Concept Note

Ministerial Meeting on Inclusion and Mobility in Higher Education
40th UNESCO General Conference 2019

13 November 2019, Room II, UNESCO Paris (Fontenoy Building)
(Item 27/draft 40 C/2)

Background

Higher education has been recognized in the 2030 Agenda as an integral part of Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG4) on education that UNESCO is mandated to lead. SDG4 aims to ensure that nations work to *ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.* In particular, target 4.3 is requiring equal access for all women and men to affordable quality tertiary education, including university. Addressing shortfalls of equity, access inclusion and quality in tertiary education demands that all post-secondary education options be considered to build the knowledge, competencies and skills humanity needs in a changing context of learning mediated by technology and by the increasing mobility of workers and learners.

The higher education landscape is rapidly changing, characterized by increasing internationalization, growing academic mobility as well as the diversification of providers and modes of learning enabled by new technologies. Some 220 million students are enrolled in universities around the world; a number that has doubled over the past decade and is set to expand, especially in Africa. Although higher education has evolved rapidly in the recent past, access and the quality of provision has not been even across and within Member States (WAHED, 2018[1]).

Increased enrolments have thus not proven to be a reliable indicator for achieving the 2030 Agenda overall goal of "leaving no one behind", or for ensuring equitable and affordable quality tertiary education. Higher education institutions face the challenge of providing quality education to an increasingly diverse student population, including non-traditional learners and disadvantaged groups such as migrants, refugees and indigenous peoples.

While institutions of higher education must perform by ensuring the quality, relevance, and social engagement of their missions, their responsibility goes beyond simple accreditation processes. Ensuring quality also implies taking targeted measures to meet the needs of an increasingly diverse student population in continuous flux.

The past decades' unprecedented increase of enrolment in higher education is also reflected in the mobility of students with the move from an *international university* to a *global campus* of learners, faculty and researchers fast becoming a reality. In the decade to 2011, the number of learners choosing to study outside of their home country more than doubled (4.3 million students) (OECD, 2013[2]) – a figure that is conservatively

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[1] https://worldaccesshe.com/research/higher-education-equity-policies/
[2] https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/docserver/eag_highlights-2013-12-
en.pdf?expires=1562144298&id=id&accname=guest&checksum=9689A1E18FE2900E904863C6812CB7C5

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estimated to double again by 2025 (QS, 2018) given the widening of access and diversification of providers[3]. Yet many students still face obstacles in having their qualifications recognized when returning to their home country or moving to a new country. For many international students and alumni, lack of recognition of their qualifications constitutes a major obstacle for accessing further studies or for seeking employment opportunities. For this reason, UNESCO has established a number of regional conventions to facilitate cross-border recognition of higher education qualifications and to harmonize recognition practices. The Conventions not only provide a legal framework for fair and transparent recognition underpinned by robust quality assurance processes and mechanisms, but also reflect the diversity of types of higher education courses, programmes and delivery modalities.

However, today more than half of students going abroad study outside their home regions, and UNESCO is therefore preparing the adoption of a Global Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education at the 40th Session of the General Conference in 2019 to facilitate student mobility and improve access to higher education across regions and continents.

General Objective and Purpose

This Meeting will focus on inclusion and mobility in higher education. Its general objective is to support decision-making in favour of inclusion, mobility and improved recognition of qualifications within and across-regions through informed debate.

By organizing an informed debate, UNESCO aims to contribute to the strengthening of political will, international cooperation and capacities in the field of higher education as part of the 2030 Agenda. The Ministerial Meeting will support identification of promising practices for policy development in favour of quality, inclusion and equal opportunities in higher education. It also aims to increase understanding among Member States on how the ratification and implementation of the *Global Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education* can facilitate this process. The conclusions of the Ministerial will be annexed to the official proceedings of the General Conference.

In two sessions, Ministers in charge of higher education and university rectors from different regions will share their views and experiences on ensuring inclusive, quality higher education for diverse populations, including migrants, refugees and internally displaced persons, and how to spearhead the spirit of a truly inclusive *global campus* through international student and faculty mobility, innovative study programmes and delivery modalities.

Expected Outcomes

The main expected outcome is a resolve by policy-makers and higher education institutions to work more closely together to ensure inclusion in higher education and facilitate the recognition of degrees and qualifications, including through the ratification of the Global Convention.

Participants

Invitations will be sent to ministers in charge of higher education of all UNESCO Member States and to rectors/presidents of universities participating in the UNESCO Chairs/UNITWIN Programme, as well as UNESCO's key partner organizations in higher education (university associations, student organizations etc.).

Working Languages

The working languages of the meeting will be the six official languages of the organization: Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian and Spanish.

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[3] https://www.qs.com/growth-international-students-higher-education

Higher Education Ministerial Meeting
40th Session of the General Conference

Provisional Agenda

Inclusion and Mobility in Higher Education

13 November 2019, Room II, UNESCO (Fontenoy Building)	
14:00-14:30	Registration and welcome coffee
14:30-15:00	**Opening Session** **Welcome address:** Ms Audrey Azoulay, UNESCO Director General **Keynote address:** Prof. Mr. Fernando Reimers, Professor of International Education, Harvard University, and Member of the Futures of Education Report Commission
15:00-16:15	**Panel 1: Inclusion in Higher Education** *Ensuring effective system and institutional level policies to support inclusion and equity of access to overcome barriers to entry to higher education for non-traditional learners and disadvantaged groups including migrants, refugees and indigenous peoples.* Evidence based experiences and knowledge from Higher Education Leaders (15 minutes) - Ministerial Debate (45 minutes) - Interventions of other participants (15 minutes)
16:15-17:30	**Panel 2: Mobility in Higher Education** *Spearheading the global campus through student and faculty mobility, innovative study programmes and delivery modalities.* Evidence based experiences and knowledge from Higher Education Leaders (15 minutes) - Ministerial Debate (45 minutes) - Interventions of other participants (10 minutes)
17:30-17:45	**Statement by the SDG-4 Steering Committee** Prof. Mr Kazuhiro Yoshida, Co-Chair of the SDG-Education 2030 Steering Committee
17:45-18:00	**Closing Remarks** Ms Stefania Giannini, Assistant Director-General for Education, UNESCO