



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)

Introduction

More than one hundred ministers in charge of higher education of UNESCO Member States and 130 university rectors and presidents as well as UNESCO's key partner organizations participated in the *Ministerial Meeting on Inclusion and Mobility in Higher Education* organized during the 40th UNESCO General Conference, 13 November 2019. Many institutional leaders represented universities participating in the UNESCO Chairs/UNITWIN Programme.

The overall objective of the meeting was to support decision-making in favour of inclusion, mobility and improved recognition of qualifications within and across-regions through 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.

In her welcoming address, the UNESCO Director-General, Mme Audrey Azoulay highlighted three challenges that the higher education is called upon to address in the coming decade. First, increasing inclusion and equity, especially social and gender inequalities as well as the growing inequalities between countries. Second the pressures for higher education institutions (HEIs) to adapt to the increasing demands for enrolment and international academic mobility. Third, the acquisition by learners of new knowledge, skills, competences, and values within the context of technological disruption. The Director General stressed the timely elaboration of a new global convention on the recognition of qualifications in higher education since "the time has come to shift from a regional focus to a global one" and called Member States to adopt it during the 40th General Conference.¹ She also recognised the contribution of UNESCO Chair-holders in fostering the cooperation needed to face the challenges confronted by higher education systems worldwide, and highlighted the importance of the UNESCO Qualifications Passport initiative to support refugees and vulnerable migrants in pursuing further studies or seeking employment.

Mr Fernando Reimers, Professor of International Education at Harvard University (USA), and a Member of the Futures of Education Report Commission, delivered the keynote address. He recalled that the ambitious goals set out in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) requires HEIs to strengthen knowledge creation through ever greater and new forms of collaboration. Professor Reimers reiterated that structural barriers to access and completion of a higher education still exist for many groups suffering discrimination; he highlighted the need for universal access for all students with the potential to succeed to create universal knowledge regardless of social status and personal circumstances of students. The speaker also highlighted the importance of curricula development and that they must be

¹ The *Global Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications Concerning Higher Education* was adopted on November 25, 2020, during the 40th General Conference of UNESCO.

designed or redesigned in line with achieving the SDGs. He remarked that universities need to collaborate with schools and high schools to develop study programmes to ensure seamless progression to higher learning and to better inform research. He also mentioned that academic mobility is crucial to achieving the cosmopolitan role of universities. Mr Reimers stated that the SDGs represent more than ever the challenges that our world faces. He underscored "ambition" as a necessary element given the urgency of sustainable development as a whole, growing numbers of displacement, poverty, climate change, the rise of nationalism affecting democracies, and many other old and emerging challenges. He stressed the irreplaceable role of universities in achieving the 2030 Agenda.

Mme Stefania Giannini, Assistant-Director General for Education, introduced the agenda and thanked the panellists and participants for their participation. The meeting was organized into two panels with the participation of the representatives mentioned below. Following their interventions, the discussion was opened to representatives previously registered to speak (19 after the first panel and 18 after the second panel). The first panel was moderated by Mr Borhene Chakroun, Director of the Division for Policies and Lifelong Learning Systems Division and the second by Mr Francesc Pedró, Director of UNESCO-IESALC.

Panel 1: Inclusion in Higher Education

The panel addressed the challenge of 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.

Prof. Mr Anibal Jozami, rector of University Tres de Febrero, Argentina, highlighted higher education as a public good rather than a commodity. To overcome the global challenges of today, he emphasized the need for education (at all levels) needs to fight against prejudice, discrimination, exclusion, and a lack of respect for others, and to urgently ensure access to populations who are "removed from the discussion" (sports, art, culture, etc.). Incorporating digital technologies is a critical challenge, as well. Professor Jozami called for universities to be more open and approachable to other sectors of society and excluded populations.

H.E. Mme Tina Beaudry-Mellor, Minister of Higher Education for Saskatchewan, the Council of Ministers of Education (Canada), highlighted what she called the "democratic challenges to inclusion". Among these are how higher institutes of learning have made efforts to include indigenous people and specific institutions with curricula for indigenous people as a part of national efforts in her country. She remarked that economies and the challenge to the democratization of education should be taken into consideration when designing such policies. The minister mentioned that a lifelong learning perspective is needed for a digital future to make sure mid-career learners upgrade their skills to succeed in the future. Finally, she highlighted that "the new Global Convention really matters" as recognition of qualifications is a global right.

