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Middle School Conference

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Middlebury Institute
Monterey, CA

Background Guide for the UNESCO General Conference Committee

SDG 4: Quality Education

Target 4.3: Promoting Universal Access to Affordable & Quality Education After High School*

**technical, vocational and tertiary education, including university*



Target
4.3

By 2030, ensure equal access for all women and men to affordable and quality technical, vocational and tertiary education, including university

Indicators

4.3.1

Participation rate of youth and adults in formal and non-formal education and training in the previous 12 months, by sex



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UNESCO & Education

UNESCO¹ is the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. It is the only UN agency with a mandate to cover all aspects of education. It leads the global and regional coordination and monitoring of the Education 2030 Agenda, which aims to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning opportunities for all.

UNESCO believes that education is a human right that works to raise men and women out of poverty, level inequalities and ensure sustainable development. It supports education systems worldwide and responds to contemporary global challenges through education with gender equality as an underlying principle. Its work encompasses educational development from pre-school to higher education and beyond, with themes such as global citizenship, human rights, health, HIV and AIDS, technical and vocational skills, and more.

UNESCO also provides technical advice, standard setting, innovative projects, capacity-building and networking in the field of education. It works with various partners, such as governments, civil society, NGOs, foundations, institutes and centers, to improve education quality and access. Some of its flagship initiatives include the Global Education Monitoring Report, the UNESCO Institute for Statistics, the International Centre for Technical and Vocational Education and Training (UNEVOC), the Man and the Biosphere

Programme, and the UNESCO Prize for Girls' and Women's Education.²

UNESCO General Conference

The UNESCO General Conference³ is the main governing body of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. It determines the policies and the main lines of work of the Organization, sets the programmes and the budget of UNESCO, elects the Members of the Executive Board and appoints the Director-General every four years¹. The General Conference consists of the representatives of UNESCO's Member States and Associate Members, each having one vote, irrespective of its size or contribution to the budget.

The General Conference meets every two years, usually in November, at the UNESCO Headquarters in Paris. It is attended by Member States and Associate Members, together with observers for non-Member States, intergovernmental organizations and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). The working languages of the General Conference are Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian and Spanish. The General Conference also organizes various side events, such as award ceremonies, exhibitions, panel discussions and cultural performances, to showcase UNESCO's work and achievements.

¹ [UNESCO.org](https://unesco.org)

² <https://unevoc.unesco.org/start.php?p=une&q=UNESCO+and+Education>

³ <https://www.unesco.org/en/general-conference>

Promoting Universal Access to Education After High School

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SDG4 Quality Education

SDG4 Quality Education is one of 17 sustainable development goals established by the United Nations in September 2015.⁴ The full title of SDG 4 is “Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all”⁵

The goal of SDG 4 is to provide children and young people with quality and easy access to education plus other learning opportunities. It also aims to eliminate gender and wealth disparities, and achieve universal access to a quality higher education. It has seven outcome targets and three means of implementation that cover different aspects of education, such as primary and secondary education, early childhood development, vocational training, literacy and numeracy, and education for sustainable development.⁶

SDG 4 is of critical importance because of its transformative effects on the other SDGs. Education liberates the intellect, unlocks the imagination and is fundamental for self-respect. It is the key to prosperity and opens a world of opportunities, making it possible for each of us to contribute to a progressive, healthy society. Education enables upward socioeconomic mobility and reduces inequalities. Education also fosters

global citizenship and promotes a culture of peace and non-violence.⁷

SDG4.3 Education After High School

SDG 4.3 is one of the target outcomes of the Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4), which aims to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all. SDG 4.3 focuses on providing equal access to affordable and quality technical, vocational and tertiary education, including university, for all women and men by 2030.

SDG 4.3 recognizes that education is a human right and a powerful driver of development and social transformation. It also acknowledges that education is not only about acquiring basic skills, but also about enhancing professional skills and competencies that are relevant for the changing world of work. Technical, vocational and higher education can equip learners with the knowledge, skills and attitudes that enable them to contribute to sustainable development and to the well-being of themselves and their communities.

SDG 4.3 has several indicators to measure its progress, such as the participation rate in formal and non-formal education and training, the proportion of youth and adults with information and communications technology (ICT) skills, and the gender parity index in education. According to the latest data, there has been some improvement

⁴ sdgs.un.org/goals

⁵ unesco.org/gem-report/en/monitoring-sdg4

⁶ en.unesco.org/education2030-sdg4/targets

⁷ data.unicef.org

in access to technical, vocational and higher education, especially in developing regions, but significant gaps remain, especially for women, people in rural areas, people with disabilities, refugees and migrants. More efforts are needed to ensure that everyone can benefit from quality and affordable education opportunities that are relevant to their needs and aspirations.⁸

Challenges & Opportunities

SDG 4.3 is a target that aims to ensure equal access for all women and men to affordable and quality technical, vocational and tertiary education, including university, by 2030. However, many countries face various challenges⁹ in meeting this goal, such as:

- Lack of adequate funding and resources for education, especially in developing regions, where public spending on education is often low and insufficient to meet the growing demand for quality and relevant education.
- Lack of qualified and motivated teachers, especially in technical and vocational fields, where there is a shortage of skilled professionals who can impart practical and industry-relevant knowledge and skills to learners.
- Lack of access and inclusion for marginalized groups, such as women, people in rural areas, people with disabilities, refugees and migrants, who often face multiple barriers to education,

such as poverty, discrimination, violence, displacement and lack of recognition of their qualifications.

