechanism of cooperation and peer learning. The Indicators of Education Systems (INES) programme, established in 1992, provides comparative performance data on education systems in the 36 OECD member countries and selected partner countries. These are made available primarily in the annual *Education at a Glance*. Among its aims, INES seeks to 'accelerate improvements in education by enabling member and partner countries to learn from each others' experiences'.

One strand of the programme's work focuses on 'learning environment and the organization of schools', which collects information on issues such as curricular content and decision-making responsibilities. In 2009, it evolved into the INES Network for System-Level Indicators (NESLI), which collects system-level data on, for example, teacher remuneration and instruction time using annual, cyclical or ad hoc surveys. INES and NESLI follow in a long tradition of expanding diagnostic tools developed by the OECD, which tend to focus on benchmarking or identifying best practices to facilitate peer learning.

All three organizations are making efforts to align their education strategies with SDG 4. Outside Europe, almost all regions have established entities encouraging countries to share information on education and learn from each other. Some are led by the UNESCO regional bureaus in Bangkok, Beirut, Dakar, Nairobi and Santiago, others by regional and subregional organizations such as the African Union, Caribbean Community, Organization of Ibero-American States and Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organization. Strengthening policy dialogue and peer learning mechanisms requires a regional education strategy, with clear priorities, targets, resources and monitoring frameworks. However, resources need to be dedicated to cover the considerable coordination costs of peer learning mechanisms, and allocated in a way that motivates participation and contribution by all participating countries.

## COLLABORATION ON LEARNING ASSESSMENT IN PACIFIC ISLAND COUNTRIES

The Pacific Islands Literacy and Numeracy Assessment (PILNA) is a regional learning assessment model that elicits a high level of consensus among participating countries. It responds to two needs. First, it helps share the costs and improve the efficiency of obtaining reliable and valid data on the literacy and numeracy skills of students in grades 4 and 6. Second, it promotes, through a consensus-building and peer learning mechanism, effective use of data in formulating national policy, monitoring, and designing appropriate intervention programmes to improve literacy and numeracy levels.

The origins of the programme go back to 2006, when UNESCO, the Secretariat for the Pacific Board of Educational Assessment (SPBEA; now the Educational Quality and Assessment Programme [EQAP] of the Secretariat of Pacific Community) and representatives of 15 Pacific island countries developed the Pacific Regional Benchmarks for Literacy and Numeracy. These were endorsed by 15 education ministers at the 2007 Forum Education Ministers' Meeting. The benchmarks developed from common curricular components and learning outcomes. Collaborative activities between UNESCO and SPBEA began in 2010 and resulted in the development of the PILNA instruments. PILNA has since been administered in three rounds since 2012. The 2018 round covered 15 countries, 900 schools, 41,000 students and 10 languages. As primary education curricula in some countries have been revised, the 2018 Forum Education Ministers' Meeting endorsed new benchmarks.

There is a four-tier management and governance structure:

- EQAP manages and supervises the assessment overall, supported through a partnership with the Australian Council for Educational Research.
- A steering committee, consisting of the EQAP director, the chief executive officer of each participating country's education ministry and representatives of the Australia and New Zealand foreign affairs ministries, provides oversight and guides plans, activities and communication.
- A project management team ensures timely delivery and technical support.
- An operations team supports the administration and a development team provides analytical and technical support to develop PILNA as a long-term regional assessment, in partnership with EQAP.

Each participating country is fully involved in these structures to ensure effective practices, information sharing and dissemination. The steering committee adopts a consensus approach to the six purposes of the programme: interventions, policy, political support, community awareness, monitoring results and national validation. In turn, participating countries have committed to share the results with other countries for lessons they can learn. A data-sharing commitment outlines how country-specific results are to be shared, taking into account countries' wish not to use results for side-by-side comparisons or league tables. Countries have also committed to use the findings to carry out policy and technical interventions to improve learning outcomes: A communication plan ensures that results are shared with ministry staff for system-wide efforts (through ministerial briefs with key findings and recommendations per country), as well as with teachers.

Figures are reported for the region and disseminated to participating education ministries, through the Pacific Heads of Education Systems, and to ministers of education. Three sets of reports (regional, subregional and national) are produced for education ministries. All present literacy and numeracy results by gender, school authority and school locality, and compare progress over time. Draft reports are shared with countries before the launch to allow review and comment. This approach increases ownership of the results and promotes responsibility for devising strategies to foster improvement in teaching and learning in classrooms.

