

Background document

Organized with the SDG-Education 2030 Steering Committee

2021 Global Education Meeting *From recovery to accelerating SDG 4*

Ministerial Segment (on line) – 13 July 2021 13:00-16:00 CEST

UNESCO convenes periodic Global Education Meetings (GEMs) aligned with the meeting schedule of the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF). The 2021 GEM will consist of a Ministerial Segment aligned with the 2021 HLPF in July and a High-Level Segment aligned with the 41st Session of the UNESCO General Conference in November. The Ministerial Segment, organized by UNESCO with the SDG-Education 2030 Steering Committee, will take place at the margins of the 2021 HLPF under the theme:

Sustainable and resilient recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic that promotes the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development: building an inclusive and effective path for the achievement of the 2030 Agenda in the context of the decade of action and delivery for sustainable development.

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1. Introduction

Background:

In October 2020, Heads of State and Government, Ministers and representatives of the international education community met at the extraordinary session of the Global Education Meeting (2020 GEM), in response to the urgent call to protect education suffering from the worldwide school closures and the constrained fiscal environment as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic; and to promote education as a catalytic force for inclusive recovery and sustainable development. The GEM2020, convened by UNESCO with the Governments Ghana, Norway and the United Kingdom, reached a global agreement (2020 GEM Declaration) on the commitment to protect education finance and to implement priority actions needed to build more resilient, flexible, inclusive and gender-responsive societies and education systems.

The 2020 GEM participants upheld their commitment to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its SDG 4 to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all, thus reaffirming the universal and holistic education agenda. On the other hand, reversals in SDG 4 progress caused by COVID-19 have heightened the urgency for action and have increased the necessity to work across sectors to respond to the interconnectedness of SDG 4 with the other SDGs. Moreover, while the COVID-19 crisis impacted every country, community and family, its human, social and economic impact affected disproportionately vulnerable and marginalized populations and in fact exacerbated the existing inequalities, including in education.

The 2020 GEM also triggered a dialogue about improving the Global Education Cooperation Mechanism as a means to support countries to accelerate their progress toward SDG 4, recovering from the COVID-19-affected context. Many have called for stronger policy leadership, better synergies, greater efficiency and improved delivery in global and regional cooperation as the response to these goals and challenges. The 2020 GEM called specifically for a multi-stakeholder consultation process “to develop a proposal to strengthen the SDG-Education 2030 Steering Committee to be able to effectively steer and coordinate the global education cooperation mechanism in line with the Education 2030 Framework for Action and in the post-COVID-19 context”. UNESCO was mandated to design and lead this process, and a Working Group, co-chaired by UNESCO and Norway, provided inputs and deliberated on various versions of the draft proposal.

An extensive series of consultative meetings with countries and education actors took place. An in-depth and evidence-based review of the current state of the global education architecture, including comparison with the global health and climate sectors, was prepared by an independent expert. A survey of Member States was carried out to explore coordination challenges and good practices at the global, regional and country levels. A consultation on the emerging proposals, across all regions and key constituencies (including civil society organizations, the teaching profession, education in emergency partners, and youth), was conducted in May 2021.

Meeting objective and expected outcomes:

With the SDG-Education 2030 agenda’s midpoint in sight, countries and the international community face the pressing need to transform the way we work—at the global level, it is critical to create an enabling environment to allow accelerated progress toward SDG 4, leveraging the partnerships, innovations, and lessons learned gained from the COVID-19 response and recovery action in the past year and a half. In this context, this 2021 GEM Ministerial Segment aims to:

- Endorse the multi-stakeholder Working Group’s proposal for the improved Global Education Cooperation Mechanism, including its functions and institutional arrangements

- Take stock of measures and lessons learned from the COVID-19 education response that help to accelerate progress toward SDG 4

The discussion will be informed by the Working Group's proposal and the report of the third round of the UNESCO-UNICEF-World Bank-OECD Survey on National Education Responses to COVID-19 School Closures, which will be launched at the 2021 GEM.

2. Forging a Purposeful and Effective Global Education Cooperation Mechanism – Proposal by the Working Group

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Executive Summary

Background

Global education faces a changing agenda and fast-moving set of demands. It has become increasingly dynamic and complex in terms of an expanding scope across the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and a widening array of actors engaged at global, regional and country levels. Reversals in SDG 4 progress caused by COVID-19 have heightened the urgency for action and have increased the need to work across sectors to respond to the interconnectedness of the SDGs. Many have called for clearer policy leadership, stronger synergies, greater efficiency and better delivery in global and regional cooperation as the response.

SDG4-Education 2030 is a universal agenda **applicable to all countries**, and is a **holistic, lifelong learning** agenda giving equal validity to all the targets. Effective global and regional cooperation among the education community is expected to support progress by countries in five ways: **high-level advocacy** and **action-focused political will**; improved **data** and enhanced **monitoring** of results; adequate and **aligned global financing**; **knowledge sharing** about effective policies and practices; and support for **implementation capacity and systems strengthening**.

The SDG-Education 2030 Steering Committee (Steering Committee) was intended to be a representative driving force in making global cooperation relevant and in supporting countries to achieve SDG4-Education 2030. However, the Steering Committee has not kept pace with the rapidly evolving education agenda and its changing actors. It has also suffered from a lack of high-level participation and from inadequate resourcing of its secretariat. As a consequence, the Steering Committee has not proved sufficiently effective, and the contribution and impact of global cooperation have fallen below the intended expectations.

In response, the 2020 Global Education Meeting (GEM) called for a proposal to improve the Global Education Cooperation Mechanism (GCM) and to strengthen the Steering Committee. The GCM is the totality of the GEM, the Steering Committee and its Secretariat, the Collective Consultation of NGOs on Education 2030 (CCNGO), the Global Education Forum (GEF), the Multilateral Education Platform (MEP) and relevant regional coordination platforms.

GCM objectives and functions

A GCM that is relevant to all countries and international actors will need to serve a dual purpose:

- Create a strong **overall enabling environment** for faster progress towards SDG 4, by facilitating global and regional cooperation on better knowledge, evidence, data and monitoring, and by boosting the shared ambition and commitment by governments and international actors to achieve results.
- Support **time-bound initiatives** developed by coalitions of countries or partners, guided by thematic areas endorsed by the GEM and driven by country priorities, to help countries accelerate towards SDG 4-Education 2030.

The focus will not be about creating new initiatives in most cases, but about amplifying, deepening or scaling the initiatives already being developed by coalitions of actors. Equally, the GCM will not seek to duplicate country-level coordination mechanisms, but to strengthen the institutional incentives of global actors to collaborate and coordinate better at country level.

Based on the expected contributions of cooperation at global level, three core functions are proposed for an improved GCM:

- **Promote evidence-based policy formulation and implementation** – Provide policy leadership of the GCM to recommend priority actions for accelerating progress towards the achievement of SDG 4 based on evidence, knowledge and lessons on overcoming bottlenecks in achieving the SDG 4 targets. Promote the effective use of evidence for making appropriate policies and implementation strategies at the country level.
- **Monitor progress and improve the availability/use of data** – Pursue the monitoring, follow-up and review arrangements for the SDG 4-Education 2030 agenda while helping hold all relevant partners to account for their commitments. Develop and pursue advocacy strategies based on reported national and regional benchmarks, and create a Global Education Observatory.
- **Drive financing mobilisation and improve alignment** – Advocate for mobilisation and better use of domestic and international education financing in support of agreed priorities, by galvanising renewed commitments, pushing for greater harmonisation and alignment, championing innovative sources of finance, and promoting efficiency and equity in education spending.

GCM structures and membership

Strengthening and transforming existing structures is the priority, not creating new ones. The new arrangements aim to be simpler and nimbler, while also being more powerful and visible. Proposals for reform centre on two institutional elements.

A remodelled *SDG4-Education 2030 High-Level Steering Committee (SDG4 HLSC)* will serve as the global education apex body, in place of the current Steering Committee. In line with the Incheon Declaration and the Education 2030 Framework for Action, the SDG4 HLSC will provide strategic guidance, review progress, and make recommendations on priorities/actions; monitor and advocate for adequate financing; and encourage harmonisation and coordination of partner activities.

It will have a membership that is representative of the global education community. The structure will comprise a '*Leadership Group*' (comprising a maximum membership of twenty-eight Ministers, Heads of Agency, and equivalent top organisational leaders) and a corresponding '*Sherpa Group*' of senior technical representatives. The latter will provide support to the Leadership Group and will lead the technical work on the three GCM functions.

The HLSC will operate under the auspices of the Global Education Meeting, which will periodically set thematic priorities. It will be co-chaired by the Head of State or Government of a Member State and the Director-General of UNESCO.

A dedicated *Inter-Agency Secretariat* to support the SDG4 HLSC will be established. It will be convened and hosted by UNESCO and will have specialist staff assigned or seconded by members of the global education community. It will support the functions, activities and meetings of the SDG4 HLSC and other GCM forums/platforms; liaise with other relevant bodies involved in global education; manage external communications and outreach for the GCM; and maintain data, knowledge and reporting systems in line with the SDG4 HLSC mandate.

