Including Education in the Pact for the Future: An SDG 4 Youth & Student Network Contribution

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Introduction:

Inclusion is the promise towards a fair and equitable education for all. It is critical to ensuring that every youth and student succeeds. Highlighted by UNESCO in the 2020 Global Education Monitoring Report,[1] striving towards inclusive education is non-negotiable, as education is a human right. With the current challenges of our world highlighted in the 2030 Agenda,[2] specifically in the areas of poverty, armed conflict and digital transformation, inclusion must be an essential imperative in all policies.

The Summit of the Future (SOTF)[3] convenes on the 22 to 23 of September at the United Nations Headquarters in New York, United States. One of its outcomes, if inter-governmentally agreed-upon, would be the Pact for the Future.[4] The Pact is action-oriented, including a chapeau followed by 5 chapters: 1) sustainable development and financing for development; 2) international peace and security; 3) science, technology and innovation and digital cooperation; 4) youth and future generations; and 5) transforming global governance. Along with the Pact are two annexures: the Global Digital Compact and the Declaration on Future Generations.

This document introduces the advocacy of the SDG 4 Youth & Student Network[5] – a network hosted by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) as the Global Education Cooperation Mechanisms Inter-Agency Secretariat – for inclusive and equitable education at the SOTF, to uphold peace, sustainable development, youth and future generations. It is essential to **#IncludeEducation** in the Pact and the outcomes of the SOTF for our **#InclusiveFuture**, to ensure that no one is left behind. It brings attention to how education is essential to global cooperation and empowering future generations, calling upon you to join us **in supporting inclusive education systems**, with the Global Education Meeting convened by UNESCO side by side with the G20 meeting on 31 October and 1 November 2024 in Fortaleza, Brazil.

SDG 4 Youth & Student Network:

The SDG 4 Youth & Student Network is an inclusive and representative platform for youth representatives, youth organizations, and student unions worldwide, designed to ensure meaningful

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[1] Global Education Monitoring Report. 2020. *Global Education Monitoring Report, 2020: Inclusion and education: all means all*. Paris, Global Education Monitoring Report.

[2] United Nations. 2024. *The Sustainable Development Agenda*. https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/development-agenda/ (Accessed 14 September 2024)

[3] United Nations. 2024. *Summit of the Future.* https://www.un.org/en/summit-of-the-future (Accessed 14 September 2024)

[4] United Nations. 2024. *Pact for the Future*. https://www.un.org/en/summit-of-the-future/pact-for-the-future-revisions (Accessed 14 September 2024)
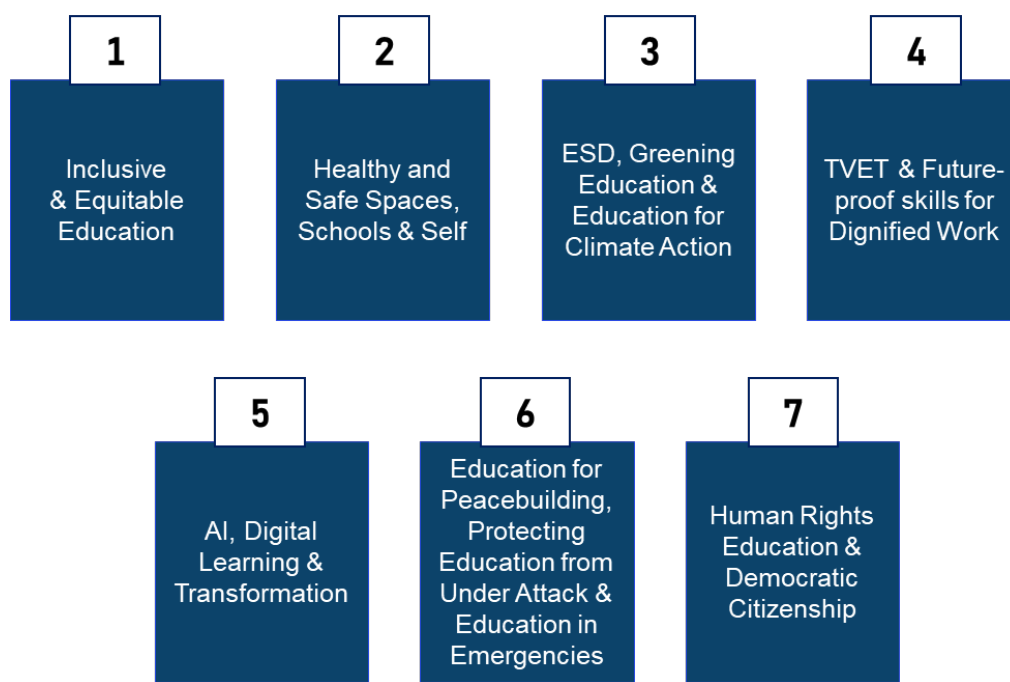
[5] United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. 2024. SDG 4 Youth & Student Network: A Platform for Youth and Students to Take Action for SDG4 Education 2030. https://www.unesco.org/sdg4education2030/en/global-education-cooperation-mechanism-platforms/sdg4-youth-network (Accessed 14 September 2024)

