

High-level segment (Paris and online)

# 2021 Global Education Meeting

*Invest in education - a global mobilization for COVID-19 recovery and the futures of education*

## Concept Note

**10 November 2021 14:30-18:30 CET**

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*The high-level segment of the 2021 Global Education Meeting will galvanize global political commitments to raise the profile of education and its investment imperative, as a catalytic driver for the world's COVID-19 recovery and the acceleration toward the 2030 Agenda, and to transform the futures of education.*

## Background

Education is a human right, a key to individual well-being and an enabler of social development. The global community's ambitions for education are captured in the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4 – ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all – and education is considered as a driver for all SDGs.

Education financing should be regarded as an investment rather than a cost. It is thus reassuring that government spending on education has increased steadily over the past decade particularly in low- and middle-income countries. However, these lower income countries have a huge financing gap to achieve SDG 4 by 2030, which has been aggravated by the COVID-19 pandemic. UNESCO estimated that the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic could increase the pre-COVID annual funding gap of US\$148 billion in low and lower-middle income countries to as much as US\$200 billion<sup>1</sup>. Indeed, the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted both government and household spending, which together accounts for more than 99% of

<sup>1</sup> [https://en.unesco.org/gem-report/sites/default/files/covid\\_cost\\_Press\\_Release\\_EN.pdf](https://en.unesco.org/gem-report/sites/default/files/covid_cost_Press_Release_EN.pdf)

global education spending. Education budgets declined in 65% of low- and lower-middle-income countries and 33% of upper-middle and high-income countries since the onset of the pandemic.<sup>2</sup>

Moreover, according to UNESCO's estimate, only 2.9 % of COVID-19 stimulus package funding worldwide went to education and this is concentrated in high-income countries (97% of education funding provided as part of COVID-19 stimulus package worldwide). Low-income and middle-income countries allocated less than 1 percent of their additional resources for education, signalling the risk of further aggravating educational inequalities across and within countries. The need for increased education financing—both domestic resources and international aid—thus is even more urgent for the world's recovery from the pandemic and acceleration of the progress towards SDG 4 targets.

In October 2020, Heads of State and Government, Ministers from over 70 countries and international partners met at an extraordinary session of the Global Education Meeting (2020 GEM), convened by UNESCO, the governments of Ghana, Norway and the United Kingdom, and adopted the 2020 GEM Declaration,<sup>3</sup> expressing strong commitment to protect education financing and outlining measures<sup>4</sup> to be put in place over the following year. The education finance commitment in the 2020 GEM Declaration consists of: a) increasing or maintaining the share of public expenditure on education; b) including in national recovery stimulus packages allocations for equity-focused support measures and skills development for employment; and c) increasing the volume, predictability and effectiveness of international aid to education.

The 2020 GEM also triggered a dialogue about improving the Global Education Cooperation Mechanism (GCM) as a means to promote collaboration and create an enabling environment for countries to accelerate their progress towards SDG 4, and called for a multi-stakeholder consultation process to “develop a proposal to strengthen the SDG-Education2030 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” (para. 11).

## Fulfilling the 2020 GEM commitments

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The 2020 GEM participants agreed to monitor the implementation of these commitments, collect and exchange good practices, and report at the 2021 GEM on the fulfilment of commitments. Since then, UNESCO convened twice Ministers of Education across the world to share innovative responses in transforming their education systems amid the crisis and discussed the lessons learned that would help accelerate countries' progress towards SDG 4: in March 2021 commemorating one year into COVID-19 pandemic and in July 2021 at the ministerial segment of the 2021 GEM.

Moreover, UNESCO led an extensive consultation process with a dedicated multi-stakeholder working group to develop a proposal to strengthen the SDG-Education 2030 Steering Committee and improve GCM, which was endorsed at the ministerial segment of 2021 GEM. Operating under the auspices of the Global Education Meeting, the multi-stakeholder SDG4-Education 2030 High-Level Steering Committee (HLSC), co-chaired by a Head of State/Government and the UNESCO Director-General, will be constituted as the global education apex body, supported by a dedicated Inter-Agency Secretariat hosted by UNESCO. The HLSC, which will be inaugurated at this high-level segment of 2021 GEM, will provide political

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<sup>2</sup> World Bank and UNESCO. 2021. [Education Finance Watch 2021](#).

<sup>3</sup> <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000374704>

<sup>4</sup> 1) safe school reopening through closer inter-sectoral collaboration, 2) support for all teachers and education personnel as frontline workers, 3) investment in skills development, including social and emotional learning and 4) narrow the digital divide in education and improve digital learning

leadership on global education priorities and create stronger accountability incentives for accelerating progress toward SDG 4.

## The Global Education Meeting

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UNESCO convenes periodic Global Education Meetings (GEMs) aligned with the meeting schedule of the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF)<sup>5</sup>. All Member States and other stakeholders that are part of the coordination mechanism participate in the GEMs. The first ordinary GEM was held in December 2018 in Brussels in preparation for the 2019 HLPF, which reviewed the progress on SDG 4.

The 2021 GEM has two segments: the ministerial segment which took place in July 2021 and the high-level segment in November 2021.