Relationship with other global actors and forums/platforms

Noting their important roles in the global system, and in order to ensure a close link to the UN Secretary General's Office, **the UN Special Envoy for Global Education and the UN Secretary General's Envoy on Youth will have standing invitations to attend meetings of the SDG4 HLSC Leadership Group.** Further opportunities will also be sought for the HLSC to engage influentially across the UN system on education issues as part of the entire Agenda 2030, and to ensure the involvement of non-members of UNESCO that are active in education.

The **Global Education Forum and the Multilateral Education Platform will each work under the auspices of the HLSC**, and they will provide updates on progress at the annual HLSC meetings. The GEF and MEP will be reviewed as part of the next phase of GCM reform to ensure coherence and avoid duplication.

It is expected that the different platforms and fora of the GCM would complement each other in contributing to the three core functions, under the overall guidance of the HLSC.

Next steps

This final proposal will accompany the draft outcome document of the Ministerial Segment of the Global Education Meeting on 13th July, which is being shared with all Member States to seek endorsement of the Working Group's final proposal.

The analysis and proposals in this paper represent the first step in a global co-creation process towards an improved GCM. The process requires **further steps at regional and country levels, as well as an elaboration of how these levels will relate to one another**, in order to ensure its relevance and to make a meaningful difference. Further work will also be carried out to develop the three GCM functions.

1. Context and introduction

UNESCO, with the Governments of Ghana, Norway and the United Kingdom, convened an extraordinary session of the Global Education Meeting in October 2020 (2020 GEM), with the aim of protecting

education as a catalytic force for the COVID-19 recovery and sustainable development. At the 2020 GEM, governments and the international community:

- Agreed to uphold their commitment to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its SDG 4 to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all, thus reaffirming the universal and holistic education agenda.
- Triggered a dialogue about improving the Global Education Cooperation Mechanism (GCM) as a means to assist countries accelerate their progress toward SDG4.

The 2020 GEM called specifically for a multi-stakeholder consultation process *“to develop a proposal to strengthen the SDG-Education 2030 Steering Committee to be able to effectively steer and coordinate the global education cooperation mechanism in line with the Education 2030 Framework for Action and in the post-COVID-19 context”*.ⁱ The Steering Committee is considered to have a relevant and important mandate, but it has previously not proved to be an effective body. The overall GCM includes the GEM, the Steering Committee and its Secretariat, the Collective Consultation of NGOs on Education 2030 (CCNGO), the Global Education Forum (GEF), and the Multilateral Education Platform (MEP).

A Working Group (WG)ⁱⁱ, co-chaired by UNESCO and Norway, was tasked with developing and consulting upon a proposal to improve the GCM and to strengthen the SDG-Education 2030 Steering Committee.

An extensive set of consultative meetings with global education stakeholders has been running alongside the WG discussions. An in-depth and evidence-based review of the current state of the GCM, including comparison with the global health and climate sectors, was prepared by an independent expertⁱⁱⁱ. A survey of Member States was carried out to explore coordination challenges and good practices at the global, regional and country levels. A consultation on the emerging proposals, across all regions and key constituencies (including civil society organisations, the teaching profession, education in emergency partners, and youth), was conducted in May.

Consultation and discourse across a wide and diverse global community has itself been a challenging endeavour, which has illustrated the complexity and weaknesses of the existing GCM. The analysis in this paper represents only a first step in a global co-creation process towards an improved GCM. That process will require further work at global, regional and country levels to ensure its relevance and in order to make a meaningful difference.

A formative review of the GCM reform will be carried out two years after it is endorsed by the July 2021 GEM. That will assess in particular whether the new GCM arrangements have improved the relevance and effectiveness of the SDG4 HLSC.

This final proposal reflects the ideas and feedback from all of these consultative processes. The proposal accompanies the draft outcome document of the Ministerial Segment of the Global Education Meeting on 13th July, which is shared with all Member States to seek endorsement of the Working Group’s final proposal.

The paper presents the following material:

- A summary of key challenges with the current GCM, identified through the in-depth review and consultations, and then validated by the WG members.

- A framework for linking global cooperation to country-level outcomes based on the Education 2030 Incheon Declaration and the Education 2030 Framework for Action.
- A proposed set of functions and institutional arrangements for the GCM, to strengthen the Steering Committee and to provide leadership on global actions in support of progress toward SDG 4-Education 2030.

2. Case for change: observed challenges for global-level cooperation on Education 2030

Global education confronts a changing and fast-moving agenda. It has become increasingly dynamic and complex in terms of an expanding agenda which connects to many of the SDGs and a widening array of institutional stakeholders at global, regional and country levels.

Reversals in SDG 4 progress caused by COVID-19 have heightened the urgency for action and have increased the necessity to work across sectors to respond to the interconnectedness of SDG 4 with the other SDGs. Education in emergency settings presents urgent and distinctive demands, but also has close interactions with other SDG priorities.

Many have called for clearer policy leadership, stronger synergies, greater efficiency and better delivery in the Global Cooperation Mechanism for education as a response to these goals and challenges.

The effectiveness of cooperative global action in education over the past two decades is widely considered to have fallen below expectations^{iv}, especially with respect to countries and population groups furthest behind in the implementation of SDG 4. Whether one takes a universal lens across all countries or a partial lens on the development cooperation sector, the evidence points to shortcomings of progress and performance in the global system.^v

Five challenges stand out as particular impediments:

- *Ability of leaders across the global education system to translate high-level/political priorities and commitments into focused, credible and sustained actions* – There has either been insufficient engagement by political and institutional leaders to create sustained commitment at the global level, or the engagement has not translated into sustained action at the country level. While education is often identified as an area of high priority, the agenda falters because of a failure to follow through.
- *Accountability for fulfilling commitments in respect of support for improved education outcomes, and sufficient data and monitoring with which to do so* – There has been a broad failure, by national and international actors, to ensure accountability for achieving results.^{vi} Despite multiple global platforms promoting SDG 4, and existing mechanisms within countries and international or regional organisations, effective joint monitoring and accountability for achieving results is lacking. Data gaps on key SDG 4 indicators remain a major bottleneck to tracking and monitoring progress.
- *Adequate global financing for education, including credible commitments, less fragmentation and greater innovation* – Underfunding of education, lack of transparency and accountability about financing commitments, fragmentation of international financing flows, and limited progress with innovative finance are recurring themes.^{vii} This problem goes beyond countries/government not meeting desired spending levels for education, linking to systemic

public finance challenges. More efficient use of available funding is needed^{viii}, as well as commitment by international funding providers to improve harmonisation and alignment.

- *Supply, uptake and effective use of knowledge and evidence about what has worked in improving education outcomes* – Research and evidence in global education are given too little emphasis, and in many instances are underutilised. Lack of capacity to produce, share and deploy evidence limits its use in country-level dialogue and decision-making. Few initiatives focus on national researchers and institutes in lower-income countries. Despite demand from governments, coordinated global efforts at the consolidation and sharing of evidence and lessons are insufficient.
- *Well-coordinated and effective international technical and policy support for strengthening government implementation capacity and systems in the education sector* – Problems of inadequate, uncoordinated or ineffective support are widely acknowledged. A number of global initiatives have been developed or attempted but most have struggled to find broad multi-agency support or to get to scale. On the demand side, governments have been either unable to access readily the responsive and flexible support they require. While much of this issue is at country level, the right incentives are lacking in the global system for better coordinated support.

While a strengthened GCM is by no means the panacea, it could make a significant difference. Explanations for the shortcomings in effective cooperation at global level often focus on the increasingly diverse and complex network of actors and organisations engaged in the global education architecture. Many of those have overlapping and even potentially competitive mandates, objectives and memberships. There is a widening array of coordination mechanisms, convening platforms and partnership frameworks, which complicates the challenge of linking together evidence, advocacy and monitoring to support results. Yet there is no credible and agile “clearing house” function to the support synthesis and exchange of pertinent information (e.g., on priorities, initiatives and results) and to help in facilitating joint actions (e.g., based on demand from governments).

SDG-Education 2030 Steering Committee and other forums/platforms

The SDG-Education 2030 Steering Committee was intended to provide leadership for the global education community and to improve cooperation among global education actors. Its mandate in the Education 2030 Incheon Declaration and the Framework for Action (FFA) states that: *“it will, among other activities, provide strategic guidance, review progress drawing on the GEM Report, and make recommendations to the education community on key priorities and catalytic actions to achieve the new agenda; monitor and advocate for adequate financing; and encourage harmonization and coordination of partner activities”*.^{ix}

While the purpose and mandate of the Steering Committee in the global architecture remain relevant – indeed have become more necessary – it is viewed as relatively ineffective. It has suffered from a lack of high-level participation and from inadequate resourcing of its secretariat. Additionally, it has insufficient coverage of new global education actors, a weak connection to regional and country-level cooperation mechanisms, and a limited focus on education in emergency settings. As with many such international bodies, it faces a problematic and unresolved trade-off between inclusiveness and efficiency.