participation in shaping global education policies. We advocate that youth and students are essential stakeholders in education and governance, playing a key role in achieving SDG 4 for universal quality education to improve the quality of education and make it accessible for everyone.

We have partnered with organizations like UNESCO-IESALC, the Global Campaign for Education, the Global Project for Education and various other groups, to shape global education policies, advocacy, outreach and governance. We have also played a key role in events such as the Transforming Education Summit 2022,[6] where the Youth Declaration on Transforming Education[7] – which we contributed to – was presented as young people's inputs to the Transforming Education Summit Chair Summary/UN Secretary-General's Vision Statement. Founded in 2021, the Network was appointed by the mandate of the Global Education Cooperation Mechanism (GCM) and the global apex body for education, the SDG4-Education2030 High-Level Steering Committee, and hosted by UNESCO.

The Network members consist of 170 youth and student activists, advocates, leaders, teachers, researchers, and young professionals across the world, working in their local, national and regional context to uphold SDG 4: Quality Education for All. Our structure consists of an overarching elected Executive Committee consisting of ten representatives for the five UNESCO regions, and seven thematic working groups focusing on the following areas:

1	2	3	4
Inclusive & Equitable Education	Healthy and Safe Spaces, Schools & Self	ESD, Greening Education & Education for Climate Action	TVET & Future-proof skills for Dignified Work

5	6	7
AI, Digital Learning & Transformation	Education for Peacebuilding, Protecting Education from Under Attack & Education in Emergencies	Human Rights Education & Democratic Citizenship

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[6] United Nations. 2022. *Transforming Education Summit: United Nations, New York, 16, 17 & 19 September 2022.* https://www.un.org/en/transforming-education-summit (Accessed 14 September 2024)

[7] United Nations. 2024. *Youth Declaration on Transforming Education.* https://www.un.org/en/transforming-education-summit/youth-declaration (Accessed 14 September 2024)

[Ajmal Raymar](), a member of the SDG 4 Youth & Student Network who is originally from Afghanistan, is working as the Executive Director of [Afghans for Progressive Thinking]() (APT) to uplift Afghan women who don't or didn't have proper access to education. His work includes online training and mentorship programs for Afghan women to empower them to seek higher education.

Education in emergencies:

The Pact of the Future acknowledges in several parts including Chapter 1 and Chapter 2, the detrimental impact of crises such as poverty, inequality, armed conflict, violence, displacement, terrorism, biological risks, and the climate crisis. Education is a human right but unfortunately, not every child can access it. According to UNHCR[8] in 2020, 42% of the 82.4 million forcibly displaced people worldwide were children, and almost half of all refugee children were out of school. Barriers range from legal restrictions in host countries, lack of integration into national education systems, cultural and linguistic limitations, which significantly hindered displaced learners.