Mme Anwar Horani, a refugee from Syria and a European Qualifications Passport holder shared how the passport had given the opportunity to develop both academically and professionally in her host country of Norway. She called for policies to focus on gender balance within programmes, designing innovative activities, and accepting and integrating international students around the world.

Mme Victoria Ibiwoye, Youth Representative, the One African Child Foundation (Nigeria), recalled the financial challenges to learners in accessing higher education around the world. She identified as critical the need to address the culture on higher education campuses as little has been done to address the mind-set of faculty, staff, and administration towards marginalised communities. Mme Ibiwoye suggested higher education institutions should introduce culturally and globally respectful training

programs for those working in higher education to truly understand what inclusion means and represents. She highlighted the need to hold systems accountable so that they can take timely and appropriate measures before exclusion takes hold. They also need to be clear and transparent for learners to understand. Mme Ibiwoye stated that higher education is more than just the university, as there are also other forms of institutions available, including TVET centres. A good practice for inclusion for her would be TVET centres that cater to the flexible schedules of applicants and learners.

Panel 2: Mobility in Higher Education

Spearheading the global campus through student and faculty mobility, innovative study programmes and delivery modalities were the focus of the second session.

Mme Iselin Nybo, Minister of Research and Higher Education in Norway referred to the increase academic mobility of students as a priority in her country as it improves the quality of higher education in general. She stated that mobility should be the norm rather than the exception and appealed to the Member States for the adoption of the Global Convention on Recognition. The Minister emphasized the fundamental importance of higher education for sustainable development and learning futures for all and congratulated UNESCO on the successful pilot of the Qualification Passport for Refugees initiative in Zambia.

Mr Brian Mushimba, Minister of Higher Education, Zambia, considered mobility as an important priority for his country. Higher education can benefit immensely from the mobility of students, teachers and workers between countries, either virtually or physically, he stated. The Minister mentioned that his country has elaborated a specific agenda to support UNESCO's normative instruments committed to mobility. He also informed the meeting that the African Union has recently launched a free trade network – especially concerning the recognition of qualifications in higher education, and welcomed the successful implementation of UNESCO Qualifications Passport pilot in his country. Mr Mushimba explained they are working on their qualifications framework, including the recognition of qualifications across borders. His country has actively participated in the Southern African Development Community Quality Assurance Frameworks (SADC QA).

Mme Jill Downie, Deputy Vice-chancellor of Academic Affairs, University of Curtin of Australia, stated that universities in her country are committed to high-quality education, inclusion and mobility. They seek enriching students and communities by connecting campuses and making partnerships. Universities promote global experiences to help in gaining skills and perspectives while enhancing the lives of students in other countries. Increasingly they see higher education qualifications as a valuable form of international currency as they encourage efforts to innovate study programmes and equip students with skills for the 21st century. She highlighted digital revolution will change the job market around the world and will require more attention by the higher education community.

Mr Alejandro Blancas, representative of the Youth International Organization (OIJ), Mexico, called for special measures to involve marginalized communities and peoples in higher education as formal education helps to overcome the cycle of poverty, creates decent employment conditions, trains people for active citizenship and improves individuals' communities and families. Mr Blancas also called for more inclusive and accessible mobility as in many countries it is still a privilege due to the cost, dearth of information, and limited number of opportunities. He urged for urgent measures to bolster global campus strategies and to democratize opportunities for mobility. Recognizing the rights of forced migrants, especially in education was also highlighted as critical.

Open Debate: Contributions by Ministers and Leaders of Higher Education

The following representatives participated in the debate. Ministers responsible for Higher Education of Argentina, Armenia, Belgium, Cambodia, Cuba, China, Czech Republic, Ethiopia, France, Greece, Guatemala, India, Iraq, Malaysia, Mali, Morocco, Mexico, Palestine, Qatar, Republic of Azerbaijan, Republic of Iran, Russian Federation, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Somalia, Sweden, Saint Kitts and Nevis, South Africa. Vice-Ministers responsible for Higher Education of Austria and Italy. Higher Education representatives of - University Alassana Oustare (Cote d'Ivoire); Education International, Academy of Paris (France); Vytautas Magnus University (Lithuania); Community of Mediterranean Universities (Mediterranean Region); Shanghai Open University; European Research; University of Bologna; Yeshiva University Turkey; Open University, United Kingdom.

