SUMMIT OF THE FUTURE INFORMATION CLEARINGHOUSE BULLETIN

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Our Common Agenda Policy Brief 10 – Transforming Education

Summit of the Future (SOTF) Information Clearinghouse Bulletin is an independent initiative to objectively present the key elements and highlights of the SOTF preparatory processes taking place at the United Nations.

Note: Excerpts have been quoted directly from the policy briefs. The parts that are not excerpts have been *italicized*.

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Our Common Agenda Policy Brief 10 – Transforming Education
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ABOUT

Building on the proposals presented in [Our Common Agenda report](#), the Secretary-General (SG) is publishing a [series](#) of Policy Briefs over 2023 to serve as inputs into the preparations for the Summit of the Future. The Policy Brief on Transforming Education is the tenth in that series.

PURPOSE OF THIS POLICY BRIEF

The right to education and lifelong learning is important to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development since education, knowledge, and learning are essential to an individual's dignity, progress, and development. Education has been the great equalizer, a driving force in nation-building, and the engine of social, cultural, economic, and technical growth for ages. Today, however, education as we know it is no longer fit for purpose, afflicted by twin crises of equity and relevance. Individual rights, national governments, and, increasingly, the international community as a whole are all affected by the twin problems of equity and relevance in education. As the global flow of products, services, money, and people becomes more global, and as the digital and green revolutions urgently require our collective action, so will the demand for individuals in every corner of the globe to hold a growing reservoir of knowledge, skills, and capacities. Failure to re-establish global education institutions to guarantee that everyone is equipped for markets and unpredictable futures risks entrenching a two-speed world, increasing disparities, and worsening global instability. Building on the Transforming Education Summit and the International Commission on the Futures of Education report, this policy brief examines the current education crisis in greater depth and proposes a vision and set of guiding actions for countries and the international community to transform education.

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

Education is important to the United Nations' activities. Ensuring accessible and equitable quality education for all and encouraging lifelong learning opportunities for everyone is both the overall objective of Sustainable Development Goal 4 and a prerequisite for achieving all 17 Goals. Education is one of the most successful measures for empowering women and girls and substantially decreasing gender inequality, which is critical for a sustainable future, and it was a key emphasis of the Commission on the Status of Women's sixty-seventh session in March 2023. Quality education is also an essential ingredient in promoting, building, and sustaining peace by increasing our individual and collective capacity to appreciate inclusive human diversity, understand and respect differences, and confront and resolve conflicts, as recognized in United Nations resolutions on sustaining peace, advancing a culture of peace, and youth, peace, and security. Education is also essential for anticipating, preventing, and mitigating future hazards. This is reflected in the link between education and the many issues being discussed at the Summit of the Future, such as the advancement of meaningful youth participation in decision-making, the protection of future generations' rights, ensuring information integrity, and the development of the Global Digital Compact.

Education at a crossroads

CRISIS OF EQUITY

The first educational issue is one of equity and access, which is based on widespread and persistent exclusion from learning possibilities. Despite recent progress in increasing global access to education, the effects of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, multiple armed conflicts, climate change, economic downturns, and associated displacement are having a significant impact on progress toward achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. Another difficulty is insufficient international community assistance on a large scale in the field of education. According to the Development Assistance Committee of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, not only are most high-income countries failing to meet their overall official development assistance commitments, but donor spending on education has remained largely static since 2018, despite a significant increase in needs. Today, education aid accounts for only 8% of total aid spending and 3% of global humanitarian financing. Furthermore, only around 20% of aid is sent to low-income nations, and donors' funding reflects a huge diversity of priorities. Recently, education ministers from 86 Global Partnership for Education partner countries called for the education aid financing architecture to support "country-led transformation by harmonizing and aligning external aid behind national priorities and commitments, eliminating fragmentation, and reducing transaction costs."

A serious and deep crisis of relevance, in addition to the equity issue, calls into doubt the ability of current education systems to react to the learning demands of individuals, society, and economies in a quickly changing world. Based on the International Commission on the Futures of Education's findings and other sources, four important interrelated worldwide trends highlight the need for root-and-branch reform of education institutions as we know them. First, a fast-changing labor market raises significant concerns about the "what, how, and when" of schooling. Automation, artificial intelligence, and the rise of the gig economy are already having substantial structural effects on the world of work, potentially resulting in considerable job displacement and the formation of a more vulnerable and mobile population. Second, the digital age and the rapid advancement of strong generative artificial intelligence constitute a tipping moment for education and research, bringing up significant new horizons as well as threats that are not yet completely understood. Third, the global climate issue threatens to have a profound influence on education, necessitating an immediate reaction from the education sector. Extreme weather events, disaster-related displacement, the destruction or repurposing of school facilities, and indirect economic demands on families are reducing access to education at all levels, particularly for women and girls. The fourth trend affecting education is greater polarization and division in society, as well as less faith in governments and other institutions. Education is essential for the formation of a stronger social fabric, the promotion of gender equality, and increased social cohesiveness.

Transforming education to transform the world: principles and actions

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

- ❖ Integrating early childhood care and education, technical and vocational education and higher education into a comprehensive lifelong learning system, alongside traditional primary and secondary levels;
- ❖ Recognizing the right to education and lifelong learning in national constitutions, legislation, norms, policies, budgets and governance architecture;
- ❖ Establishing lifelong learning entitlements, learning accounts and other delivery systems that enhance access to lifelong learning opportunities for citizens of all ages;
- ❖ Repositioning education and lifelong learning as a whole-of-government responsibility, with clear roles across ministries and public authorities;
- ❖ Improving and scaling-up recognition, validation, and accreditation mechanisms that value formal, non- formal and informal learning in various contexts;
- ❖ Building an all-of-society approach to education through involvement in the education transformation process of learners, parents, families, teachers, principals, local governments, political leaders, community elders, youth, labor and business groups.