While the Pact advocates for youth engagement in the peace and security agenda, such as the development of conflict prevention and resolution, peacebuilding, peace processes, post-conflict processes, emergency platforms, and crisis financing for climate solutions, there is greater need to support the inclusivity of impacted publics. Education Cannot Wait[9] reported in 2023 that 224 million children impacted by crises, needed urgent access to quality education. This includes but is not limited to refugees, migrants, conflict-impacted populations and displaced persons, stateless persons, and indigenous peoples. It focuses on issues such as supporting refugees' access to higher education in host countries, with UNESCO[10] estimating only a total of 3 percent of refugees worldwide were enrolled in higher education in 2021.

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[8] United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. 2020. Global Trends in Forced Displacement – 2020. https://www.unhcr.org/statistics/unhcrstats/60b638e37/global-trends-forced-displacement-2020.html (Accessed 14 September 2024)

[9] Education Cannot Wait. 2024. Results Against All Odds: Education Cannot Wait Reaches 11 Million Children in Crises Worldwide. https://www.educationcannotwait.org/news-stories/press-releases/results-against-all-odds-education-cannot-wait-reaches-11-million (Accessed 14 September 2024)

[10] United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization International Institute for Educational Planning & Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. 2022. *Refugees' Access to Higher Education in their Host Countries: Overcoming the 'Super-Disadvantage': Policy Paper.* Paris, International Institute for Educational Planning.

There is still a disparity in access to education between countries, camps and cities, operations within the same nation, and between boys and girls. A study conducted in developing countries noted that the national laws of host states place restrictions on access to refugee education.[11] For instance, Uganda offers its refugees access to public education, while Bangladesh provides only informal education for non-registered refugees. Furthermore, many refugee children experience learning poverty, meaning that even if they attend school, by the age of 10, they are unable to read or comprehend a simple text or acquire fundamental mathematical skills.[12] While it is essential to support financing, climate awareness, and protection of civilians, it is also important that the Pact includes a focus on supporting vulnerable communities' access to high quality and inclusive education.

Alejandra Molina, a member of the SDG 4 Youth & Student Network from Perú, has led MetaBronx, an organization that for 7 years has been integrating business development and workforce development to build a community-driven innovation ecosystem in The Bronx, unlocking economic opportunities through TVET. This organization has run accelerator Startup Cohorts for under-represented entrepreneurs, and Youth Cohorts that prepare future innovators, reaching to more than one thousand Bronx high school students and youth and working along with more than 70 district and charter New York City schools.

TVET and skills development:

Chapter 1 of the Pact identifies the need for increased investment in quality education and skills to ensure inclusive, accessible and resilient education systems. UNESCO[13] reported that 267 million

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[11] Palik, J. & Østby, G. 2023. Interventions to improve refugee children's access to education and quality learning: A scoping review of existing impact evaluations. *International Review of Education*, 69, 1-2. 227–247.

[12] United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. 2018. *Turn the Tide: Refugee Education in Crisis.* New York, UNHCR.

[13] United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. 2024. *Skills for Work and Life.* https://www.unesco.org/en/skills-work-

young people (ages 15 to 24 years) are not in employment, education or training. UNESCO, the World Bank and UNICEF[14] reported that young people faced a loss of up to $17 trillion (USD) in lifetime earnings, due to the pandemic disrupting their education, with many falling into "learning poverty". The International Labour Organization[15] reports that there are several marginalized groups who would be specifically advantaged by skills development for education, including the following: those living in rural areas for employment purposes where there are weak labor markets; migrant workers to broaden their pool of available skills; students without formal education or with incomplete formal education; individuals who have come from unpaid or low paid family work; persons with disabilities to increase awareness in employment; and young people when transitioning into the labor market.

Skills for work and life are essential, as they provide young people with lifewide learning experiences. Sufficient skills can broaden occupational mobility, combat social barriers for vulnerable groups, address disrupted education experiences, and support underinvested localities such as rural areas. The Incheon Declaration[16] identifies technical and vocational education training (TVET) as essential to address equity issues in society, through developing quality education skills training from secondary school to adult education, with sector-wide policies and ethical public-private partnerships.