Equitable and inclusive education, protagonist of Agenda 2030

Education is a universal human right, a public good and a responsibility of States. The right to education implies its guarantee for all people within a framework of equity in the distribution of opportunities, throughout life. Public systems must be based on human values and solidarity.

Equity is central to education and to sustainable development. A lack of equity leads to exclusion, social instability and poverty, and consequently the impairment of development and peace. An inclusive society can only be possible with policies to ensure equity in education and in all areas of development. However, many disadvantaged or minority groups suffer from discrimination today, particularly socio-economically fragile groups, with widespread discrimination among ethnic minorities, people with disabilities, and on a gender bias.

Guaranteeing the right to education means that it must be equitable and inclusive. The right to education requires taking into consideration the needs of all groups and paying particular attention to gender balance. In "inclusive" schools, there is room for students from all groups. The right to education also implies that education must be of quality. Quality and equity must be recognized as inseparable policy objectives.

Equity and inclusion in education require adequate funding and regulatory frameworks. Equity and inclusion must be recognized as objectives in law. They also need national strategies and targeted measures that focus on access, retention, completion, achievement and outcomes for all groups, especially the most disadvantaged. These must be efficient and effective measures, and policies and guidelines must be promulgated at local and national levels as guidelines for inclusion based on equity, at all levels of education, including higher education.

Higher education also requires ensuring equity and inclusion so that everyone has the same access opportunity. Higher education acts as a social equalizer for marginalized populations and populations with different profiles. More inclusive higher education systems are fundamental to building more developed and peaceful societies.

Education, in particular higher education, must now play a fundamental role in the achievement of the SDGs and the realization of active citizenship. International cooperation in higher education not only benefits institutions and individuals but also the global agenda and should, therefore, also be an objective.

Groups of policy concern

Large groups of socio-economically fragile populations require equity measures from the public system to advance in an equitable distribution of opportunities. These groups represent a high proportion globally and especially in developing countries. The lack of policies for their inclusion only generates more poverty and hinders sustainable development. This group, therefore, requires sustained policy efforts. Poverty is often compounded by other categories of discrimination that only aggravate the situation.

The issue of gender equity remains a challenge for higher education. The imbalance affects students and teaching staff, where the shortage of female participation persists. Higher education must be attractive and offer equal development opportunities for men and women.

One group of particular concern is that of refugees and displaced persons. Sustainable development requires that these groups, regardless of their legal status, have all their human rights recognized, respected and guaranteed, and in particular the right to work, to health, and to education and learning. Recognition must be expressed at the legislative and policy levels. International conventions on the recognition of studies, diplomas and degrees can make an essential contribution to these objectives. Governments and partners should work together on these objectives. There is also a need to increase international cooperation in higher education and to assist developing countries with the collaboration of international agencies such as UNESCO and UNICEF in providing assistance to refugees.

Students with special learning needs are another group that requires special attention and affirmative action. This group is significantly under-represented in higher education institutions. Universities should support students from this group, and States should facilitate this task for their respective HEIs.

Another group of concern is ethnic minorities and indigenous groups that deserve particular attention. Improving equity requires specific measures to ensure that these groups are not underrepresented in higher education. Language often presents another barrier for these groups and is a key form of discrimination that must be overcome.

Other less advantaged populations, such as those in prison situations, also require targeted measures. Some countries are creating training centres in detention centres, even offering postgraduate studies.

Policy measures for equity and inclusion

Education systems in some countries are increasingly taking steps toward equity. Some are building universities in disadvantaged areas with a focus on local needs; others are increasing funding and supporting marginal schools to improve the quality of their teaching.

For some countries, financing higher education is challenging, which makes it even more complex to take action in favour of equity. There is also a regional gap in higher education that needs to be addressed. Although the need for structural measures is recognized, scholarships remain crucial for the least developed countries. Scholarships also remain indispensable for the internationalization of higher education. There is a need to increase further the supply of scholarships and funding for less advantaged students from least developed countries and to support the least developed regions in increasing access to higher education.