Co-hosted by UNESCO and the Government of France, the high-level segment will be held in a hybrid mode (Paris and online) at the margin of the 41<sup>st</sup> Session of the UNESCO General Conference; and it will precede the 2022 HLPF in July 2022, which will review SDG 4.

## Objective of the 2021 GEM

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The overall objective of the high-level segment of the 2021 GEM is to create a global political momentum to raise the profile of education and its investment imperative, as a catalytic driver for the world's COVID-19 recovery and accelerated progress towards the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

This 2021 GEM segment will take place immediately after the launch of the landmark Report of the International Commission for the Futures of Education, *Reimagining our Futures Together: A new social contract for education*, in the context of UNESCO's 41st General Conference. This Report invites governments and citizens around the world to forge a new social contract for education, governed by the two foundational principles: assuring the right to quality education throughout life and strengthening education as public and a common good. A new social contract for education requires renewed commitment to global collaboration, premised on more just and equitable cooperation among state and non-state actors.

The official inauguration of the SDG4-Education 2030 High-Level Steering Committee (HLSC) at this high-level 2021 GEM thus symbolizes the global education community's renewed commitment to quality education and lifelong learning for all, as reaffirmed during the 2020 GEM. In the context of the reformed GCM, HLSC will play a central role in monitoring Member States' progress on their own commitments and international actors' contributions and recommending priority actions.

Pursuant to the 2020 GEM Declaration, this high-level 2021 GEM will review the implementation of the 2020 GEM commitments particularly in relation to the education financing commitments. Building on the Global Partnership for Education's successful replenishment campaign, which also called its developing country partners to prioritize education in domestic financing, at the 2021 GEM *all* Member States will be invited to (re-)commit their investment in education – domestic and international – as committed through the 2020 GEM Declaration.

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<sup>5</sup> UNESCO. 2016. *Education 2030 Framework for Action for the implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 4: Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning for all*.

Three specific sessions are envisaged for:

- Global Education Cooperation Mechanism
- Assessing the impact of the COVID-19 on SDG 4 and monitoring the 2020 GEM commitments
- Education Financing Roundtable

## Expected outcome

“**The Paris Declaration**” will be adopted by the 2021 GEM to renew national and international leaders’ commitment to invest in education – domestically and internationally – and to galvanize policy measures to accelerate the progress toward the SDG 4-Education 2030 agenda, paving the way for the futures of education.

The monitoring data from UNESCO and OECD, the joint UNESCO, UNICEF, World Bank and OECD Report on the Global Survey on National Education Responses to COVID-19 School Closures, among others, as well as country reporting on the implementation of the 2020 GEM Declaration, will inform the content of the Declaration. A background paper will be prepared by UNESCO in collaboration with OECD and the Government of France and in consultation with key global partners.

## Provisional Agenda

14:30 – 15:00	<p><b>Opening and Inauguration of the SDG4-Education 2030 High-Level Steering Committee</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ms Audrey Azoulay, Director-General, UNESCO</li> <li>• H.E. Ms. Sahle-Work Zewde, President of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia and Chair of the International Commission on the Futures of Education</li> <li>• H.E. President Hage Geingob, President of Namibia</li> <li>• H.E. Mr. Emmanuel Macron, President of France, co-host of the 2021 GEM</li> </ul>
15:00 – 15:45	<p><b>Leaders’ Dialogue on Investing in Education</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Introduction by Youth / Student Leader</li> <li>• Statements by Heads of State/Government and Leaders</li> </ul>
15:45 – 16:30	<p><b>Session 1: Global Education Cooperation Mechanism</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Introduction</li> <li>• Interventions by incoming High-Level Steering Committee members</li> </ul>
16:30 – 17:00	<p><b>Session 2: Impact of COVID-19 on SDG 4 and monitoring commitments</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Introduction</li> <li>• Selected speakers on the implementation of the 2020 GEM commitments</li> </ul>
17:00 – 18:00	<p><b>Session 3: Education Financing Roundtable</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Presentation of the joint background paper by UNESCO, OECD and France</li> <li>• Roundtable discussion</li> </ul>
18:00 – 18:30	<p><b>Paris Declaration and Closing</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• H.E. Mr Jean-Michel Blanquer, Minister of National Education, France</li> <li>• Adoption and statements</li> <li>• Ms Stefania Giannini, Assistant Director-General for Education, UNESCO</li> </ul>

## Participants – by invitation only

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- Heads of State or Government
- Ministers of Education of all UNESCO Member States
- Ministers of Finance and Ministers of International Development of selected countries
- Heads of UN agencies, international and regional organizations
- Incoming members of the SDG4-Education 2030 High-Level Steering Committee
- Leaders of the private sector and civil society organizations
- Leaders from across other sectors
- Youth/student and teacher advocacy champions

## Format

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This 2021 GEM high-level segment will be held in a hybrid format that combines in-person sessions at the UNESCO Headquarters and online/video participation.

## Working languages

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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

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For additional information on the meeting, we kindly invite you to visit the meeting webpage (<https://on.unesco.org/2021GEM-HighLevel>) of the event or contact the UNESCO Secretariat by sending an e-mail to [GlobalMeeting@unesco.org](mailto:GlobalMeeting@unesco.org). The event will be livestreamed for public view.