



United Nations
Educational, Scientific and
Cultural Organization

Extraordinary Session of the Global Education Meeting on Education post-COVID-19



2020 GEM Declaration

Preamble

1. **We**, Heads of State and Government, ministers and delegates; representatives of United Nations agencies, humanitarian and development partners, international and regional organizations, civil society organizations and the teaching profession; members of research communities and the private sector, joined on 22 October 2020, for the extraordinary session of the Global Education Meeting (2020 GEM), organized by UNESCO and co-hosted by the Governments of Ghana, Norway and the United Kingdom.
2. **We express concern** that the unprecedented social, human and economic crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic has exposed the world's fragility and interdependence, affecting every country, community and family, particularly the most marginalized. The COVID-19 crisis cannot be reduced to a public health emergency as it has imperilled fundamental human rights including the right to education. We face a major threat that risks hampering the progress made towards the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and our joint efforts to leave no one behind. The crisis is exacerbating pre-existing inequalities and affecting disproportionately vulnerable communities and learners, especially those living in poverty, women and girls, those impacted by crises and conflicts, and persons with disabilities.
3. **We are deeply concerned** about and firmly condemn recent attacks on teachers, students and schools and reaffirm the role of education and teachers as key agents in fostering peace, non-violence, global citizenship and sustainable development.
4. **We appreciate** the mobilisation of UN organizations, international and regional organizations, humanitarian and development partners, and civil society organizations to: advocate for education as key to response and recovery; create multi-sectoral partnerships to support countries to ensure education response to COVID-19; and protect those who fall outside of state support. We also acknowledge efforts by governments, teachers and other education personnel, and other education stakeholders to respond to the unprecedented challenges arising from the pandemic. We recognize that this global crisis can only be addressed through international solidarity and multilateral cooperation.
5. **We are convinced** that quality education is a human right and essential for an equitable, inclusive and sustainable recovery of all nations. To avoid what the UN Secretary-General has described as a "generational catastrophe," we must build more resilient, flexible, inclusive and gender-responsive societies and education systems. To do so, we must address the holistic needs of all learners from early childhood to adulthood, especially the most vulnerable and marginalized.
6. **We agree to:**
 - Uphold our commitment to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its SDG 4, "to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all," in order to transform education to drive sustainable development, leaving no one behind.
 - Invest in inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning *now* to reduce the impact of COVID-19, estimated at up to US\$200 billion per year in low- and lower-middle income countries if no action is taken.
 - Reinforce our global cooperation in education to ensure the efficient and effective delivery of political, financial and technical support at the country level.

Our commitment to protect education finance at the time of COVID-19 and beyond

7. **We hereby in principle commit to:**
 - Increase or maintain the share of public expenditure on education towards the international benchmarks of at least 4-6% of GDP and/or 15-20% of public expenditure.
 - Ensure that national recovery stimulus packages include allocations to: a) support measures for recovering all marginalized students' learning loss and socio-emotional impact during educational disruption; b) (re-)enrolment campaigns and targeted support for learners who are at risk of not

returning to school, especially, girls, those living in poverty, persons with disabilities, refugees and persons affected by conflict, crises and natural disasters; and c) training and skills development to increase employment opportunities for people affected by job losses.

- Increase the volume, predictability and effectiveness of international aid to education by: a) meeting the benchmark of 0.7% of donor GNP for official development assistance (ODA) to developing countries; b) increasing the share of ODA to education as a percentage of total ODA; and c) ensuring that international aid for education is aligned to national education plans that integrate COVID-19 response and recovery and in accordance with aid effectiveness principles. Aid should target countries and populations most in need, including those who are not reached by government programmes.

Our priority actions to accelerate progress towards SDG 4 in the COVID-19 context and beyond

8. **We further commit** to the implementation of the following actions over the next 15 months:

- Safely reopen educational institutions based on scientific evidence and considering local contexts; prioritizing the health and safety of students and educators through closer inter-sectoral collaboration; strengthening and restoring access to services such as school meals, health, WASH, social protection, etc.; and ensuring that reopening plans are equity-oriented, gender-responsive, inclusive and targeted. These measures should be adequately funded at all levels and prepare education institutions to continue service provision when normal school opening is disrupted.
- Support *all* teachers and education personnel as frontline workers, consulting their representatives in decision making, and ensuring their safety, well-being and decent working conditions. Urgent attention is required to address the shortage of trained and qualified teachers aggravated by the COVID-19 crisis. Their professional development needs at all levels, including digital and pedagogical skills for learner-centred quality education, is a matter of urgency.
- Invest in skills development, including social and emotional learning and well-being, for inclusive recovery, decent work and enhanced employability, and sustainable development through reskilling and upskilling opportunities for *all* young people and adults who have lost or are at risk of losing their jobs.
- Narrow the digital divide in education, develop quality open educational resources and build digital commons as a complement to face-to-face learning, with a view to enabling inclusive and equitable technology-supported learning. In so doing, protect learners' privacy, foster digital citizenship and reaffirm education as a public good.

Way forward

9. We will monitor the implementation of these commitments over the next 15 months, collect and exchange good practices, and report on the fulfilment of commitments at the next ordinary session of the Global Education Meeting planned for 2021 (2021 GEM).
10. We request UNESCO and its partners, together with the SDG-Education 2030 Steering Committee, to assess the impact of the COVID-19 crisis on the progress towards the achievement of the SDG 4 and other education-related targets, examine the strategies and priorities to recover and accelerate the progress and propose relevant and realistic benchmarks of key SDG 4 indicators for subsequent monitoring.
11. We invite UNESCO to expeditiously design and lead a consultation in coordination with relevant stakeholders in order to develop a proposal to strengthen the SDG-Education 2030 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. We agree to extend the mandate of the current SDG-Education 2030 Steering Committee members during the consultation process as a transitional measure, until an agreement on a strengthened global education coordination mechanism is reached at the earliest convenience, and not later than the GEM 2021.