B. ENSURING EQUALITY AND INCLUSION IN AND THROUGH EDUCATION

- ❖ Orienting legislation, policies and resources towards ensuring inclusion in the education system for all groups, especially those often marginalized or excluded, such as rural populations; low-income households; migrants, refugees and displaced persons; and persons experiencing discrimination on the grounds of sex, disability, ethnicity, religion, language, sexual orientation, gender identity and legal status;
- ❖ Supporting girls' education, especially in areas such as science, technology, engineering and mathematics; eliminating gender stereotypes at all levels of education; and transforming curricula and pedagogies from a gender perspective;
- ❖ Prioritizing learner health, including mental health, as well as nutrition and well-being;
- ❖ Improving the availability of comprehensive data on the learning and skills pathways in various contexts and settings.

C. MAKING CURRICULA AND PEDAGOGIES RELEVANT FOR TODAY AND TOMORROW

- ❖ Prioritizing the delivery of foundational learning and expanding what is understood to be foundational to include creative, critical and scientific thinking, digital literacy and socio-emotional skills alongside traditional literacy and numeracy skills;
- ❖ Making curricula relevant for today and for the future, with a particular focus on education for sustainable development in science, technology, innovation and skills that are relevant for future economies and the world of work; on fostering a culture of civic responsibility, peace and respect for human diversity; and on building on the needs and traditions of the local context and preparing learners to be global citizens;

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

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

* Repositioning the role of teachers as creative guides and facilitators in learning so that their approach is transformed from passive to active and from unidirectional to collaborative, and so that they are better equipped to help learners to gather, identify and critically analyze relevant and useful knowledge from a vast and growing repository;
* Empowering teachers to interpret and manage the curriculum and to adapt and prioritize content and pedagogy;
* Conducting regular and formative professional development and evaluation of teachers to ensure improvement of learning processes and outcomes;
* Tackling global teacher shortages by improving working conditions and by ensuring fair pay and a fulfilling and engaging professional experience;
* Avoiding public sector wage constraints that block both recruitment of new teachers and improvements in teacher pay;
* Protecting the right to freedom of association and expression and collective bargaining of teachers and ensuring that teachers' voices and experiences are at the center of education decision-making, with particular attention paid to the usually invisible members of the teaching profession such as support teachers and special education teachers.

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

* Ensuring that high-quality, curriculum- relevant digital content is available to all learners, teachers and caregivers through affordable access to digital learning platforms and by giving due attention to access for teachers and students with disabilities and those from disadvantaged and diverse backgrounds, including Indigenous communities;
* Strengthening the capacity, skills and knowledge of teachers, learners and education stakeholders to effectively leverage digital tools for evidence-based and increasingly independent and self- directed learning throughout life;
* Promoting adequate digital connectivity to enable educational institutions and individuals to effectively benefit from the educational advantages of the digital revolution and avoid the digital divide;
* Ensuring that digital teaching and learning resources and overall educational content and methods dovetail effectively and ensuring that they confront negative online phenomena such as cyberbullying; harmful gender stereotypes and gender- based or other kinds of discrimination and violence; and invasion of privacy;
* Incorporating practices that strengthen the ability of learners and teachers to navigate the increasing flow of false and fake information.

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

* Increasing investment in education and delivering on international commitments to allocate at least 6 per cent of gross domestic product and 20 per cent of total government spending to education, including by undertaking required action to increase revenue and open fiscal space, and by measuring the increased public per capita investment in education;
* Ensuring that investments are allocated equitably, taking into account factors that affect individual access, such as proximity to educational institutions, the availability of sufficient qualified teachers, the existence of school meal programmes, the availability of transportation and the use of conditional cash transfers to compensate for the opportunity cost that school attendance could involve for many students;
Ensuring efficient spending on education by drawing on the evidence from interventions and policies that maximize impact and results, advancing careful planning, relying on successful strategies and well-proven practices and by monitoring teacher performance and systematically assessing learning outcomes.

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

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

- Ensuring policy coherence across the global commitments on education and the work of international financial institutions, in particular with respect to restrictive fiscal policies and public sector wage constraints that directly curtail educational investment and harm teachers and learners;
- Increasing official development assistance to 0.7 per cent of gross national income and increasing the share of aid for education to 20 per cent of all official development assistance to address the challenges of financing education in emergencies, crises and post-crisis situations;
- Supporting equitable access to high- quality and contextualized digital learning by scaling up existing efforts to develop a public, open-source digital commons and to expand school connectivity in line with the proposals contained in the policy brief on a global digital compact;
- Developing relevant international standards that provide responsible guardrails to effectively harness the digital revolution and its implications for education as a common good;
- Establishing a global consensus on recognition of vocational qualifications, education and lifelong learning;
- Strengthening the coherence and impact of support to developing countries from the global education community, including by maximizing the contribution of the global education financing architecture and education funds, under the guidance of the SDG 4-Education 2030 High-Level Steering Committee;
- Strengthening the contribution of the United Nations development system, in particular UNESCO, UNICEF and other key entities, in this area, including by capitalizing a dedicated window on transforming education in the Joint Sustainable Development Goals Fund.

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

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

- Building a comprehensive and integrated system of education and lifelong learning in a world of uncertainty;
- Ensuring equity, access and inclusion in and through education;
- Making curricula and pedagogies relevant for today and for tomorrow;
- Repositioning the teaching profession to ensure that teachers increasingly serve as creative guides and facilitators in the learning process;
- Harnessing digital tools and resources to expand access, improve learning and increase capacities to navigate the future and avoid the digital divide;
- Investing more, more equitably and more efficiently in education;

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

RESOURCE

1. Policy Brief on Transforming Education