The result is that the Steering Committee has not lived up to its mandated role. The Steering Committee has struggled to position itself at the centre of the global education architecture. It currently lacks visibility and the capacity needed to have a meaningful impact. A major observed challenge is that the Steering Committee is not taking any particularly relevant or significant decisions. In practice, it lacks the heft that in principle it should have as a result of its mandated role.

Other forums and platforms in the GCM may also have room for improvement. The Global Education Forum and the Multilateral Education Platform are recent additions, since 2019, that are working to establish themselves. The GCM reform presents a valuable opportunity to clarify the purpose and membership of each forum/platform and to strengthen them. The aim should be to avoid duplication, to demonstrate value addition, and to improve the overall coherence of the GCM.

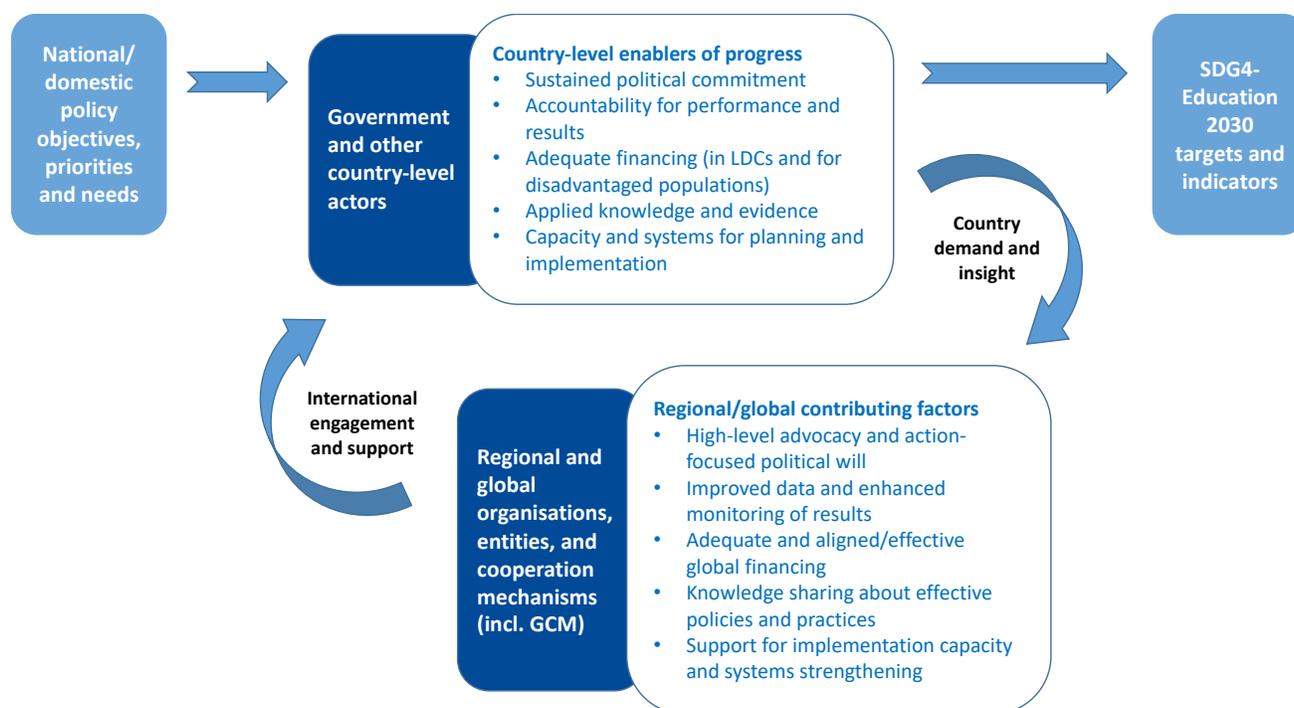
The assessment of the Steering Committee points to a particular conundrum. If there is a need and a demand for improved global cooperation, and **if there is already an apex body with the right mandate and requisite legitimacy, why not empower it and give it the capacity to fulfil that role?** This paper makes the case for strengthening the Steering Committee and making it fit-for-purpose as the apex body for SDG 4-Education 2030.

3. Country-level relevance of a Global Cooperation Mechanism

Starting with a clear purpose is vital, otherwise global cooperation risks being a detached and abstract exercise. **Country-level education outcomes** are unquestionably the driving concern. The paper works back from that purpose to ask what contributions the international cooperation architecture/system for education – with all its participation, knowledge, resources and resolve – can and should make in support of country-level efforts. The paper adheres to the principle of **SDG 4-Education 2030 as a universal agenda** applicable to all countries, and as a holistic, lifelong learning agenda giving equal validity to all the targets.

While the influence of global-level actions should not be overstated or overestimated, there is nonetheless an expectation for those actions to make a meaningful contribution in service of country efforts. The Education 2030 Incheon Declaration and Framework for Action (FFA) provides a framework to consider how global and regional cooperation can support governments and other country-level actors in their efforts to achieve the SDG 4-Education 2030 targets (see *Figure 1*).

Figure 1. Adapted Incheon/FFA framework for effective global cooperation around SDG 4



Source: Derived from the GCM Input Paper (Mundy, 2021) and from the SDG4-Education 2030 Incheon Declaration and Framework for Action.

The framework takes country-level needs, priorities and actors as an anchor. It assumes that certain enabling factors at country level (e.g., political commitment, performance accountability, targeted funding, applied know-how, implementation capacity) will create the conditions and incentives necessary to accelerate progress toward the SDG 4 targets. Regional and global actors can assist through actions that help to establish or reinforce those conditions. There is also a feedback loop, with demand and insight emanating from countries propelling more effective global contribution.

The five significant contributing factors at global level, as identified in the FFA, are:

- High-level advocacy and action-focused political will.
- Improved data and enhanced monitoring of results.
- Adequate and aligned/effective global financing.
- Knowledge sharing about effective policies and practices.
- Support for implementation capacity and systems strengthening.

Regional and global levels are both important. While the focus of this paper is on the global level, further work is proposed to develop comparable analysis and proposals for strengthening regional cooperation mechanisms and their relationships to the global level. Feedback from Member State consultations suggests that moving to a more differentiated and decentralised approach across different regions may prove most effective.

This framework for global cooperation is not intended as monolithic. Global education has a complex and diverse architecture without the preconditions or tolerance for a single unifying framework. The five contributing factors (i.e., action-focused advocacy, data-led monitoring, effective financing,

knowledge sharing, systems strengthening) are intended to be relevant to one organisation/entity operating within the global system (e.g., an international organisation), or to a coalition of actors (e.g., an acceleration initiative), or to the entire global system (i.e., the GCM). However, the contributory effect of these global factors will be multiplied in the context of a strengthened GCM which can facilitate and encourage greater cooperative and collective action.

A GCM that is relevant to all countries and international actors will need to serve a **dual purpose**:

- Create a strong **overall enabling environment** for faster progress towards SDG4, by facilitating global/regional cooperation on better evidence, data and monitoring, and by boosting the shared ambition and commitment by governments and international actors to achieve results.
- Support **time-bound initiatives** developed by coalitions of countries or partners, guided by thematic areas endorsed by the GEM and driven by country priorities, to help countries accelerate towards SDG 4-Education 2030.

The threshold question for the GCM in all cases will be whether there is an expected value addition from additional or enhanced global-level engagement. The focus on acceleration initiatives will not be about creating new initiatives in most cases, but about **amplifying, deepening or scaling the initiatives already being developed by coalitions of actors**. Multilateral agencies have a strong track record of devising such initiatives in partnership with selected Member States^x, but it has often proved harder to secure broad engagement and support by global education actors. Equally, the GCM will not seek to duplicate country-level coordination mechanisms such as Local Education Groups and Education Clusters which are the locus of collective support for country priorities. It will seek to **strengthen the institutional incentives of global actors to collaborate and coordinate at country level** (especially multilateral agencies and bilateral cooperation providers).

4. Proposed functions of a fit-for-purpose Global Cooperation Mechanism

The objective for an improved GCM is to generate conditions and incentives at global and regional levels such that actors across all constituencies cooperate more efficiently and effectively in the service of better and faster progress towards SDG 4 outcomes at country level. **That means the system of global cooperation must respond better to what countries say they require to achieve results.**

While different models could be envisaged, a lesson from the global climate sector^{xi} is that a static, monolithic and all-embracing approach to the GCM may not be optimal and is unlikely to succeed. The GCM needs to balance this tension between, on one hand, motivating political will by governments and supporting their actions to accelerate progress toward SDG 4, and on the other hand, reviewing progress towards SDG 4 and encouraging all parties (for example, governments, international and regional organisations, civil society) to be accountable to their respective commitments. Meanwhile experience in global health sector reinforces the case for combining a system-wide focus on evidence, data and monitoring with more targeted coalitions to accelerate progress on specific priorities.