- Lack of alignment and coherence between education and labor market needs, where there is a mismatch between the skills acquired by learners and the skills required by employers, leading to skills gaps, unemployment and underemployment.

To overcome these challenges, countries need to adopt a holistic and collaborative approach that involves multiple stakeholders, such as governments, civil society, private sector, academia and international organizations. Some of the possible actions that can be taken are:

- Increasing and diversifying the sources of funding for education, such as through domestic resource mobilization, international aid, public-private partnerships and innovative financing mechanisms.
- Improving the quality and relevance of education, such as through curriculum reform, teacher training, quality assurance, accreditation and recognition of qualifications.
- Enhancing the access and inclusion of marginalized groups, such as through affirmative action policies, scholarships, subsidies, flexible learning pathways, distance learning and recognition of prior learning .

⁸ unstats.un.org

⁹ unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000385723.page=253

- Strengthening the linkages between education and labor market needs, such as through labor market information systems, career guidance services, apprenticeships, internships and lifelong learning opportunities.

Trends by Geographic Region

SDG 4.3 is a target that aims to ensure equal access for all women and men to affordable and quality technical, vocational and tertiary education, including university, by 2030. Recent trends¹⁰ by geographic region for reaching SDG 4.3 are as follows:

- Europe and North America: This region has the highest average score for SDG 4.3, with 81.5 out of 100, indicating a high level of achievement and progress. The top five countries in this region are Finland, Sweden, Denmark, Germany and Austria. However, there are still challenges in terms of ensuring equity and inclusion, especially for migrants, refugees and minorities, as well as improving the quality and relevance of education to meet the changing labor market demands.
- Asia and the Pacific: This region has a moderate average score for SDG 4.3, with 67.8 out of 100, indicating a medium level of achievement and progress. The top five countries in this region are Japan, Korea, Republic of Thailand, Georgia and Bhutan. However, there are significant disparities

within and between countries, as well as challenges in terms of increasing and diversifying the funding for education, improving the quality and relevance of education, enhancing the access and inclusion of marginalized groups, and strengthening the linkages between education and labor market needs.

- Latin America and the Caribbean: This region has a moderate average score for SDG 4.3, with 67.6 out of 100, indicating a medium level of achievement and progress. The top five countries in this region are Chile, Uruguay, Costa Rica, Cuba and Argentina². However, there are still challenges in terms of ensuring equity and inclusion, especially for women, indigenous peoples and Afro-descendants, as well as improving the quality and relevance of education to meet the changing labor market demands.
- Africa: This region has the lowest average score for SDG 4.3, with 55.9 out of 100, indicating a low level of achievement and progress. The top five countries in this region are Mauritius, Gabon, Cabo Verde, Senegal and Ghana². However, there are many challenges in terms of increasing and diversifying the funding for education, improving the quality and relevance of education, enhancing the access and inclusion of marginalized groups, and strengthening the linkages between education and labor market needs.

¹⁰ dashboards.sdgindex.org

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- Arab States: This region has a low average score for SDG 4.3, with 60.7 out of 100, indicating a low level of achievement and progress. The top five countries in this region are Tunisia, United Arab Emirates, Oman, Qatar and Bahrain. However, there are still challenges in terms of ensuring equity and inclusion, especially for women and refugees, as well as improving the quality and relevance of education to meet the changing labor market demands.

What Actions Can Students Take?

Here are some things that students can do.

What other ideas do you have?

- Visit local school(s) and ask what school supplies they need. Start a school supply drive in your community. Mentor young people. You can provide tutoring and homework assistance, teach a language or deliver a lesson on the Global Goals.¹¹
- Learn more about the state and progress of global education by reading some of the reports published by various organizations, such as the United Nations, the Global Partnership for Education, and the UN Environment Programme.
- Advocate for increased and diversified funding for education, especially for technical,

vocational and higher education, which are often under-resourced and under-valued.

- Promote the quality and relevance of education by engaging with curriculum reform, teacher training, quality assurance and accreditation processes.
- Support the access and inclusion of marginalized groups, such as women, people in rural areas, people with disabilities, refugees and migrants, who face multiple barriers to education.
- Strengthen the linkages between education and labor market needs by exploring career guidance services, apprenticeships, internships and lifelong learning opportunities.

¹¹ globalgoals.org

 **SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS**



Source: <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/sustainable-development-goals/>