



unesco

# Formal Dialogue on the Initiative on the evolving right to education in a lifelong learning perspective

14 December 2023, 13:30-17:30

UNESCO HQ Room X and Online



Rawpixel.com/Shutterstock.com

In partnership with:



## About

Education as a fundamental human right is enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted on 10 December 1948. The right to education was further developed in several legally binding human rights instruments, including the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, and the [UNESCO Convention against Discrimination in Education](#) (CADE) - the first and only binding instrument entirely dedicated to the right to education, adopted on 14 December 1960. The right to education and lifelong learning has been positioned as the core principle of the Sustainable Development Goal on education (SDG4).

In states' efforts to meet their commitments to making this right a reality according to the 4As framework, many have made appreciable progress. A significant focus on improving accessible education was observed. To date, 62% guarantee the right to education without discrimination in their national constitution and/or law. With law and policies that remove fees in basic education, important progress has also been made in advancing free education, this led to the number of out-of-school children and adolescent dropping almost in half since 2000. Efforts were additionally made on the quality of education by assessing the achievement of learning outcomes, which demonstrate states' will to advance acceptable education. Regarding states' progress on making education effectively available for all, most school facilities indicators remained stable or improved between 2015 and 2020. For instance, electricity coverage in educational infrastructures for

primary and secondary education increased over this period. On top of that, from 2015 to 2020 states emphasized their efforts to adapt education for students with disabilities across all levels of education, especially in upper secondary education as the proportion of adapted infrastructures went from 46% to 56%.

However, despite the progress, as Our Common Agenda (OCA) Policy Brief 10 “Transforming Education” posits, education is beset by twin crises of equity and relevance, being no longer fit for purpose. Hundreds of millions of children and young people remain out of school, the number has risen by 6 million since 2021, and many of those in school are not even acquiring the basic skills. Worldwide 267 million young people aged 15-24 are still not in any form of employment, education or training. Over 763 million youth and adults (2/3 women) lacked basic literacy skills in 2023. The global literacy rate for people aged 65 and above was 78% in 2017. However, it is important to note that the percentage of youth/adults with information and communications technology skills, is increasingly growing. For instance, among 32, mostly high-income, countries with available data on one of the nine self-reported ICT skills monitored, the ability of adults to manage software, 24 show an improvement of at least five percentage points between 2015 and 2019 (GEM report 2023). Regarding pre-school, globally, the participation rate in organized learning (one year before the official primary entry age) has been stable at 70% since 2010, through there is an uneven distribution across regions. The lowest pre-primary participation rates are in sub-Saharan Africa (47% in 2021) and Northern Africa and Western Asia (46% in 2022).

Beyond this reality, with existential climate challenges, exponential technological change, rapidly changing demographics and growing polarization, uncertainty and distrust, the very relevance of contemporary education systems is being questioned like never before.

The persistent challenges compounded by the new realities, and the new demands on education, have been compelling to reflect on whether the existing international normative framework could be further reinforced to ensure its enduring relevance. This is as recalled in the OCA Policy Brief 10 against the backdrop that education systems still remain focused on preparing children and young people for their adult life, rather than supporting them and learners of all ages to learn and thrive throughout their lives. The latter approach referring to lifelong learning is a more comprehensive one, clearly aligned with states’ commitments to the Tashkent Declaration of 2022 on early childhood care and education and the Marrakesh Framework of Action of 2022 related to adult learning and education.

As a contribution to the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), and to mark the 63<sup>rd</sup> anniversary of the UNESCO Convention against Discrimination in Education, UNESCO, in partnership with the UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Education and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), is organizing a formal dialogue on the [Initiative on the evolving right to education in a lifelong learning perspective](#) to discuss the findings to date, foster a global consultation, and explore the ways forward in shaping the new social contract for education and addressing the twin crises of equity and relevance through the normative framework on the right to education throughout life.

## Background

---

Education as a human right means that the right to education is legally guaranteed for all by the international normative framework. It also means that, based on these legal guarantees, countries have the obligation to respect, protect and fulfil this right and are accountable for violations or deprivations. Despite

the well-established rights and related obligations, eliminating inequalities and disparities and ending the persistent discrimination remain serious challenges to tackle. As emphasized in the Secretary General Policy Brief 10, progress towards the education-related Sustainable Development Goals has been faltered amidst the widening wealth inequalities.

The CADE [Tenth Consultation](#) showed that, while existing barriers and rights violations remain pervasive, States are encountering new realities and challenges such as digitalization of education, insufficient relevance of education programmes, exacerbation of inequalities, human movement, climate change, rapid changes in the world of work, just to name a few.

The Initiative on the evolving right to education within a lifelong learning perspective was formally pre-launched following the [International Seminar](#) organized in December 2021, which aimed at advancing the discussion on the implications of the new realities on education and lifelong learning, as well as further identifying the areas that need greater regulation in order to respond to new and emerging challenges (see [full report here](#)).

There is a need to strengthen the discourse on the wider purpose of education and learning in a world that is prone to increasing inequality and climate change and further reinforce and clarify the rights and obligations in relation to lifelong learning, inclusion and equality, displaced persons, refugees and migrants, digital learning considerations and enhancing the interdependence of human rights.

