International Forum on Inclusion and Equity in Education

Every learner matters

Cali, Colombia, 11-13 September 2019

Background

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, with its focus on leaving no one behind, provides a unique opportunity to build more inclusive, just and fair societies. But we are a long way from ensuring that all people, irrespective of their sex, age, race or ethnicity, ability, location, or other social characteristics, have equal opportunities for educational progress and life-long learning[1].

From 2000-2010, the number of children, adolescents and youth excluded from education fell steadily; however, UNESCO Institute for Statistics data show that this progress has essentially stopped in recent years[2]. 262 million children and youth are still not in school[3] and more than 617 million children and adolescents are not achieving minimum proficiency levels in reading and mathematics[4]. The disadvantaged are least likely to access quality early childhood care and education, though they could benefit most from such interventions.

In 2019, we celebrate the 25th anniversary of the World Conference on Special Needs Education, which was co-organized by UNESCO and the Ministry of Education and Science of Spain in Salamanca, Spain. The Salamanca Statement was adopted and widely endorsed, laying down the fundamental principle of inclusion at school: '*All children should learn together, wherever possible, regardless of any difficulties or differences they may have. Inclusive schools must recognize and respond to the diverse needs of their students*".[5] Since then, the concept of inclusion has broadened, emphasising the need to reach all learners, under the assumption that every learner matters equally and has the right to receive relevant, equitable and effective educational opportunities.[6]

This is reinforced by the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, specifically Goal 4 (SDG4), which calls upon education systems 'to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all' and UNESCO's comprehensive guide for ensuring inclusion and equity in education.

---

[1] Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development
[2] UIS Fact Sheet No. 48 | February 2018
[3] UNESCO. 2019. Global Education Monitoring Report
[4] UIS, Fact Sheet n° 46, September 2017
[5] The Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education, p. 11
[6] See more on the International Conference on Education which focused on 'Inclusive Education: The Way of the Future'

Although efforts have been made to promote quality education for all, there has not been the transformation in educational systems nor policies needed to translate the promise of SDG4 into a reality. During the Forum, UNESCO will harness its convening power to give new impetus to inclusion in education in the context of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Goal

The International Forum seeks to build a common understanding and a renewed commitment towards reinforcing inclusion in education among education policy makers, education practitioners, civil society organisations, NGOs, UN agencies, development partners and private sector.

Objectives

The objectives of the Forum are to:
- Promote educational policies and practices that foster inclusion and share promising policies and practices.
- Review progress in policy and practice since the Salamanca Conference.
- Understand the potential of inclusion in education in bringing new opportunities in a digitalized and globalized world, in view of technological, economic and social transformation.

Expected outcomes

- Strengthened platform for dialogue and cooperation on inclusion.
- Enhanced awareness of policies and practices (from early childhood to higher education) that are effective in promoting inclusion in education, and of areas where progress is needed.
- Endorsed Outcome Document on Inclusion and Equity in Education.

Format

The Forum will provide a platform for debate, hands-on learning and a place to share innovation. It will consist of interactive plenary and concurrent sessions, knowledge-sharing workshops and exhibition sessions. It will feature:
- Plenary sessions, combining high-level and panel discussions.
- Concurrent sessions, including panel discussions and workshops to share research findings, school practices, and lessons learned.
- Exhibition booths, offering an opportunity for partners to present their activities, and to interact with participants.

Programme

The programme of the International Forum will be based on the overarching theme of inclusion and equity in education, with four sub-themes:

1. Developing and adopting legislation and policy frameworks that lay the foundations for inclusion and equity in education
2. Providing high quality educational/institutional support to respond and value learners' diversity
3. Cultivating approaches for friendly inclusive learning environments for all learners
4. Fostering cooperation and engaging multi-sectoral partnerships to ensure inclusion and equity in education

Participants

Around 500 delegates from over 40 countries will participate in the Forum including: ministries of education and other government officials; education practitioners and educators; researchers and experts; bilateral, multilateral and other development partners; private sector stakeholders; representatives of youth organizations; representatives of medias and representatives of intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations supporting inclusive education.

Working languages and interpretation

The working languages of the Forum will be English, French and Spanish.

Date and Venue

11-13 September 2019, Cali, Colombia.

Contacts

UNESCO: inclusion@unesco.org   **Colombia:** sfernandez@mineducacion.gov.co

ANNEX 1: Conference themes

Theme 1: Developing and adopting legislation and policy frameworks that lay the foundation for inclusion and equity

Only when the right to education is given full effect and is recognized and exercised without discrimination of any kind, will inclusion and equity become a reality. Solid national legal and policy frameworks are needed to create the foundation and conditions for the delivery and sustainability of inclusive, relevant and equitable quality education for all.

- What are the guiding principles of inclusive national legislation and educational policies?
- How have international normative instruments and frameworks influenced the development of inclusive national legislation and educational policies?
- How do legislation and policy in other sectors such as health, social welfare and child protection impact on the development of inclusive education policy?
- How can data be used to inform, and measure the implementation of, inclusive and equitable education policies?

Theme 2: Providing high quality educational/institutional support to respond and value learners' diversity

Inclusive education systems take steps to recognize and respond to the diverse needs of students, accommodate different styles and rates of learning, and ensure quality education for all through appropriate curricula, organizational arrangements, teaching strategies, assessment methods, equitable resource use and partnerships with their communities.

- What strategies work to ensure the development and use of inclusive curriculum and learning materials which respond to diverse situations and needs throughout the education cycle?
- What needs to be done to strengthen teachers and educational staff's capabilities, so that they are well-trained, committed and confident to implement inclusive pedagogies and classroom practices?
- How have assessment methods and processes been reviewed or adjusted to support and accompany learners with diverse abilities and educational needs?
- How are information and communication technologies expanding accessibility, improving teaching and learning, and creating enabling environments? What systems changes are needed to harness the potential benefits of such technologies?

Theme 3: Cultivating approaches for child-friendly inclusive learning environments for all learners

A child-friendly inclusive learning environment should be physically safe, emotionally secure and psychologically enabling. It should facilitate learning and foster children's psychosocial competencies, such as positive self-concept, empathy and resilience. Such an environment assists children in developing positive ideas about themselves and others and provides the setting for introducing activities about differences and creating fair and inclusive communities.

- What actions are effective in making physical learning environments safe, clean and accessible?
- What works to make the learning environment child-friendly?
- How to encourage learning processes that value diversity and promotes social cohesion?
- What is effective in building learners' psychosocial competencies and in offering adequate support?

Theme 4: Fostering cooperation and engaging multi-sectoral partnerships to ensure inclusion and equity in education

Coordination among sectors (e.g. education, health, social affairs, finance, planning) and among stakeholder groups (e.g., government, civil society, NGOs, private sector, development partners) is key for ensuring inclusion and equity in education. Inclusion and equity also entail active involvement of children, young people, families and communities.

- What effective strategies and partnerships exist (e.g. cross-sectoral, public-private, parent-schools, South-South and North-South) to ensure equality of educational opportunities?
- What works to establish shared responsibility and enforce accountability among multiple actors?
- What actions are effective in involving parents and the communities in the learning process?
- What partnerships exist with young people and youth organizations and how can they be scaled-up and replicated?