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\(^1\), 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.

**The Global Education Meeting**

UNESCO convenes periodic Global Education Meetings (GEMs) aligned with the meeting schedule of the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF). The first ordinary GEM was held in 2018 in Brussels, Belgium, in preparation for the 2019 HLPF, which reviewed the progress on SDG 4. The 2020 GEM was convened on an exceptional basis to exhort the highest-level political commitment to protect education as a catalytic force for the COVID-19 recovery and sustainable development.

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 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*

While SDG 4 is not reviewed specifically at this year’s HLPF, this overall theme is central to the education sector’s challenge today and education is undoubtedly a cross-cutting and catalytic element of this HLPF theme. As the subtitle “from recovery to accelerating SDG 4 progress” indicates, the 2021 GEM Ministerial Segment builds on the partnerships and innovations the global education community mobilized in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, to step up sustainable, resilient and inclusive recovery in pursuit of the 2030 Agenda and SDG 4.

At the 2021 GEM High-Level Segment in November, the implementation and fulfilment of the 2020 GEM commitments will be reviewed and the strengthened SDG 4 Steering Committee will be officially launched.

**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

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\(^{1}\) Membership included: 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.
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.

Participants

Participants (by invitation only) will include:

- Ministers of Education, Development Cooperation and/or other relevant sectors
- Senior officials of UN agencies, international organizations, regional organizations and other development partners
- Representatives of the teaching profession, students and youth
- Representatives of civil society organizations
- Private sector and foundations

The invited participants will be asked to register online and upon registration, they will receive a link to the on-line meeting platform. The meeting will be livestreamed for public view.

Provisional agenda

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Session 1: Endorsement of the Working Group’s proposal on the improved global education cooperation mechanism</th>
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| 13:00 – 13:10 | Opening
  - Ms Audrey Azoulay, UNESCO Director-General
  - H. E. Mr Koichi Hagiuda, Minister of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, Japan/Co-chair of the SDG-Education 2030 Steering Committee |
| 13:10 – 14:20 | Session 1: Endorsement of the Working Group’s proposal on the improved global education cooperation mechanism
  - Presentation of the proposal by the Working Group Co-chairs
  - Statements from Ministers and constituency representatives
  - Showcasing regional benchmarks setting
  - Endorsement of the proposal
  *Message from Ms Amina J. Mohammed, United Nations Deputy Secretary-General*
**Session 2: From recovery to accelerating SDG 4 progress**

- Voices of students and teachers
- Presentation of the UNESCO, UNICEF, World Bank and OECD Report on the Global Survey on National Education Responses to COVID-19 School Closures
- Ministerial Roundtable: *What measures and lessons learned from your country’s COVID-19 response would contribute to accelerate progress toward SDG 4? How could these and other acceleration measures in your country be supported through regional and global SDG 4 cooperation mechanisms?*

**Working languages**

Simultaneous interpretation will be available in the six official languages of the United Nations (Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian and Spanish). Working documents will be made available in English and French.

**Information and contact**

For additional information on the meeting, we kindly invite you to visit the [official website](https://www.unesco.org) of the event or contact the UNESCO Secretariat by sending an e-mail to GlobalMeeting@unesco.org. The event will be livestreamed for public view on: [https://webcast.unesco.org/events/2021-07-GEM-Ministerial](https://webcast.unesco.org/events/2021-07-GEM-Ministerial).