Building on the [Futures of Education Report](#), that explicitly suggests broadening our understanding of the right to education towards lifelong learning across different times and spaces, and responding to the need to equipping learners and societies with new skills, capacities, and mindsets for a sustainable and just future and thus transform the education systems across the world, as recalled in the Secretary General Policy Brief 10, this Initiative aims to explore the possibility to update the international normative framework to support this transformation.

## **Present roadmap for the evolving international framework**

---

The current roadmap in place for this Initiative was designed around seizing key education milestone events in 2022/3 to deep dive into the specific components of the right to education. Most notably, these included (in chronological order):

- [Third World Higher Education Conference \(WHEC2022\)](#): Based on a [policy paper](#) elaborated, a roundtable entitled '[New approaches to the right to higher education](#)' served to have a comprehensive understanding of the evolving aspects specific to the right to higher education.
- [Seventh International Conference on Adult Education \(CONFINTEA VII\)](#): A panel discussion was held on 'Adult Learning and Education within the New Social Contract for Education: Towards a right to lifelong learning'. An occasion to take stock of the global efforts made in adult learning and examine how the right to education can take these into consideration, especially in light of the Marrakech Framework for Action.
- [Transforming Education Pre-Summit](#): A [side-meeting was organized by UNESCO and its partners](#), which is framed around the extended right to education in order to put the rights-based approach on the table for discussion regarding the transformation of education.
- As defined by the [Transforming Education Summit](#), the purpose of education today is to encompass four dimensions: learning to learn, learning to live together, learning to do and learning to be.

Grounded in human rights, the UN SG Vision statement invites to rethink the purpose and content of education in the 21<sup>st</sup> century on the basis of the [Futures of Education Report](#), recognising the importance of ensuring the right to quality education throughout life. This report specifically suggests broadening the understanding of the right to education towards lifelong learning across different times and spaces.

- [Second World Conference on Early Childhood Care and Education \(WCECCE\)](#): The need to adopt a rights-based approach to expand the legal framework were reflected in a [policy paper](#) and formed an integral part of the main discussions during the Conference.
- [Consultation on the revision of the 1974 Recommendation](#): The updated and new content of the revised Recommendation will allow to frame the discussion on components of the right to education related to human rights education and the aims of education.

Besides, multistakeholder consultations consisted of conducting online ‘global conversation’, organising the International Seminar, as well as other events targeting specific constituencies – such as for instance youth consultation on the occasion of Human Rights Day 2022. Discussion on this agenda also formed part of the recent engagement with the UN Human rights Council. In addition, all education-related events and initiatives are leveraged to inform and galvanise support from the public and all stakeholders regarding this Initiative, advocating for the vision around an evolving right to education within a lifelong learning perspective.

This formal dialogue will be thus the occasion to share the consultations and research findings, notably through the periodically updated policy-oriented research paper, have in-depth discussion on the suggestions, and discuss next steps.

## Objective and main expected outcomes

---

The formal dialogue, which is conceived as a follow-up discussion to the Transforming Education Summit (TES), aims at discussing and defining the future roadmap towards the development of a framework for the review and expansion of the international normative framework, placing a particular emphasis on the legal implications of the implementation of the TES vision and flagships.

In this context, its specific objectives are to:

- Share the findings to date of the Initiative on the evolving right to education including from the research policy paper and the road map developed, and discuss them to gain further feedback;
- Based on the research policy paper, discuss the areas that need further regulation and clarification in the international normative framework to discuss what it takes to address the twin crisis of equity and relevance in education, including specific suggestions put forward, in light of education trends and emerging challenges;
- Discuss and agree on modalities and next steps, with a view to engaging in the process of strengthening the normative framework on the right to education.

## Modalities, format and participation

---

The formal dialogue will bring together senior officials and representatives from Member States, national and international experts, UN agencies, civil society representatives and youth, to discuss the findings of the Initiative and modalities.

The discussion will build upon the policy-oriented research paper, which has been prepared based on consultations and an in-depth literature review on the trends, issues and challenges of each of the four areas<sup>1</sup> examined under the initiative, and an in-depth analysis of legislative and policy practices in force in several countries. The paper develops reflections and arguments which allow to clearly define the scope of the evolution, and advocates for the inclusion or strengthening of certain rights and obligations within the international legal framework.

The formal dialogue will thus build on the Initiative's findings. Following an **opening session**, including keynote speeches and ministerial intervention showcasing recent developments at country level, **two panel sessions** will ensue. The consultation will **conclude with a discussion on modalities and next steps**. Each session will begin with a brief panel Q&A to frame the discussion and the moderator will then open the floor to all participants.

## Resources

- [Website on the Initiative on the Evolving Right to Education](#)
- Research Paper (Main reference document for the Meeting) (forthcoming)
- Background Thematic Reports on right to education and evolving agenda:
  - Global report on climate change and right to education (2023) (forthcoming)
  - Report on lifelong learning entitlements (2023) (forthcoming)
  - Report on regulation of non-state actors (2023) (forthcoming)
  - Report on homeschooling (2023-24) (forthcoming)
  - [Building and strengthening the legal framework on ECCE rights: achievements, challenges and actions for change](#) (2022)
  - [Right to higher education: unpacking the international normative framework in light of current trends and challenges](#) (2022)
  - [Minding the data: protecting learners' privacy and security](#) (2022)
  - [The impact of climate displacement on the right to education](#) (2020)

---

<sup>1</sup> Ensuring learning throughout life; reinforcing equality and inclusion; education delivery and online learner protection; and holistic rights, systems and governance.