Demographic transitions, political instability and climate crises can be directly addressed, according to the UNESCO TVET Strategy 2022-2029[17] through effective TVET systems that address inclusion by envisioning "societies in a future characterized by rapid change". For example, changes in workforce skills due to automation, AI and robotics, requires reconsideration of foundational skills for work and life – in alignment with Chapter 3 of the Pact – especially when reflecting on the need for including young people and vulnerable groups in science, technology and innovation sectors.

life#:~:text=Worldwide%20267%20million%20young%20people,of%20employment%2C%20education%20or%20training. (Accessed 14 September 2024)

[14] United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, The World Bank & United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund. 2021. *The State of the Global Education Crisis: A Path to Recovery.* Washington D.C., Paris, New York, The World Bank, UNESCO, and UNICEF.

[15] International Labour Organization. 2024. *Skills for Social Inclusion.* https://www.ilo.org/skills-and-employability-branch-skills/skills-social-inclusion (Accessed 14 September 2024)

[16] United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization Institute for Information Technologies in Education. 2015. *Education 2030: Incheon Declaration and Framework for Action Towards Inclusive and Equitable Quality Education and Lifelong Learning for All.* https://iite.unesco.org/publications/education-2030-incheon-declaration-framework-action-towards-inclusive-equitable-quality-education-lifelong-learning/ (Accessed 14 September 2024)

[17] United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. 2022. *Transforming Technical and Vocational Education and Training for Successful and just transitions: UNESCO Strategy 2022-2029.* Paris, UNESCO.

Le Dolino, a member of the SDG 4 Youth and Student Network, is running an educational initiative that offers individualized support to STEM learners across the Philippines who do not have access to the crucial intellectual resources to succeed in STEM inquiry. The initiative supports STEM learning outcomes particularly in low-resource spaces, such as those without laboratories or without nearby universities. As part of this work, they coordinate a community-of-practice of almost 2,000 teachers and professionals to improve the teaching of STEM inquiry across the country. They are able to leverage digital spaces to construct a comprehensive online ecosystem to ensure the success of learners in STEM.

Technology and digital learning:

Chapter 3 of the Pact and the Global Digital Compact highlights the importance of inclusion with the development of digital tools and technology, to address the digital divide within and between states that undermines diversity. The digital divide plays a significant role in the education experiences of young people, for example it was found that only 3 out of 4 students in the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)[18] regions had access to sufficient digital tools for remote learning during the pandemic. The evolution of artificial intelligence (AI) is also reported to cause a "second digital divide", due to cost impacting accessibility.[19]

UNESCO's [20] mandate calls for a "human-centered" approach for AI and advanced technological systems across high-income countries, which is also reiterated in the Global Digital Compact. The human-centered orientation includes the consideration of open resources, and considerations of areas such as the setting of national targets and targeted investment in technological infrastructure as recommended in the 2023 Global Education Monitoring Report on Technology in Education.[21]

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[18] Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development. 2024. Digital Divide in Education. https://www.oecd.org/en/topics/sub-issues/digital-divide-in-education.html (Accessed 14 September 2024)

[19] Trucano, M. 2023. AI and the Next Digital Divide in Education. https://www.brookings.edu/articles/ai-and-the-next-digital-divide-in-education/ (Accessed 14 September 2024)

[20] United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. 2024. *Artificial Intelligence in Education.* https://www.unesco.org/en/digital-education/artificial-intelligence?hub=84636 (Accessed 14 September 2024)

[21] Global Education Monitoring Report. 2023. Technology in Education: A Tool on Whose Terms? Paris, GEMR.

