



Europe and North America SDG4/Education 2030 Regional Consultation

in preparation for the Transforming Education Summit

Online meeting, 23 June 2022 (Strasbourg, France)

Convened by the Council of Europe and the European Commission

in partnership with UNESCO

OUTCOME STATEMENT

Preamble

We, the representatives from governments of European and North American States, UN Agencies and international organisations, the Council of Europe and the European Commission, National Commissions for UNESCO, academia and civil society organisations, the teaching profession and youth organisations, convened online on 23 June for the Regional Consultation of Region Europe in preparation of the Transforming Education Pre-Summit and Summit of the United Nations, of 28-30 June and 19 September 2022 at the UNESCO and UN Headquarters respectively, adopt this outcome statement.

We reaffirm the universal relevance of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the centrality of education for reaching all SDGs and commit to a regional response in dialogue and solidarity with all world regions, while considering regional and national differences. Region Europe fully embraces the global agenda in all its components and with its underlying goals and objectives to transform education at all its levels and strands.

We remain convinced that the work to achieve the goals of the 2030 Agenda for Education should build on existing achievements, while at the same time create opportunities for further transformation that go beyond the horizon of 2030, as reaffirmed in the report of the International Commission on the Futures of Education “Reimagining our Futures Together - A new social contract for education”.

We are convinced that urgent and decisive action is needed to address the challenges Region Europe and the world are facing and that the Right to Education as a fundamental right and an enabling right for other human rights is key to securing a sustainable future. Reiterating the central relevance of SDG subgoal 4.7 intertwining education for sustainable development with citizenship education in a global setting, we strongly believe that education is essential for active preparation for the world of work as well as for living together peacefully and meaningfully with respect for the richness of diversity and in a spirit of intercultural understanding.

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We are fully aware that the COVID-19 pandemic has affected all aspects of teaching and learning. It has widened the gaps in meeting the SDG 4 sub-targets and magnified the long-standing functional deficiencies and profound inequalities in our societies. On the other hand it was also a catalyst for educational institutions in Europe and worldwide to come up with innovative solutions in a relative short period of time to ensure teaching and learning continuity.

Building on lessons learned in the recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic crisis we will orient our policies and practices towards accelerating the necessary change for strengthening social inclusion in education, building trust in local communities, and reshaping the narratives on migration.

Looking ahead, we need to offer to younger generations a strong vision for the future through an education that is built on the fundamental values of democracy, human rights, and the rule of law, thus equipping them with competences to navigate in a complex environment, characterized by technological opportunities and challenges, a rapidly changing world of work, economic and ecological (climate) crises and other disruptions, such as violent conflicts.

We commit to a holistic approach to education at all levels and in all settings from early childhood education and care to adult learning and reaffirming our commitment to the universal right to lifelong learning. While foundational learning remains essential, we also underscore the pivotal role and contribution of other strands of education, especially higher, vocational, and adult education. Higher education provides the basis for teacher preparation and initial training, and due to its link with research contributes heavily to the advancement of the knowledge base of a society, while adult education gains importance in the demographic context of our Region, with its ageing population and the ensuing increasing need for up- and re-training. Vocational education and training must also play a key role in increasing the employability of young people and responding to the needs of the economy.

We emphasize the need for all countries of our Region to accelerate the recovery and to strengthen the resilience of our societies and education systems when faced to new crises, and to act by investing in education. Education should not be considered as a mere cost but rather as the best investment that a society can make for its future.

The European Union and other European and international organisations will continue their strong involvement in financing education in worldwide solidarity, with over 55% of development assistance funds coming from Europe. At the same time, we underline the importance of finding a balanced common vision on the transformation of financing of education that encompasses both international solidarity as well as domestic funding. Addressing regional and national needs and investing more and better in education systems, as well as funding reforms to underpin more equitable and inclusive education policies, is also an essential need for European countries.

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We support the growing demand for better coordination and cooperation at all levels. Europe will make its voice heard in the global debate and reaffirm its commitment to the global Education 2030 agenda through active participation in joint activities with other World regions, aiming at sharing and building knowledge and resources with other Regions in a spirit of dialogue and mutual learning. In our international cooperation, we increasingly work as Team Europe towards more impact.

Priorities for further work to Transform Education

We, within our respective mandates and in our areas of responsibility, taking into account our needs, capacities, available resources and national and European strategic priorities, commit to further work on the following:

- a) Transform education strategic governance with a clear focus on the future of the next generation. Multi-annual strategies for the whole education system might be set up, with due attention to democratic citizenship, sustainable development, and inclusion. Such strategies should involve teachers and learners, as well as education partners and other stakeholders from formal and non-formal education sectors, while enhancing collaboration with local authorities and communities, families, and civil society.
- b) Underpin the curriculum with more competence-based education and the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values needed for life in democratic and peaceful societies with respect for human rights. Thematic curriculum developed in collaboration with teachers and students might also be included. Schools and other educational institutions should be strongly embedded in local communities and reach out to less advantaged and non-traditional learners through flexible lifelong learning pathways.
- c) Safeguard and enhance teachers' pedagogical freedom, professional autonomy, and creativity to empower them to take up their changing responsibilities. Teachers' initial education and continuous training as well as their professional status and development, as well as their salaries and working conditions must reflect the vital role they play as agents of change in society.
- d) Capitalise on the pandemic-accelerated digital transformation of education. Digital citizenship and digital competences and skills are crucial for democratic participation, social inclusion, personal and professional growth, and labour-market access. We should continue to help teachers in acquiring digital competences and skills and let them experiment with innovative teaching methods to promote students' autonomy and agency. Special attention must be given to the well-being and mental health of all learners and teachers in the aftermath of the pandemic.

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The effort of education systems worldwide to provide online education to students under lockdown has shown that technology cannot replace teachers (or other critical functions of our society) but can support and complement teaching and learning. Interaction with teachers and peers is crucial, especially for the most vulnerable learners and notably for the youngest, for whom human interaction and role models are essential for dynamic and balanced personal development.

The digital gap widens inequalities in access to knowledge. Moreover, in certain situations, the dependency on private provision, if not well regulated and planned, can lead to accelerated commoditisation of learning, and threaten the privacy of learners. Appropriate governance and regulation will be needed to ensure that private development of ICT-based learning and the introduction of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in education do not undermine public services, autonomy in determining educational content and methods, increase inequality, and degrade the status of education professionals. ICT-based learning and AI should be used to improve education quality and access for all.

e) Engage in the global SDG 4 benchmarking process while putting the countries at the centre in defining the values for national benchmarks, adapted to context, and acquired progress. We commit to strengthening the monitoring of equity and quality in education by using qualitative and quantitative data and mixed methods of analysis and taking into account the multiple purposes of education and the contextual factors that influence the development of education.

f) Overcome the problems of competing priorities for public funding that are currently affecting Europe as a result of the (post-) pandemic and are exacerbated by armed conflicts and refugee crisis. Education must be viewed as a long-term, sustainable investment for all people of all ages in these times of simultaneous crises.

g) Make the best use of the public funds available for education. This is critical but yet, efficiency should be viewed as a corollary to quality that in its turn relates to the multiple missions of education. National governments, as well international organisations, should acknowledge the value of financing education as a long-term investment. In their fiscal policies, financial accountability mechanisms should not be imposed top-down but in structured dialogue with public authorities and stakeholder organisations as well as subject to sound parliamentary control.

h) Address multinational corporations' blind spots so that their contribution to public budgets is equitable. International donors should avoid competing with one another and instead ensure that their initiatives are complementary, coordinated, and contextualised. Existing international financing mechanisms should be leveraged more effectively to boost education funding.

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