Following the launch of the results, participating countries are supported by follow-up visits from EQAP officers, who present the results and work with national stakeholders, including parent groups in some cases. Each visit generally includes three sessions, with the specifics of the visit determined in consultation with the education ministry. The first session is to share the results with education ministries and discuss strategies to enable the results to reach teachers in the classroom. The second focuses on strategies enabling assessment to be used as a learning tool by assessment and curriculum unit officials. The third is a training workshop with classroom teachers, advising them how to use assessment as a tool to guide intervention.

## GLOBAL MECHANISMS TO DEVELOP THE SDG 4 MONITORING FRAMEWORK

The international agreement around SDG 4 succeeded in shifting the debate in education. By raising questions of equity, inclusion and quality, the 2030 Agenda also broadened the education monitoring debate. While discussions at the global level do not underestimate the unfinished business of universal primary completion and gender parity, they have extended to issues including the slow annual progress towards universal achievement of minimum proficiency in reading; the low percentage of adults participating in any form of education and training in middle-income countries; and information collected by an NGO on the high number of attacks on schools. That these issues, not on the global education agenda just a few years ago, are now being raised is a testament to efforts on all fronts.

Four years after consensus was reached on the Education 2030 Framework for Action, countries, civil society and international partners are investing in pinning down definitions, improving methodologies and collecting information. A significant parallel development since 2015 is the establishment of a cooperation mechanism on international education monitoring. Debate on this issue was until recently the remit of international organizations, with scant country involvement. Mirroring the operation of the Inter-Agency and Expert Group on Sustainable Development Goals (IAEG-SDGs) at the level of global SDG indicators, three related mechanisms are operating at the level of SDG 4 indicators.

The Technical Cooperation Group (TCG) on SDG 4 – Education 2030 Indicators, co-convened by the UIS and UNESCO, is the key mechanism for developing the SDG 4 monitoring indicators for approval by the SDG – Education 2030 Steering Committee and, ultimately, the IAEG-SDGs. Consisting of the IAEG-SDGs countries and selected international agencies and institutions, it is the forum where countries voice experiences, preferences and concerns about how progress towards SDG 4 should be measured.

The Global Alliance to Monitor Learning (GAML), convened by the UIS, focuses on developing methodologies for indicators related to learning outcomes. Due to the technical sophistication of these indicators, GAML was originally conceived as a forum to promote consensus among organizations involved in learning assessments. It has task forces corresponding to the targets with learning outcome indicators (e.g. minimum proficiency in mathematics in basic education, adult literacy, digital literacy). Gradually, however, GAML has incorporated countries as members and become a working group of the TCG.

The Inter-Agency Group on Education Inequality Indicators was first convened in April 2016, led by the UIS, UNICEF and the World Bank. Its goal is to promote and coordinate the use of household survey data for education monitoring at the global, regional and national levels, ensuring standardized analysis and reporting. Its potential lies in the success with which survey resources can be pooled and used. Unlike the TCG and GAML, it does not yet have countries as members. Bringing countries in and including the group under the TCG umbrella would help ensure coherence and gradually target activities to build countries' capacity to contribute to, and learn from, the estimation of survey-based education indicators.

In short, the international community has developed a promising architecture to support the SDG 4 monitoring framework. Inevitably, there are challenges. Countries and international agencies sometimes struggle to find a common language that links priorities at the national, regional and global levels. Streamlining country representation and strengthening regional communication channels are time-consuming tasks. Crucially, no funding has been allocated to improve coordination and strengthen country engagement in these mechanisms.

It is important to strengthen country representation and voice in the TCG. So far, many countries have been either inactive participants or unable to represent their regions. As the 2017/8 *Global Education Monitoring Report* noted, to improve the accountability of international organizations and mechanisms, 'countries need to build their capacity for stronger representation' at the level 'where problems are framed, priorities identified and solutions devised'. The current structure of the TCG, with 28 countries and insufficient communication channels with other countries, risks leaving other countries without sufficient information to influence the agenda, so that precious momentum is lost. All countries' education ministries (with responsibility for planning or monitoring and evaluation) and national statistical agencies (with responsibility for social statistics) should be involved to help institutionalize the process further and create a global community of interest.