This should reiterate the needs of vulnerable publics as stated in the Compact, for groups such as women and girls, children and youth, disabled persons and other marginalized groups in design and implementation. This can also be expanded to consider the specific needs of vulnerable groups at the national level. For example, gender disparities in STEM are alarming, as the 2023 Global Education Monitoring Report[22] states that the amount of women STEM graduates is at 35%, and has not changed in the past decade. Digital technologies can aid persons with disabilities, with examples such as Alternative and Augmentative Communication (AAC) devices, such as iPads or tablets, that serve as critical tools for learning and language expression for non- or minimally-speaking students. Another example is students in rural areas who do not have access to strong connectivity or digital devices, in alignment with the International Research and Training Centre for Rural Education[23] under the auspices of UNESCO INRULED.

The Compact has also committed to the UNESCO Recommendation on the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence,[24] advocating for the ethical governance of AI. Digital ethics is also essential to ensure inclusion in education, when considering how vulnerable publics – such as young people – are impacted by privacy and security, intellectual property, and other ethical considerations in digital education.

Future Generations:

As acknowledged in Chapter 4 of the Pact and the Declaration on Future Generations, the current generation of young people is the largest in recorded history. In accordance with the Youth Declaration on Transforming Education, 450,000 young people across the world advocated that we have:

> *For too long, we have been excluded or only tokenistically included in the policy and decision-making processes affecting our lives, livelihoods, and futures. In transforming education, we demand that our voices be heard, our lived experiences valued, our demands addressed, and our efforts, leadership, and agency acknowledged.*[25]

With only 2.8% of parliamentarians across the world being aged 30 and under, it is essential that decision-makers include youth and student leadership at their education institutions and in wider society.[26] It is also essential that there is a commitment to Our Common Agenda,[27] which calls for governments to work with young people to promote political representation for youth such as addressing the voting age, ability to stand for elected office, and youth participatory roles.

This includes providing sufficient protection for the human rights of young people, such as protection from arbitrary arrest, violence, political exclusion, child labor and modern slavery, historical and

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[22] ibid

[23] United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization International Research and Training Centre for Rural Education. 2024. About UNESCO INRULED. https://inruled.bnu.edu.cn/aboutinruled/missionandfunctions/index.html#:~:text=The%20UNESCO%20International%20Research%20and,economic%20development%20in%20rural%20areas. (Accessed 14 September 2024)

[24] United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. 2023. *Recommendation on the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence.* https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/recommendation-ethics-artificial-intelligence (Accessed 14 September 2024)

[25] United Nations. 2024. *Youth Declaration on Transforming Education.* https://www.un.org/en/transforming-education-summit/youth-declaration (Accessed 14 September 2024), 2.

[26] Inter-Parliamentary Union. 2024. I SAY YES TO YOUTH IN PARLIAMENT! https://www.ipu.org/i-say-yes (Accessed 14 September 2024)

[27] United Nations. 2021. *Our Common Agenda – Report of the Secretary-General.* New York, UN.

structural inequalities such as racism and sexism. It also includes active support for student activism and campaigning, combating criminalization of young people in their education experiences.[28] It also includes active financial support and resourcing provided to the work and leadership of young people in areas related to education.

There is now a significant amount of literature on student agency in policy and its influence on supporting sustainable education systems, peace studies, skills development, and innovation.[29] It is important to include young people in education decision-making to ensure that the transformative moments of education are supported through supporting young people as citizens. Inclusion of youth in education and governance is essential, as it ensures that their perspectives are included in the policies that shape their future.

Recommendations:

Recognizing the urgency to strengthen our multilateral cooperation mechanisms, the Network believes it is essential to **#IncludeEducation** for our **#InclusiveFuture** in education to address poverty, conflict and digital transformation for future generations.

It is vital to insist that we focus on evidence-based policy and the financing of education across the world, to enable all stakeholders to construct inclusive, adaptable and sustainable alternatives for the future.

