

National Statement of Commitment on behalf of Sweden to the Transforming Education Summit, September 2022

[Introduction]

- These are challenging times. Covid-19 and school closures have disrupted education systems globally at tremendous costs.
- This has increased inequalities and worsened the pre-existing learning crisis with severe effects that hit the most vulnerable groups the hardest.
- At the same time, we see that education is receiving a higher visibility on the global agenda manifested by the UN Secretary-General's decision to convene this summit.
- The Swedish government is hopeful that the Summit will result in a coherent set of recommendations drawing on relevant normative instruments and processes.

[Learning recovery]

- In order to understand where we are going, we must first know where we stand.
- This year, the government submitted a comprehensive report to the Swedish Parliament on our national implementation and progress of the 2030 Agenda including SDG 4 on Quality Education for All.

- The report indicates that Sweden is well on its way towards achieving SDG 4.
- Sweden has a well-developed education system for children, young people and adults. Education is free of charge at all levels.
- Access to university and technical and vocational training, without an upper age limit, offers lifelong opportunities for higher education and learning.
- But challenges remain to ensure high quality education for all. Critical areas include equity within and between schools to tackle segregation as well as a gender gap in which boys are lagging behind when it comes to school results.

[Background and national experiences from Covid-19]

- At the outset of the pandemic, the Swedish Government Offices convened consultations with national authorities and others to discuss appropriate measures for schools in relation to Covid-19.
- Sweden kept schools and pre-schools open throughout the pandemic. As the Minister for Education and Research put it: “Schools must be the last to close and first to open”.
- We believe this was the right decision for several reasons - important for health and wellbeing of children and youth while providing a safe and conducive environment for learning.

- Teachers have taken great responsibility during the pandemic when schools were kept open and have faced many challenges - not least when allowing for remote teaching and learning.
- Some pupils have had difficulties to benefit from remote teaching. Particularly those who already face challenges in school, including those with special needs and children and youth from socioeconomically vulnerable circumstances.

[Transforming Education]

- When discussing how to transform education it must be with the understanding that only a human-rights based approach will drive positive change.
- Fundamental challenges such as poverty, gender inequality, and climate change are all interconnected. To tackle these challenges, education policies must integrate environmental, economic and social dimensions.
- Curricula at all levels must also include the skills needed to empower citizens.
- It is imperative to strengthen teachers and the education workforce - the backbone of the education system. Teachers need to be paid and trained - not least be provided with tools to facilitate a green and digital transition.
- Lifelong learning is a priority for the Swedish government – both in our international and domestic agenda.

- In line with the above, the Government has launched a large reform package on the Swedish labour market. The centrepiece includes an extensive finance scheme for transition, retraining and upskilling.
- The scheme will ensure that professionals will be able to study for one year with minimal loss of income. This facilitates opportunities for lifelong learning.
- Education for sustainable development is a long-term commitment for Sweden and is incorporated at all levels of the education system. Systematic implementation, however, remains a challenge.
- Comprehensive sexuality education (CSE) is not “a girl’s issue”. Sweden has recently updated its curricula strengthening CSE as an indispensable tool for promoting tolerance, mutual respect and non-violence in relationships.

[Swedish support to global education]

- Swedish support to global education applies a holistic approach to learning with a focus on resilient, national education systems - from early childhood education throughout life.
- We pay particular attention to equity and inclusion to safeguard education as a public good and human right. We all need to be empowered to shape our lives and contribute to society.
- The poorest and most vulnerable groups – including refugees and children with disabilities - are at the center of our attention. The role of education in empowering girls and women is of utmost importance.

- We pay particular attention to the importance and role of education in conflict and post-conflict situations and in humanitarian crises.
- Support to basic education and lifelong learning remain priority areas in international development cooperation.
- Key areas also include Education for Sustainable Development and neglected areas such Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE) - also as an effective means to build knowledge on sexual and reproductive health and rights.
- Swedish support is provided to organisations such as UNESCO, UNICEF and Global Partnership for Education (GPE) through flexible, unearmarked funding.
- Financing is increasingly critical in the aftermath of the pandemic when many countries are cutting domestic spending on education.
- Alternative and innovative financing models are needed to mobilise additional resources for investments in education for those millions of children and youth that are left out.
- The International Finance Facility for Education (IFFEd) - to be launched during the Summit - will do just that by providing innovative finance to education in Lower Middle-Income Countries.
- The Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida) is in its final stages of an appraisal process of a guarantee to IFFEd. We hope this will encourage others to follow.
- To conclude, education is a prerequisite to achieve all 17 sustainable development goals.