Drawing on these lessons from other sectors, and harnessing the expected contributions of cooperation at global level (i.e., action-focused advocacy, data-led monitoring, effective financing, knowledge

sharing, systems strengthening), the Working Group proposes three core functions for an improved GCM:

- I. Promote evidence-based policy formulation and implementation**
- II. Monitor progress and improve the availability/use of data**
- III. Drive financing mobilisation and improved alignment**

An additional function of the GCM may be considered in due course – **effective support for implementation capacity and systems strengthening**. While it is not principally a global-level issue, engagement by the GCM could serve to increase the attention by all actors to capacity development and system strengthening, and to improve the incentives for adequate, coordinated and effective support at country level. No direct role in country-level capacity development is envisaged. Regional coordination mechanisms already serve an important contributory role as hubs for provision and coordination of capacity support to countries. The system strengthening/transformation agenda is a universal one as well as a development cooperation priority, which makes it pertinent to a wider array of global education actors. It is clearly of vital importance to SDG 4 progress, alongside financing and evidence

The broad scope and approach for each of the first three functions are sketched out below. **The strategies and main actions of these functional areas will be further developed prior to the GEM in November 2021.** To support an inclusive approach, and to address both a universal agenda and development cooperation issues adequately through the GCM, each of the three functional areas will be co-led by representatives from more than one HLSC constituency category.

I. Promote evidence-based policy formulation and implementation

One of the key functions of the GCM is to promote stronger evidence-based policy making and implementation in the education sector. At the global level, the Steering Committee's recommendations on policy priorities and catalytic actions will be informed under this GCM function by the consolidated data, research evidence and knowledge about education policies and their effective implementation for the advancement of the SDG 4-Education 2030 agenda into policy briefs and memos. At the country level, the effective use of evidence for making appropriate policies and implementation strategies will be promoted and supported by using the existing regional and national SDG4-Education coordination platforms.

Building on what already exists (e.g., research networks, knowledge production/management initiatives and platforms), the emphasis of this functional area is on collaboration among global and regional partners and stakeholders to collate and consolidate evidence, knowledge and lessons learned with respect to overcoming bottlenecks in achieving the SDG 4 targets, including policy options and implementation strategies chosen to transform the situation. Thus, joint and collaborative action will be undertaken to:

- Further promote decision-making for policy and its implementation based on evidence and knowledge about successful and innovative programmes and interventions in advancing the SDG-Education 2030 agenda.
- Support the capacity of national actors to develop and adapt such evidence and knowledge for policymaking.
- Facilitate peer-learning and cross-country collaboration, including South-South cooperation.

Given the SDG-Education 2030 agenda's universal, lifelong learning scope, this GCM function's added value consists in its global coverage—across geographic regions as well as countries' wealth or development levels—and the education sector-wide and lifelong learning perspective. The closer coordination with the regional SDG-Education 2030 coordination mechanisms will be sought to ensure the bi-directional feedback loop and knowledge sharing between the global and country levels and across the regions.

II. Monitor progress and improve the availability/use of data

In line with the established SDG 4 monitoring framework and supported by the Technical Cooperation Group on SDG 4 Indicators (TCG), the monitoring, follow-up and review arrangements for the SDG 4-Education 2030 agenda as established in the Education 2030 Framework for Action will be pursued under this functional area while helping hold all relevant partners to account for their commitments. The Framework for Action also recognizes the technical leadership of the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS) as the official source of cross-nationally comparable data on education and the UNESCO Global Education Monitoring Report (GEM Report) as an independent and authoritative source of monitoring and reporting on SDG 4 progress.

Enhanced collaboration and collective action among national, regional and global SDG 4 stakeholders is essential to leverage technical and financial resources, improve the efficiency of investments in data systems and build national capacity in the production of education statistics. At the global level, the creation of a Global Education Observatory is proposed to provide Member States and the international community with easy access to education data, bringing together different data international sources (e.g., UIS, World Bank, UNICEF, OECD).

Setting regional and national benchmarks is the linchpin of the improved GCM^{xii} as they serve as a framework to identify and support national actions to fill data and policy gaps and to help address respective regions' common challenges by prompting an exchange of best practices, mutual learning, gathering and dissemination of information and evidence of what works, as well as advice and support for policy reforms. In this way, monitoring of progress against SDG 4 targets would be centred on nationally determined commitments made by individual governments within the SDG 4 framework. It is recognised that, while the SDGs are universal, targets cannot be the same from one country to another. Moreover, regular monitoring against benchmarks would help identify multi-stakeholder time-bound acceleration initiatives, whose investment will need to be monitored in turn.

III. Drive financing mobilisation and improved alignment

Under this function of the GCM, the advocacy for increased domestic and international funding for education and for spending equity and efficacy is prioritized. Ensuring that the case for education has a strong voice in national and global discussions, including around tax, debt, austerity and wider macroeconomic policies is critical, particularly when lower income countries are facing increased fiscal pressure from high levels of public debt and competing spending needs compounded by the COVID-19 pandemic. This may include strengthening the capacity of Ministries of Education to engage in strategic dialogue with Ministries of Finance and ensuring that the impact on education is considered in key public finance discussions. Moreover, reinforcing country capacity for stronger and more reliable data systems, analytical capabilities for translating data into evidence, and strong dissemination capabilities are critical. Such capacity support includes refining toolkits and learning resources to support policy

makers in diagnosing major weaknesses in education financing systems and identifying ways to tackle them.

It is essential that development partners, including bilateral donors and multilateral agencies, coordinate and harmonize their support to governments, aligned with the country-owned education plans, thus reinforcing the aid effectiveness principles. This should be complemented by efforts to support developing credible financing strategies underpinning national education plans; promoting and ensuring the necessary (international and domestic) financing uplift; ensuring that national priorities are identified based on evidence; and investing funds in low cost/high-effectiveness programmes that target greatest needs. There is also the scope to leverage innovative financing tools to unlock additional funding for education, and crowd in new funding and new partners.

This GCM function would require close links with relevant forums/platforms in the GCM, as well as focused engagement with individual governments, international and regional financial institutions, donor countries, and innovative sources of financing. Action areas include tracking and reporting of metrics such as financing commitments, mobilisation and allocation of flows, fragmentation of international financing, and sources of innovative finance. They should be linked to wider discussions on public finance covering revenue mobilisation, debt servicing, and medium-term revenue strategies.

For international financing, the Global Education Forum could serve as a platform for dialogue among development cooperation providers and facilitate agreement on joint actions and donor harmonisation, in support of the priorities agreed upon at the Global Education Meeting. For domestic financing, discussion among a technical advisory group composed of representatives of finance and education ministries could become an integral part of the GCM agenda. It could support a periodic joint roundtable of ministers of education and finance as part of the GEM.

A note on the link from data/monitoring to increased accountability

Enhanced accountability was mentioned frequently during the review process as a highly desirable element of a strengthened GCM. It is also the most difficult global-level issue to address credibly and concretely. The phrase itself creates a risk of different interpretations and applicability. The usage here is that **each and every global education actor is held accountable for its own commitments and distinctive contributions to improving education outcomes.**

Two different dimensions of accountability are covered implicitly here. The first is **domestic accountability** by national governments (i.e., Member States of the United Nations) for the achievement of substantive progress and results against SDG 4 targets and indicators. The second is **global accountability** by international actors (e.g., international organisations, donor governments, non-governmental organisations, private sector) for their commitments made to support global education in general and various countries in particular.

Given the poor track record of attempts at mutual accountability, it is suggested that **peer-to-peer approaches to accountability** may be a more promising avenue to pursue. That would apply, for example, to regional groupings of governments attempting to make domestic progress on SDG 4 or to bilateral development cooperation providers attempting to make their contributions more relevant and effective.

Better data and improved monitoring may also provide a pathway to enhanced accountability through the GCM. However, while the lack of data and the weakness of monitoring are clear impediments to stronger accountability for results, the foremost requirement is a top-level political/institutional commitment to that accountability on the part of both national and international actors.

The ambition may be to move towards regular and systematic reporting by countries on SDG4 progress. The GCM at regional and global levels could collate the reporting done at country level and produce a progress score card. A similar approach could be applied to development agencies and international organisations with respect to their contributions to supporting country-level progress. While the primary accountabilities are, respectively, to domestic taxpayers and to governing boards, that would not prevent commitment to a score card process through the GCM.

Whichever approach is taken, it is essential to be precise about *who* is accountable, *for what*, and *to whom* as part of the GCM. None of these have been adequately clear to date. Further work, as part of the process to improve the GCM ahead of the November 2021 GEM meeting, is needed to find agreement on the forms of global or regional accountability mechanism that Member States would find acceptable and valuable. Consultations so far suggest a good deal of support in principle for greater accountability, but very limited inclination to translate that into a credible global mechanism.