Pupils at Al Shuhada School in Souran, western Syria, enjoy the visit of UN Refugee Chief Filippo Grandi.

CREDIT: UNHCR/Andrew McConnell



# Conclusion

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This assessment of country perspectives on SDG 4 implementation, on the occasion of the first review of SDG 4 at the 2019 High-level Political Forum, demonstrates diversity of efforts in low-, middle- and high-income countries. There are clear indications that some education systems are aligning or seeking to align their national targets with SDG 4 and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development more broadly. System-wide reforms and innovative thinking are taking place. While not the only influence on decision-makers, the SDG 4 framework is used as a tool to reinforce reforms, push for certain policy issues and engage internationally.

This publication had two key objectives. First, it tried to capture country perceptions and prioritization in SDG 4 implementation. Some key patterns emerged. The development of early childhood education and technical and vocational education are central to policy-makers' concerns. Some of the shifts that SDG 4 sought to mainstream are taken up well by countries. There is a clear focus on monitoring learning achievement and using the information to deliver change. A range of curricular and pedagogical reforms signal understanding of the need to develop skills that are relevant for sustainable development, albeit pursued more intensively in richer countries. Other shifts are emerging more slowly. Efforts to achieve inclusive education seem fragmented across group-specific initiatives. Adult education initiatives are spreading but seem focused on employment-related lifelong learning opportunities. While multisector policies involving health, nutrition or employment recognize the need not to work in isolation, governments still do not fully utilize the potential of cross-sectoral partnerships.

Second, the publication aspired to introduce a way to monitor progress not just from a quantitative, indicator-focused perspective, but also from a qualitative, policy-oriented angle, focused on a framework of six essential transformations that call on countries to look:

- Beyond averages into equity and inclusion
- Beyond access into quality and learning
- Beyond basics into content fit for sustainable development
- Beyond schooling into lifelong learning
- Beyond education into cross-sectoral collaboration
- Beyond countries into regional and global collaboration

This framework can serve as a starting point for national, regional and global conversations about whether the education policy focus is moving in the right direction. It could usher in peer learning opportunities on how policies that follow these principles can be contextualized, how financial resources can be mobilized and how collaborative arrangements can be developed.

The sheer number of initiatives undertaken since 2015 to improve equity, quality and relevance attests to the importance countries ascribe to education renewal. The practices showcased provide reason for optimism, although far stronger mobilization is needed to achieve the ambitious SDG 4 targets. A stronger emphasis on implementation is also needed if education is to help fulfil the promise of sustainable development and transform how societies function.

# BEYOND COMMITMENTS

## HOW COUNTRIES IMPLEMENT SDG 4

Almost one-third of the time set to achieve the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development has elapsed. As the international community gets together for the first time since 2015 to review the Sustainable Development Goal on education, SDG 4, it appears unlikely that its targets will be met. The world will fall well behind universal completion of secondary education, the achievement of relevant and effective learning outcomes, and the distribution of equitable education opportunities.

But the seeds of education take time to bear fruit. The aspiration is that the new agenda has instilled a new sense of purpose, which will ultimately turn education systems around. The Education 2030 Framework for Action proposed a roadmap with implementation strategies at national, regional and global levels to achieve wSDG 4. It stressed the need to align national education policy and planning to the 2030 Agenda targets and priorities.

However, SDG 4 encompasses almost every level and dimension of education. There is a risk that it could mean anything to anyone. While the agenda is universal, it is not always clear how countries perceive its relevance, how they respond to the commitments made and what policies they strive towards.

This special publication written by the *Global Education Monitoring Report*, under the auspices of the SDG – Education 2030 Steering Committee, is based on a synthesis of perceptions on these issues received from more than 70 countries. It also analyses the education components of countries' voluntary national reviews, which are the main reporting tool for the 2030 Agenda.

This publication seizes the moment provided by the High-level Political Forum in 2019 to offer countries an opportunity to reflect on whether their education policies and plans match their commitments. It presents a shared appreciation of what SDG 4 means for countries, using a framework that showcases policies that capture the spirit of SDG 4 in various contexts and that will be important to monitor in the coming years.