The following provides our recommendations for the Pact for the Future and the outcomes of the SOTF, concerning inclusion and equity in education for the following:

Education in emergencies

- Strengthen emergency and armed conflict response mechanisms, with emphasis on strengthening infrastructure and physical and psychological care for communities.
- Build local capacities to promote resilience in conflict by empowering and listening to youth and children.
- Having effective implementation of action plans and training strategies for institutions, teachers, parents, and students, is crucial to address education in emergencies.
- Consider and actively combat the barriers stopping access to education from marginalized communities in areas such as legal restrictions, lack of integration in national education systems, and cultural and linguistic limitations
- Effective research and data collection for the identification of strategies for improving refugee, displaced, and migrant education (among others), without leaving aside the importance of mobilizing and optimizing resources to protect schools.
- Ethical and effective support from donors, humanitarian organizations and governments prioritizing education in emergency response plans through effective funding to programs and enrollment processes of individuals affected by violence or conflict.

TVET and skills development

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[28] SAIH - Norwegian Students' and Academics' International Assistance Fund. 2023. *Activism under Attack.* Oslo, SAIH.
[29] Klemenčič, M. 2015. What is Student Agency? An Ontological Exploration in the Context of Research on Student Engagement (pp. 11-29). *Council of Europe Higher Education Series No. 20.* Strasbourg, Council of Europe Publishing.

- Provide more accessible and equitable TVET that responds to the demographic and contextual trends and necessities, by creating partnerships between governments, ministries, education institutions, the private sector, and young people.
- Invest in the learning continuity and quality, gathering support from public, private and non-governmental sectors that allow the allocation of specific funds not only in main but marginalized regions so that the TVET programs are strengthened.
- Support and coordinate ethical apprenticeships and internships to support industry transitions between education institutions to the private sector.
- Provide flexible skills development qualifications in secondary education, higher education, adult education, non-formal and informal education, to provide multiple pathways for learner success.
- Provide rigorous economic analysis at the national and regional level, that precedes investment and comprehends the existing skill gaps.
- Highlight the role of investing in human resources, including teachers, institution leaders, trainers and general educators, recognizing their fundamental role in reinforcing the TVET ecosystem.
- Adapt skills development training for emerging markets and future needs, including socioemotional skills, digital skills and greening skills in alignment with lifelong learning initiatives.

Technology and digital learning

- Implement targeted initiatives to encourage and support equitable access to digital learning tools and resources for all, from low-income settings, to people with disabilities, to girls and other marginalized groups.
- Support effective development and distribution of affordable and user-friendly digital platforms that, along with frameworks that facilitate the use of technology in the education system, enable inclusivity.
- Invest in effective data connectivity and accessible technology plans for marginalized groups, such as women and girls, or those in rural areas or small island nations.
- Support ethical and "human-centered" orientations to AI, through collective and inclusive digital governance at the national and regional level.
- Integrate new technologies into curricula and pedagogy to empower students and teachers, specifically focusing on technology that can support vulnerable publics such as disabled students, and migrant and refugee students.
- Support investments for technology in the education sector is key to move forward to the achievement of rising digital learning, with special focus on financing connectivity and digital infrastructure such as effective internet access.
- Support STEM subjects in school to encourage women and girls are included in this work.
- Support multilateral coordination from technology providers, private sector, educational institutions, governments, and non-governmental organizations, to create robust, flexible and high-quality strategies for digital learning design and teacher training.

Youth and student engagement

- Support the Youth Declaration on Transforming Education, and embed it into policy and practice.
- Ensure that young people are included in education and governance decision-making, including considering the voting age, capacity to run as an elected official, and in youth participatory roles.
- Uphold and protect the human rights of young people in areas such as arbitrary arrest, violence, political exclusion, child labor and modern slavery, historical and structural inequalities such as racism and sexism.

- Invest in and resource capacity building for student and youth-led initiatives
- Providing training, platforms and resources for youth and students to effectively advocate for global solutions and policy influence can be key to create environments of leadership and sustainable development.

So join our movement and call to #IncludeEducation for our #InclusiveFuture at the SOTF by sharing this document and our campaign

Disclaimer: This research piece is published with the inputs from the SDG 4 Youth & Student Network members. The ideas and opinions expressed in this article are those of the authors; they are not necessarily those of UNESCO and do not commit the Organization. UNESCO does not endorse any project or organization mentioned in the article.