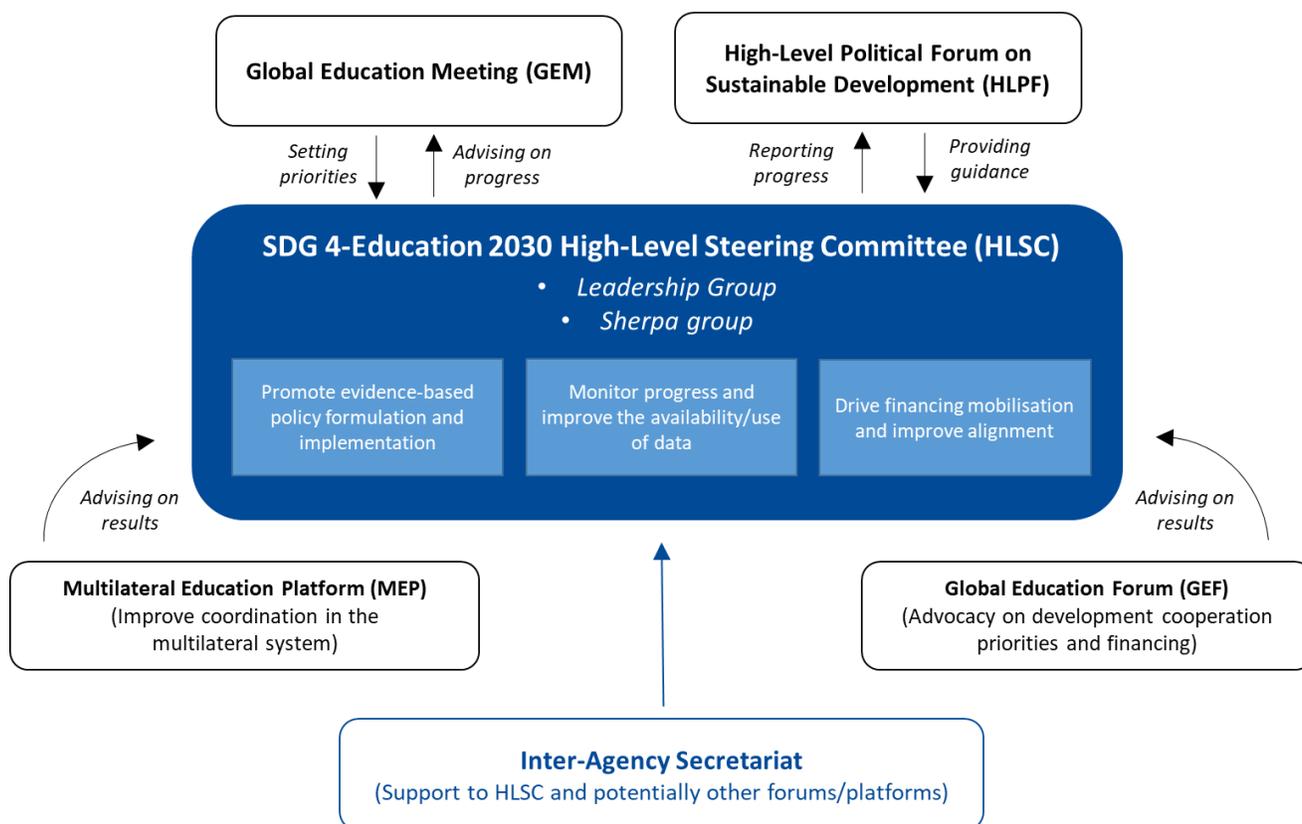
5. Proposed institutional arrangements for an effective Global Cooperation Mechanism

The consultations and Working Group discussions indicated a number of guiding principles for reform of the GCM institutional arrangements:

- A desire for the GCM structures to have the authority and capacity needed to deliver in practice on the mandates and functions that are agreed for them by the GEM.
- An intention that priorities established by the GEM and the SDG4 HLSC should guide the activities of all forums/platforms in the GCM.
- A strong preference that membership of the GCM structures should continue to be representative of the global education community.
- A broad agreement that the aim should be to strengthen or transform existing structures (notably the SDG-Education 2030 Steering Committee) rather than to create new ones.
- An expectation that the relationships among all the GCM forums/platforms (including the Global Education Forum and the Multilateral Education Platform) should be clearly explained and agreed.

The central proposal is **to strengthen the current SDG-Education 2030 Steering Committee and to overhaul its support structures**. The new arrangements should be more visible and influential.

Figure 2: Proposed structures and functions for the strengthened GCM



Source: Formulation by GCM Working Group

Figure 2 illustrates the proposed basic structures – highlighting the proposed top-line mandate and functions (i.e., evidence-based policy leadership, monitoring and accountability, and advocacy for financing), as well as the links to the GEM and the HLPF. Two institutional elements are envisaged as integral parts of an improved GCM:

- A strengthened and rebranded **SDG 4-Education 2030 High-Level Steering Committee (SDG4 HLSC)** to serve as the global education apex body, consisting of:
 - *Leadership Group* at Ministerial or Head of Agency level (or equivalent for other entities)
 - *Sherpa Group* at senior official level (or equivalent for other entities)
- A dedicated **Inter-Agency Secretariat** to support the SDG4 HLSC and potentially other GCM forums/platforms.

A more detailed presentation of the proposed configuration, mandates, responsibilities, memberships and working arrangements of the SDG4 HLSC and the Inter-Agency Secretariat is included in **Annex A**.

SDG 4-Education 2030 High-Level Steering Committee

Operating under the auspices of the Global Education Meeting, the SDG4 HLSC will provide political leadership on global education priorities and create stronger accountability incentives for accelerating progress toward SDG 4. It will help to strengthen accountability through high-level advocacy and monitoring. It will be mandated by the GEM with the following principal responsibilities:

- Provide leadership on SDG4-Education 2030 policy issues and evidence.
- Monitor commitments and progress, and drive improvements in data.
- Advocate for mobilisation and effective use of education financing.
- Empower and facilitate the work of the Global Education Forum and the Multilateral Education Platform, within the GCM framework.

A ‘Leadership Group’ of twenty-eight members, operating with a strong ‘no delegation’ policy, will comprise:

- Member States – to be represented at Ministerial level.
- Regional intergovernmental organisations – to be represented at Head of Agency level.
- Multilateral organisations/banks/funds (GPE, OECD, UNICEF, World Bank) – to be represented at Head of Agency level, and with reference to membership of the Multilateral Education Platform.
- Development cooperation agencies – to be represented at Ministerial or Head of Agency level, and with reference to membership of the Global Education Forum.
- Non-state actors (i.e., teaching community, civil society, youth/students, foundations, private sector) – to be represented by the top leadership (or equivalent).
- UNESCO (ex officio) – to be represented by the Director-General.

The SDG4 HLSC will be co-chaired by the Head of State or Government of a Member State and by the Director-General of UNESCO.

Keeping the HLSC to a maximum size of twenty-eight members is considered an important factor for ensuring that the vision and objectives for the GCM reform, as determined by the 2020 GEM, can be achieved.

Representatives on the HLSC Leadership Group, especially through the Sherpa Group, will have a responsibility to consult actively with their relevant constituencies ahead of HLSC meetings and to provide feedback following those meetings.

The HLSC Leadership Group will be supported by a ‘Sherpa Group’ of twenty-eight senior technical representatives, which will meet at least quarterly. The Sherpa Group will have the following responsibilities:

- Identify opportunities for effective SDG4 HLSC action and impact.
- Carry out consultations among SDG4 HLSC constituencies.
- Facilitate inter-agency/multi-actor initiatives and activities related to the functions of the SDG4 HLSC:
 - Promoting evidence-based policy formulation and implementation
 - Monitoring progress and improving the availability/use of data
 - Driving financing mobilisation and improved alignment

To ensure the HLSC is an influential and effective body in the context of global efforts to accelerate progress toward SDG 4, specific decision-making authorities will be granted the Leadership Group by the GEM. Decision-making powers will relate to the functional areas of the GCM. For example:

- The HLSC could decide which thematic priority areas and catalytic actions to recommend to the GEM for adoption.
- Based on reported national benchmarks, the HLSC could decide on advocacy strategies for follow up.
- The HLSC could decide which finance-related commitments to advocate and monitor.

Formal proposals will be developed consultatively following the July GEM as part of further work on the functional areas.

Inter-Agency Secretariat

A small and agile Inter-Agency Secretariat will be responsible for initiating and supporting work across agencies on evidence and policy, data and monitoring, and financing. Besides facilitating the functioning of the SDG4 HLSC, this support structure will carry out underpinning or preparatory analytical and consultative work relevant to the GCM.