While taking practical steps to improve higher education, it is necessary to put in place student support mechanisms and for these to be recognized as essential for any quality HEI. Such mechanisms need to harmonise individual needs with different types of study programmes.

While the mission of higher education is clearly knowledge generation and human development, it must also serve the development needs of society as a whole and the labour markets particularly within the framework of Agenda 2030. The labour market requires higher education institutions to foster relevant competencies in graduates and to train them in the skills and knowledge needed for the successfully entering employment at the level of their qualifications or skills attainment.

Increasingly, people are learning in the workplace and performing new types of work. Jobs are changing, and some are disappearing. For this reason, practical and real lifelong learning opportunities are critical for sustainable individual and national futures. Higher education institutions must therefore diversify the programmes and such as critical thinking and problem solving. They must also ensure a continuous adaptations and improvements to curricula with a focus on international competences such as foreign language acquisition and intercultural intelligences.

Education systems should also be available for mid- and later-life learners by taking extraordinary measures. Investing in adult education with a lifelong learning perspective is an unmet need.

The improvement of educational programmes must be accompanied by improvements in initial teacher training, preparation course for higher learning teaching faculty and continuous profession development. In many countries, there is a shortage of pedagogical infrastructure and of teachers and professors. Good teachers are vital for inclusion and must be given adequate preparation and on-going support in their teaching and assessment methodologies.

Higher education requires intensive use of information and communication technologies, new digital skills, smart classrooms, open educational resources, and digital education. This is also important for academic mobility. The number of international students is systematically increasing, and technological changes are facilitating virtual mobility across borders. Ensuring the quality of learning and teaching though digital delivery is now a priority globally.

Science also plays a key role in equity. Excellence oriented science must be accompanied by equity-focused higher education since all talents are needed. Science has a fundamental role in building peace since advances in science contribute to making minds focused on solidarity, cooperation and peaceful development. There is also a need to deliberately strengthen the teaching of the humanities and social sciences in higher education.

International mobility for better higher education

Academic mobility is a priority objective for many countries that consider it essential for development and peace. They understand that "academic mobility" contributes to the transfer of high-level knowledge and cross-fertilization of expertise. They recognize the value of diverse learning environments that benefit all students, HEIs and countries. They also understand that, along with student exchange, the exchange of scholars and researchers enriches higher education and offers the opportunity to improve the quality of education. Higher education mobility works in tandem with global research mobility as it enhances higher education systems as a whole, generating international networks of scholars and researchers that benefit the international community.

For higher education to contribute to mobility, all its actors must be aligned for the same purpose. A participatory debate must be developed around these priorities for higher education.

To support both inclusion and mobility, the relevance of the curriculum and pedagogy must be improved. Mobility requires monitoring the quality of qualifications and teaching to strengthen trust between countries in favour of recognition. Many countries are signing international agreements with others and seeking support from international bodies to improve academic mobility. For this reason, countries particularly value UNESCO's Regional Conventions and the Global Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education, which represents a step forward in international academic collaboration. The internationalization of higher education is a positive response to globalization.

As an asset in itself, academic mobility needs to be supported by public policies to make it an opportunity for all students, scholars and researchers. The inclusion and sustainability of higher education must be guaranteed to both national and international students. Scaling up scholarships and financial support for students from least developed and emerging countries must be implemented to support economically disadvantaged international students. Realizing the global campus requires HEIs to adopt new measures and policies as part of their drive for a quality international institution: student, academics and researchers exchange agreements with other higher education institutions; implementing foreign language programmes and summer programmes; facilitating virtual mobility; generating joint or double degree programmes; contributing to the design of professional competence frameworks; and facilitating and ensuring the recognition of studies and qualifications. Systems of mutual international recognition can contribute to and complement measures at the national level. Comprehensive frameworks for the recognition of professional skills are also essential for ensuring researcher and occupational mobility.

Several countries have national bodies to monitor and strengthen mobility as a pillar of their higher education systems, which is seen as fundamental for the development of knowledge. However, international cooperation plays a significant role in favour of mobility and the improvement of higher education, and therefore must be strengthened.

