

Education and Academia Stakeholder Group

Sectoral position paper for the High-Level Political Forum 2019 Executive summary

The Education and Academia Stakeholder Group endorses fully the vision, principles, goals and targets laid out under SDG 4 within ‘The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development’, in the Incheon Declaration and the ‘Education 2030 Framework for Action’. SDG 4, its targets and means of implementation, especially its adoption of a lifelong learning perspective, explicitly acknowledges the right of every human being to enjoy free and inclusive quality public education. The framing of SDG 4 also implies a whole-sector approach, from early childhood to tertiary education and adult education, acknowledging the interconnected nature of the education sector.

Education and lifelong learning play a crucial role in the development of individuals, communities and societies, contributing to the creation of inclusive, equal and sustainable world. The mutual linkages between education and other goals are clear - education helps eradicate poverty and hunger and promotes peace, the rule of law and respect for human rights. Education is powerful in its potential to strengthen individuals’ skills for decent work and contribute to economic and social development.

Progress in other areas has multiple effects on education. Social and cultural barriers, economic instability and financial crises, environmental degradation and catastrophes, as well as armed conflicts and violence, put millions of children, young people and adults into the risk of not achieving even the minimum of literacy skills, skills for life, work and individual development. A safe and supportive learning environment, quality education and educated teachers are pathways to the empowerment of people and creation of inclusive and equitable societies.

Education and lifelong learning are directly related to work and employment. Education links skills, training and education, by integrating literacy, skills for work and for life, and as such education is the best and most sustainable opportunity for those living in dire material conditions to move out of poverty. It provides people with skills needed for work, but helps them also to become lifelong learners so they can cope with continuous challenges of the fast changing world of work and have better chances for decent work in the globalized economy and unpredictable labor market.

Further on, education and lifelong learning empower people not only by helping them to adapt to the new challenges, but also to challenge and deconstruct the systems that reproduce various kind of inequalities. Critical thinking is thus a tool not only for personal development, but even more for active and participatory citizenship and contribution to the democratic, peaceful and tolerant societies.

Education as a public good is key to promoting social, economic and environmental justice. When it comes to combating the climate change, its contribution ranges from awareness raising, encouragement of people to change attitudes and behavior towards climate change-related problems, the increase of resilience capacities, and of skills and knowledge for sustainable development.

It is proven that education can address structural inequalities and discriminations, paying particular attention to those most in need including those discriminated against based on poverty, gender, disability, ethnicity, language, sexual identity, or migrant or refugee status. One of the most important contributions of education is its potential to reduce gender inequalities and to eliminate gender disparities in education and work, especially by empowering girls and women and providing them equal chances through education.

This requires governments who have not yet done so to enact legal frameworks on the right to education, to work on comprehensive, inclusive and integrative education policies, to increase investment in education and lifelong learning and to fund global, regional and country-level data as a public good, strengthening national, regional and international data collection.