The Secretariat will be mandated by the HLSC with the following principal responsibilities:

- Support functions, activities and meetings of the SDG4 HLSC and other GCM bodies
- Organise periodic Global Education Meetings and SDG 4-Education 2030 side-events at the HLPF
- Manage external communications and outreach for the GCM bodies and forums
- Maintain data, knowledge and reporting systems in line with the SDG4 HLSC mandate
- Negotiate and resolve obstacles to better coordination, aggregation, monitoring, and exchange among global stakeholders

The Secretariat will be convened by UNESCO. Staff will be assigned or seconded from global education actors, subject to operational and funding considerations. Seconded staff could remain physically located in their respective organisations and countries.

SDG4 HLSC relationship to other global forums/platforms and bodies

The role and positioning of the SDG4 HLSC in the global education architecture are intended to provide an umbrella and an *enabling* impetus and to serve as a focal point for other global organizations or mechanisms. Experience from other sectors such as health and climate counsels against over-engineering these relationships, and it suggests instead a focus on finding complementary and mutually reinforcing roles. There is also an efficiency question as the overlap in institutional membership of the various global mechanisms is high.

To ensure strong links to the UN Secretary-General, the SDG4 HLSC will continue to report to the HLPF on SDG 4-Education 2030 progress. An additional meeting with the presence of the UN Secretary-General, the UN Special Envoy for Global Education, and UN Secretary General's Envoy on Youth will be convened back-to-back with the annual SDG4 HLSC meeting to share and receive feedback beyond education actors.

Noting their important roles in the global system, and in order to ensure a close link to the UN Secretary General's Office, the UN Special Envoy for Global Education and the UN Secretary General's Envoy on Youth will have standing invitations to attend meetings of the HLSC Leadership Group. Further opportunities will also be sought for the HLSC to engage influentially across the UN system on education

issues as part of the entire Agenda 2030, and to ensure the involvement of non-members of UNESCO that are active in education.

The Global Education Forum and the Multilateral Education Platform will each work under the auspices of the HLSC, and they will provide updates on progress at the annual HLSC meetings. The GEF and MEP will be reviewed as part of the next phase of GCM reform (following the July GEM) to ensure coherence and avoid duplication. Any revisions needed regarding the purpose and membership of each forum/platform will be determined through consultations in the period between July and the November 2021 GEM.

Each of the multilateral organisations (e.g., WB, UNESCO, UNICEF, GPE, ECW, OECD) has its own governing body. The reform of the GCM does not interfere with those arrangements. However, the overlap of multilateral mandates in global education and the overlap of membership on the governing bodies both suggest there is benefit in cross-sector dialogue through the GCM about how to strengthen and align the incentives for coordinated actions and accountability for results.

6. Next steps

Consultation and discourse about improving the GCM has highlighted the breadth and diversity of the global education community, as well as the complexity of existing global cooperation mechanisms. The analysis and proposals in this paper represent the first step in a global co-creation process towards an improved GCM. The process requires further steps at regional and country levels to ensure its relevance and to make a meaningful difference.

The proposed next phases of work are as follows:

Phase 1: Extraordinary Session of the GEM (13th July 2021)

- Adopt proposals for strengthening the GCM, covering:
 - Purpose, coverage and functions of the GCM.
 - Configuration, mandate, responsibilities, membership and working arrangements for the SDG 4-Education 2030 High-Level Steering Committee and the Inter-Agency Secretariat.
- Initiate the process of constituency nominations for membership of the HLSC Leadership Group, and request Member States to consult on the appointment of an inaugural co-chair.
- Reaffirm the seven SDG4-Education 2030 global indicators for benchmarking and the regional processes to set minimum regional benchmarks, and invite Member States to submit national benchmarks on these indicators.
- Mandate UNESCO to lead the further development of the proposal with its Member States and partners on:
 - Developing the functions of the GCM (evidence/policy, data/monitoring, financing) and considering the merits of an additional function (capacity development).
 - Developing the detailed operating arrangements for the SDG4 HLSC (incl. decision-making authorities, Sherpa Group responsibilities) and its Inter-Agency Secretariat (incl. responsibilities, structure, staffing and budget).
 - Strengthening of global-regional-country links in the GCM.
 - Reviewing and potentially revising the functions and membership of the Global Education Forum and the Multilateral Education Platform, as embedded parts of the GCM.

- Strengthening global/regional accountability framework covering SDG 4 progress by Member States and contributions/support by international actors (including development cooperation providers and multilateral agencies).

Phase 2: Establishment of the SDG 4-Education 2030 High-Level Steering Committee, and High-level Session of the GEM back-to-back with the UNESCO General Conference (November 2021)

- Adopt proposals for further strengthening the GCM, covering:
 - Detailed functions of the GCM.
 - Detailed operating arrangements for the High-Level Steering Committee and its Inter-Agency Secretariat.
 - Strengthened global-regional-country links in the GCM.
 - Strengthened global/regional accountability framework covering SDG 4 progress by Member States and contributions/support by international actors.
- Endorse revisions to the functions and membership of the Global Education Forum and the Multilateral Education Platform, as part of the GCM.
- Mandate further work on:
 - Proposing global thematic areas of the GCM based on country priorities within the scope of SDG 4-Education 2030 for proposed adoption at the next GEM.

Annex A: Configuration, mandates, responsibilities and membership for the GCM structures

Proposals are set out below for the organisation of the SDG 4 HLSC and the Inter-Agency Secretariat.

The configuration of these core GCM bodies will be as follows:

- **SDG4-Education 2030 High-Level Steering Committee** (HLSC), consisting of:
 - *Leadership Group* at Ministerial or Head of Agency level (or equivalent for other entities)
 - *Sherpa Group* at senior official level (or equivalent for other entities)
- **SDG4 Inter-Agency Secretariat** (IAS) for the HLSC

Revision of other elements of the GCM, notably the Global Education Forum and the Multilateral Education Platform, will be considered once the GEM has provided endorsement for the overall GCM vision, purpose and configuration.

A. SDG 4-Education 2030 High-Level Steering Committee

Mandate

To act as the **apex body for the SDG 4-Education 2030 agenda**, comprising top-level leaders and with a mandate to drive and oversee the Global Education Cooperation Mechanism. To **provide political leadership on global education priorities and create stronger accountability incentives for accelerating progress** toward SDG 4.

The apex body will operate under the auspices of the Global Education Meeting as well as the UN High Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development.

To ensure the HLSC is an influential and effective body in the context of global efforts to accelerate progress toward SDG 4, specific decision-making authorities will be granted to it by the GEM. Decision-making powers will relate to the functional areas of the GCM (i.e., promote evidence-based policy formulation and implementation; monitor progress and improve the availability/use of data; drive financing mobilisation and improved alignment).

Leadership Group

Responsibilities

- Provide strategic guidance, review progress (drawing on the Global Education Monitoring Report), and make recommendations to the education community on priorities and catalytic actions to achieve the SDG4-Education 2030 agenda.
- Provide leadership and direction for GCM functional areas intended to support and enable country-level progress.
- Encourage harmonisation and coordination of partner activities at international, regional and country levels.
- Mandate and empower the Multilateral Education Platform to improve coordination in the multilateral system, and provide a locus for updates on its agenda and results.
- Facilitate the work of the Global Education Forum as an arena for dialogue and advocacy on education financing and development cooperation issues, by providing guidance on areas of thematic priority and by receiving updates on results

Membership and working arrangements

- Co-chaired by the Head of State or Government of a Member State and by the Director-General of UNESCO
- Twenty-eight (28) members representing the following constituencies:
 - Two Member State representatives for each of the six regions – to be represented at Ministerial level [12]
 - One representative of regional intergovernmental organisations for each of the six regions – to be represented at Head of Agency level [6]
 - Four representatives from multilateral organisations/banks/funds (with close link maintained to the Multilateral Education Platform): GPE, OECD, UNICEF, the World Bank – to be represented at Head of Agency level [4]
 - One representative from development cooperation (with close link maintained to the Global Education Forum) – to be represented at Ministerial or Head of Agency level [1]
 - One representative of civil society: CCNGO on Education 2030 – to be represented at top leadership level [1]
 - One representative of teacher organisations: Education International – to be represented at top leadership level [1]
 - One representative of foundations and the private sector (shared seat) – to be represented at top leadership level [1]
 - One representative of students and youth [1]
 - UNESCO (*ex officio* member) – to be represented by the Director-General [1]
- Reflecting their important global roles, the following individuals will have standing invitations to attend HLSC meetings:
 - UN Special Envoy for Global Education
 - UN Secretary General’s Envoy on Youth
- A ‘no delegation’ policy will apply to the Leadership Group in order to ensure and maintain the seniority of HLSC members.
- Unless stipulated otherwise, constituencies will operate on a self-governing principle for selecting Leadership Group members and there will be rotation every two years.
- Sub-regional balance among MS representatives for each region will also be important.
- Best endeavours will be made to ensure gender balance among the HLSC membership.
- Each full member will be accompanied and supported by a senior level technical officer, who will collectively form a ‘Sherpa group.’
- Representatives on the HLSC Leadership Group, especially through the Sherpa Group, will have a responsibility to consult actively with their relevant constituencies ahead of HLSC meetings and to provide feedback following those meetings.
- Representatives of non-education stakeholders may be invited to attend meetings on an ad hoc basis in line with the GEM rolling priorities, with opportunities sought to ensure the involvement of non-members of UNESCO that are active in education.