For academic mobility and the international campus to be realized, the quality of study programmes and HEIs must be assured by national higher education system oversight. Building trust and confidence in the quality of periods of study abroad and/or of foreign qualifications earned, is central to the recognition of such learning experiences being fully accepted either in a home or third country, both for further study or employment purposes. It is therefore essential that policies and procedures be dutifully put in place to ensure the fair, transparent and non-discriminatory recognition of foreign qualifications as a means to sustaining and improving academic mobility and thus enriching higher education systems.

Innovative technologies and artificial intelligence also represent a real opportunity for enhancing student mobility and to significantly improve practices of recognition. Some countries are promoting the recognition of credentials through block chain technology and several more supporting the implementation of the UNESCO Qualifications Passport initiative to ensure inclusion and integration of refugees and vulnerable migrants with non-documented qualifications.

Open interventions: University faculty, leaders and international higher education associations

HEIs have a morale obligation to strengthen inclusive societies through safe higher learning spaces open to all with the potential to succeed— regardless of their backgrounds and circumstances.

Measures for more inclusive higher education should consider that students include persons with disabilities, persons advanced in age, migrants, workers from rural areas, poor people, and people of different faiths and belief systems.

The technology to strengthen mobility is already available and must be used. A digital campus can also support the achievement of SDG4 and catalyse lifelong education. The possibility of scaling up education depends on the development of online learning.

Academic mobility is a joint responsibility of ministries, universities and other institutions concerned. It requires a global approach to democratizing access. Mobility should represent an opportunity for all, not just for the few. Empathy and the ability to think and solve problems are components of mobility.

Harmonization of the curriculum and the retraining of skills are enabling conditions for mobility. Mobility is part of the history of the university and contributes to diplomacy.

Some initiatives can promote international higher education in important ways, such as a so-called "credit bank" that offers students degrees that are recognized and transferable to partner universities.

UNESCO is recognized as having a world standard role in facilitating the mobility of students and teachers underpinned by the fair recognition of qualifications.

Statement by the SDG-4 Steering Committee

The SDG-4 Steering Committee, represented by its co-chair, Prof Mr Kazuhiro Yoshida, stated that equitable and quality education is the key to the transformative Education 2030 Agenda and higher education is vital in achieving all SDGs. Nevertheless, progress on SDG 4 is falling short to achieve the target by 2030.

The Steering Committee encouraged the adoption of the Global Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications Concerning Higher Education and called for political engagement at the highest level to realize shared commitments and responsibility in education towards the 2030 Agenda and beyond. As members of the SDG-4 Steering Committee, Argentina, Bangladesh and Kenya supported the declaration.

Closing Remarks

In her closing remarks, Ms Giannini highlighted the unprecedented gathering of ministers and universities to discuss inclusion and mobility. She stressed that education is at the very core of the 2030 Agenda and called on governments and universities to take responsibilities and take the lead.

The ADG/ED offered some specific recommendations to governments and universities for an *open, inclusive and quality assured* education. First, develop open higher education systems and strongly support the adoption and implementation of the Global Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications Concerning Higher Education. Secondly, reinforce policies that ensure equity in education and equal access to higher education to eliminate all forms of discrimination on the basis of income, gender, race, refugee or migrant status, people with physical and learning disabilities, among others. Third, she called on systems and institutions to have the courage to break down barriers for all learners by widening the 21st century vision of learning and to explore different learning modes and pathways. Finally, Ms Giannini stressed the importance of strengthening quality assurance systems to build robust, dynamic and innovative higher education systems that are at once both nationally relevant and internationally open to mobility and cooperation across borders.

Conclusion

In two sessions, Ministers in charge of higher education and university leaders from different UNESCO regions shared 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.

The meeting helped to reaffirm the principles of the right to education and of the Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development, in particular of objective four.

Ministers and leaders of higher education expressed their strong support for equity and inclusion in higher education at all levels of the education system, and throughout life. The central tensions, challenges and opportunities for equity and inclusion in higher education were mentioned, and suggested policy directions were highlighted.

Widespread support was expressed for academic mobility in higher education as part of the right to education, and the need for systems to strengthen the role of education for development and peace.

The Global Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education received strong support by all 400 participants. The new Global Convention was unanimously adopted by the 40th General Conference of UNESCO on 25 November 2019.