- Annual meetings:
 - Meets annually alongside another major international gathering (e.g., UNGA or UN HLPF), or more frequently if required.
 - Additional meeting with the presence of the UN Secretary-General the UN Special Envoy for Global Education, convened back-to-back on the same occasion, to share and receive feedback beyond education actors.

Sherpa group

Responsibilities

- Identify opportunities for effective HLSC actions and impact.
- Carry out consultations among HLSC constituencies.
- Facilitate inter-agency/multi-actor initiatives and activities related to the functional areas of the HLSC (i.e., evidence/policy, data/monitoring, financing).
- Provide substantial input and preparation to the agenda for HLSC meetings.

Membership and working arrangements

- Twenty-eight (28) members in total at the level of senior official/specialist (e.g., Director-level), matching the institutional composition of the Leadership Group.
- Best endeavours will be made to ensure gender balance among the HLSC membership.
- Further work to develop the functional areas will be carried out after the 13 July GEM, at which point the potential need for additional participants in the Sherpa Group may be considered based on further work to develop the functional areas of the HLSC.
- Convenes at least quarterly, and more frequently as required.

B. Inter-Agency Secretariat

Mandate

To enable effective actions of the SDG 4-Education 2030 High-Level Steering Committee by **taking forward initiatives, addressing challenges, providing support** on technical and administrative issues.

Responsibilities

- Support functions, meetings and other activities of the GEM, SDG4 HLSC and other GCM forums/platforms as designated by the GEM/HLSC.
- Troubleshoot obstacles to better coordination, aggregation, monitoring and exchange among global stakeholders.
- Provide specialist technical support to the ‘Sherpa Group’ on the HLSC functional areas (i.e., promote evidence-based policy formulation and formulation; monitor progress and improving the availability/use of data; drive financing mobilisation and improved alignment).
- Organise periodic Global Education Meetings and Education 2030 side-events at the HLPF, and support the preparation of a periodic HLSC report to the HLPF.
- Liaise with other relevant bodies involved in global education, including regional organisations.
- Manage external communications and outreach for the GCM bodies and forums.
- Maintain data, knowledge and reporting systems in line with the HLSC mandate.

Membership and working arrangements

- Core team located at UNESCO headquarters in Paris with an expanded virtual team located in different organisations.
- Specialist staff either assigned or seconded from global education actors, with personnel costs covered by those organisations.
- Small cadre of fixed-term management and administrative staff (including a Head of Secretariat) based in UNESCO, with funding for personnel costs by Member States.
- Responsibilities, performance metrics and overall budget for the Secretariat to be approved every two years by the HLSC.

Notes

ⁱ [2020 GEM Declaration](#)

ⁱⁱ Membership includes: Member States on the SDG-Education 2030 Steering Committee Bureau (Japan, Norway, Slovak Republic, Colombia, China, Kenya and Saudi Arabia); UN and multilateral organizations (UNESCO, UNICEF and African Union); global funds for education/multilateral banks (World Bank, GPE and ECW); Donors (EU-INTPA, UK and Germany); Civil society/teaching profession (Education International, Global Campaign for Education); the UN Special Envoy for Global Education.

ⁱⁱⁱ Mundy, K. (2021). “UNESCO SDG-Education 2030 Input Paper on Global Education Coordination”. [Unpublished paper].

^{iv} See, for example: Burnett, N. (2019). “Invited Essay: It’s past time to fix the broken international architecture for education”. *International Journal of Educational Development*. Volume 68, pp. 15-19. Elsevier. [Link: <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0738059319303633>]

^v Mundy, K. (2021). “UNESCO SDG-Education 2030 Input Paper on Global Education Coordination”. [Unpublished paper].

^{vi} Beeharry, G. (2021). “The pathway to progress on SDG 4 requires the global education architecture to focus on foundational learning and to hold ourselves accountable for achieving it”. *International Journal of Educational Development*. Volume 82. Elsevier. [Link: <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0738059321000286>]

^{vii} See “Aid effectiveness: key issues for a global education architecture”, paper prepared by UNESCO’s Global Monitoring Report Team for and shared during the meeting of education aid donors on 17 February 2021

^{viii} Lewin, K. (2020). “Beyond Business as Usual: Aid and Financing Education in Africa”. *International Journal of Educational Development*. Volume 82. Elsevier. [Link (paywalled): <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0738059320304065>]

^{ix} Education 2030 Incheon Declaration and Framework for Action (p. 62):

http://uis.unesco.org/sites/default/files/documents/education-2030-incheon-framework-for-action-implementation-of-sdg4-2016-en_2.pdf

^x Examples of multi-stakeholder initiatives developed by multilateral agencies include the World Bank’s ‘Accelerator Program’ <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/feature/2020/11/20/world-bank-launches-accelerator-countries-program-to-improve-global-foundational-learning>; UNICEF’s ‘Generation Unlimited’ <https://www.generationunlimited.org/>; and GPE’s ‘Partnership Compacts’ <https://www.globalpartnership.org/content/gpe-2025-strategic-plan-december-2020>

^{xi} Steer, L. & Steer, A. (2021). “The global architecture for climate action: Lessons for the education sector?”. Commentary. Education Commission. [Link: <https://educationcommission.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/Climate-lessons-for-education-April-2021.pdf>]

^{xii} The TCG endorsed seven SDG 4-Education 2030 monitoring indicators for benchmarking in August 2019, and regional and national benchmark setting is under way in collaboration among UNESCO (UIS, GEM Report and Regional Bureaux), regional organizations (African Union, ASEAN, CARICOM, CECC-SICA, European Union, Forum of Education Ministers Meeting, SEAMEO) and Member States. The Working Group proposes that the Global Education Meeting in July 2021 reaffirm these seven indicators for benchmarking and the regional processes to set minimum regional benchmarks. Member States will be invited to submit national benchmarks on these indicators, and UNESCO will compile the national benchmarks and present them to the Global Education Meeting in November 2021.

3. Update on the SDG 4 benchmark process

Background

The Education 2030 Framework for Action calls on countries to establish “appropriate intermediate benchmarks (e.g. for 2020 and 2025)” for the SDG indicators, seeing them as “indispensable for addressing the accountability deficit associated with longer-term targets” (§28). However, a majority of countries have not translated the global targets into national ones to serve as references to report their progress in a regular manner. To fill this gap, the Technical Cooperation Group on the Indicators for SDG 4 (TCG) agreed in 2019 on seven indicators to be benchmarked. The proposal was based on a review of proposals by TCG members, which concluded that it would be possible to set benchmarks for 6 of the 43 SDG 4 indicators plus the Framework for Action public expenditure indicators based on past trends, country coverage, frequency of data and policy relevance:

- Indicator 4.1.1. Proportion of children and young people (a) in grades 2/3; (b) at the end of primary; and (c) at the end of lower secondary achieving at least a minimum proficiency level in (i) reading and (ii) mathematics, by sex
- Indicator 4.1.2. Completion rate (primary education, lower secondary education, upper secondary education)
- Indicator 4.1.4. Out-of-school rate (1 year before primary, primary education, lower secondary education, upper secondary education)
- Indicator 4.2.2. Participation rate in organized learning (one year before the official primary entry age), by sex
- Indicator 4.c.1. Proportion of teachers with the minimum required qualifications, by education level
- Equity indicator (to be defined)
- Education expenditure as a share of GDP/total expenditure

The extraordinary session of the Global Education Meeting in October 2020 reminded Member States and the international community of this pending commitment and called on UNESCO and its partners, together with the SDG-Education 2030 Steering Committee to “propose relevant and realistic benchmarks of key SDG 4 indicators for subsequent monitoring” (§10).

The effectiveness of the process to set, monitor and act on benchmarks rests on two factors:

- First, political commitment is needed. Setting benchmarks as requested by the Framework for Action cannot be done at global level, given the very large differences in starting points between countries. Benchmarks need to be feasible and based on national ownership. A global process may undermine these objectives and it was therefore proposed to define benchmarks at the regional level, as a starting point. Countries within each region tend to have more challenges in common and more opportunities to enter into policy dialogue and learn from each other.
- Second, technical challenges of measurement need to be overcome. TCG agreed on the seven indicators following a review of proposals by its members, which concluded that it would be possible to set benchmarks for six of the 43 SDG 4 indicators – plus the Framework for Action expenditure indicators – based on past trends, country coverage, frequency of data and policy relevance.

The UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS) and the Global Education Monitoring Report (GEM Report) proposed a two-step technical and political process consisting of, first, regional benchmarks and, second, national

benchmarks, which was endorsed by TCG:

- The regional benchmark level, with the definition of a common regional minimum reference, offers a balance when countries in a region share many of the same challenges. A regional approach in conjunction with a national benchmark enables engagement across countries and offers opportunities to be inspired and learn from each other.
- The national benchmark levels for the selected indicators shall reflect countries' realities and will be based on their starting points, contexts, plans and ambitions.

The aim of benchmarking SDG 4 indicators is to serve as a framework to identify and support national actions to fill data and policy gaps and to help address common challenges by prompting an exchange of best practices, mutual learning, gathering and dissemination of information and evidence of what works, as well as advice and support for policy reforms. The progress on SDG 4 and its targets depends on the contribution of each country for each policy area by defining a quantitative target and the set of actions and policies to support the achievement.

The benchmarking process is also responding to the United Nations Secretary General's Synthesis Report (UNSG, 2014)¹, which recommended that four levels of monitoring should be considered: global, regional, thematic and national. This process aims to align these four indicator levels.

The progress to date and the way forward

The UIS and the GEM Report have been working closely with regional inter-governmental organizations and Member States towards two deadlines:

- Regional inter-governmental organizations and their Member States that participated in different consultation rounds will endorse the minimum regional benchmarks by July 2021. The table in the annex summarizes the processes in each region currently underway.
- Member States will endorse their national benchmarks by 30 September, so it could be compiled by 15 October 2021.

Regional benchmarks

There are additional indicators of interest in regional and sub-regional frameworks. The benchmarking process is offering an opportunity to regional organizations with an education agenda to add indicators they may wish to benchmark at the regional level. During the first phase, they were identified and are now in the process of finalization through consultation with countries. This process is under the oversight of the respective regional intergovernmental organizations.

The table below summarizes the globally benchmarked indicators and the proposed regionally benchmarked indicators currently under consultation.

¹ UN Secretary-General, (2014), [The Road to Dignity by 2030: Ending Poverty, Transforming All Lives and Protecting the Planet, Synthesis Report of the Secretary-General on the Post-2015 Agenda](#), §149.

Target	SDG 4 monitoring framework		Regional monitoring frameworks		
	Global indicators	Thematic indicators	Africa	Asia/Pacific	Europe
4.1 Basic education	2	5			
Of which, benchmark:	i. Learning proficiency ii. Completion rate	iii. Out of school rate			
4.2 Early childhood	2	3			
Of which benchmark:	iv. Pre-primary enrolment rate				
4.3 TVET/Higher/Adult education	1	2		Youth/Adult education participation Tertiary enrolment	Adult education participation Tertiary attainment Digital skills
4.4 Skills for work	1	2			
4.5 Equity	1	4			
Of which, benchmark:	v. Equity indicator (to be defined)				
4.6 Adult literacy	1	2			
4.7 Sustainable development	1	4			
4.a Learning environment	1	2	Schools with electricity, computer, internet; WASH		
4.b Scholarships	1	1			
4.c Teachers	1	6			
Of which, benchmark:	vi. Percentage of trained teachers				
TOTAL	12	31			
Finance	1	1			
Of which, benchmark:	vii.a. Education spending as %GDP	vii.b. Education spending as %total public spending	R&D spending; TVET spending		
Other			Youth not in education, employment, training	STEM	STEM
			TVET graduates in labour force		TVET on the job learning

Note (1): Indicators in red are the global benchmarked indicators.

Note (2): The European Union has adopted only 3 of the 7 benchmarked indicators: (i) learning proficiency (ii) completion rate and (iv) pre-primary enrolment rate.

National benchmarks

For each of the seven global and thematic benchmark indicators, countries are expected to submit their national benchmark values for 2025 and 2030, as a sign of their commitment with the aim of achieving SDG 4.

- **Who:** Each country will outline and communicate its benchmarks through the SDG 4 national focal point to the UIS/TCG microsite.
- **How:** Benchmark values will be a quantified target for each indicator and level.
 - If a country has a strategy or plan and actions that sets a target for a benchmarked indicator in 2025 and 2030, then this will be the source of the benchmark.
 - If a country does not yet have a target for 2025 and 2030 for the indicative benchmark values generated in the process led by the UIS and the GEM Report, which are based on the country's initial conditions and past trends and are available at the TCG website. The country can use these values.
- **When:** The process should be completed by 30 September 2021 in order for the results to be compiled by 15 October 2021 to be endorsed at the High-Level Segment of the Global Education Meeting in November 2021.

Development partners and international community will commit to support the achievement of these national benchmark values.

Annex: Summary of progress on regional benchmarks

Benchmarks	Regional partners	Action executed	Next step	Indicators		
				Adopted	Level	Regional
Africa	African Union Regional Economic Communities	Meeting with Expert Group (February 25) 5 regional meetings Global indicators adopted	Report back to countries Feedback to confirm adoption once last sub-regional meeting is concluded (June 10)	Yes	Yes	Yes, 7 indicators identified in CESA framework
Arab States	UNESCO Beirut	Two regional meetings Country bilateral meetings	Adoption of regional levels	Yes	Yes	No
Asia/Pacific	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • UNESCO Bangkok • Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) • Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organization (SEAMEO) • South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) • Pacific Community (SPC) 	Five consultations Global indicators adopted Regional indicators identified <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Endorsement of regional benchmark process from Pacific Education Ministerial Forum • Promote advocacy to mobilize political commitment through sub-regional high-level forums (FEDMM, SEAMEO Congress and ASEAN SOMED) 	Report back to countries Feedback to confirm any additional regional indicators	Yes	Yes	4
Europe	European Commission	Meeting with EC Agreement on 3 of 7 indicators of the European Education Area Council resolution aligned	Note from EAC with contribution from European Education Area	Yes, 3 of 7 indicators	Yes, for some levels	Yes, 4 indicators identified in European Education Area
Latin America/ Caribbean	UNESCO Santiago CECC-SICA CARICOM	CECC-SICA	Meeting with coordination and Ministerial Meeting	Yes		No
		CARICOM	Meeting with coordination	Alignment with Indicators of first phase Human Resource strategy	first phase defined	yes

4. Launch of the UNESCO, UNICEF, World Bank and OECD Report on the Global Survey on National Education Responses to COVID-19 School Closures

Background

The COVID-19 pandemic brought the loss of many lives and placed severe pressures on health systems. Since March 2020, most governments worldwide have implemented policies to contain the spread of the disease. At the peak of the crisis, in April 2020, over 1.6 billion learners and 100 million teachers and school personnel in more than 190 countries were affected by school closures.

While the COVID-19 pandemic caused a global learning disruption of unprecedented scale and severity, it also revealed the enormous potential for innovation in education and reform of education systems. After more than a year of being affected by COVID-19 education disruption, countries need data more urgently than ever to plan and monitor emergency response efforts and prepare for medium- and long-term mitigation and recovery strategies. Up-to-date information on the impacts of policy interventions and responses at the global level is needed to support the subsequent educational planning and programming needed to implement effective learning strategies.

The survey

As part of the coordinated global education response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the World Bank have conducted a Survey on National Education Responses to COVID-19 School Closures. The survey instrument is designed for government officials responsible for education to capture de jure policy responses and perceptions from government officials on their effectiveness, providing a systematic understanding of deployed policies, practices and intentions to date.

Between May and June 2020, 118 countries completed the first round of the survey and 149 countries completed the second round between July and October 2020. UNESCO, UNICEF and the World Bank produced a joint report – "What have we learnt? Overview of findings from a survey of ministries of education on national responses to COVID-19"² based on the first two rounds of data collection. The questions covered four levels of education: pre-primary, primary, lower secondary and upper secondary.

The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) has joined the consortium in the third round of the survey, which was answered by a total of 143 countries³ between February and May 2021.

The survey results will help to better inform local and national responses and to prepare for school reopening. The results will also help support the decisions and actions of partners in support of governments.

² <https://data.unicef.org/resources/national-education-responses-to-covid19/>

³ Thirty-one countries submitted responses to the OECD and 112 countries responded to the UIS. Seven countries responded to both surveys; the more complete set of their responses were used in analysis.

Organization of the report

This report presents key findings from the third round of the UNESCO-UNICEF-World Bank-OECD survey, although in some cases, data from the previous two rounds and some other sources were also used. The report has eight sections:

- Section 1 addresses the potential learning losses implied by school closures and policies related to school calendars and curricula.
- Section 2 investigates various policy adjustments on learning assessment and examinations.
- Section 3 addresses distance learning modalities deployed and the policies and strategies implemented to ensure equity and boost access to and effectiveness of online learning.
- Section 4 addresses policy implementations to support teachers and education personnel.
- Section 5 addresses school reopening management and health protocols for all students.
- Section 6 addresses system-level responses in education financing.
- Section 7 investigates the locus of decision-making of public institutions during the pandemic.
- Section 8 provides an overall conclusion.

Stay in touch

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