

Every learner matters and matters equally

Making education truly inclusive

High-level policy dialogue on the occasion of the 30th Anniversary of Salamanca Statement

13 March 2024, 14.00-17.00

UNESCO Headquarters
Paris, France

Background

“Let’s make sure today’s learners and future generations can access the education they need, to create a more sustainable, inclusive, just and peaceful world for all.”

UN Secretary-General António Guterres
at the opening of the Transforming Education Summit, New York, September 2022

Despite significant progress in making education inclusive in the last decade, deep disparities remain and 250 million children and youth are still denied their right to education.¹ Poverty, geographical location, gender, language, disability, ethnicity, migration, or displacement status continue to dictate and limit education opportunities.

Additionally, the challenge of inclusion was heightened by the COVID-19 pandemic which amplified a pre-existing education crisis and particularly affected the most vulnerable and marginalized learners. Millions were excluded from learning altogether during school closures because of socio-economic status, gender, disability and limited access to technology.

Inclusive policies are imperative to reach Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4) to “ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all”, which is essential for the realization of the 2030 Agenda.

The [Salamanca Statement](#) adopted and widely endorsed at the World Conference organized by UNESCO and the Ministry of Education and Science of Spain in Salamanca, Spain in 1994

¹ UNESCO (2023), [SDG 4 mid-term progress review: progress since 2015 has been far too slow](#). Paris, Global Education Monitoring Report.

established the fundamental principle of inclusion at school: “All children should learn together, wherever possible, regardless of any difficulties or differences they may have. Inclusive schools must recognize and respond to the diverse needs of their students”.² Participants at Salamanca considered the fundamental policy shifts required to promote inclusive education, namely ensuring that schools serve all children, particularly those defined as having special educational needs.

Since then, the concept of inclusion has broadened, emphasising the need to reach *all* learners, under the assumption that every learner matters equally and has the right to receive relevant, equitable and effective educational opportunities.

In this regard, the [UNESCO International Forum on inclusion and equity in education](#) held in Cali, Colombia in September 2019 urged policymakers and practitioners to ensure that all people have access to lifelong learning opportunities irrespective of gender, race or ethnicity, ability, migrant status or other characteristics. As stated in the [Cali Commitment](#), inclusion “represents a commitment to making preschools, schools, and other education settings, places in which everyone is valued and belongs, and diversity is seen as enriching”.³

More recently, the importance of ensuring inclusive education systems cater for the needs of the most vulnerable learners and communities was further stressed during the United Nations Transforming Education Summit held in New York, USA in September 2022.

Efforts are being made in many countries to move educational policy and practice in a more inclusive direction. However, measures adopted by countries are still insufficient and have had an incipient impact on educational practice. The complexity of the transformations that inclusive education demands requires changes in thinking and practice at every level of an education system. This is an evolving long-term process that will beneficially impact not only on education, but also diversity, solidarity and cooperation, and contribute to more peaceful, equitable and sustainable societies.

Every learner matters and matters equally, this is what inclusion is about. It is not an easy task. Inclusion calls for transformation – for a paradigm shift in the philosophy and practice of education – away from a “one-size fits all” approach.

Purpose of the event

The overall purpose of the event is to make the case for fostering inclusion and equity in education. It will bring together high-level ministries of education representatives as key partners to foster policy dialogue on how countries are prioritizing and promoting inclusion in education.

Expected outcomes

² UNESCO and Spanish Ministry of Education and Science (1994), [The Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education](#). Paris, UNESCO, p. 11.

³ UNESCO (2019), [Cali commitment to equity and inclusion in education](#). Paris, UNESCO, p. 1.

- Enhanced awareness of the potential of inclusion in education in bringing new opportunities in a digitalized and globalized world, in view of technological, economic, and social transformation.
- Increased awareness of educational policies from early childhood to higher education that are effective in promoting inclusion in education.

Participants

Around 400 participants are expected to attend the high-level policy dialogue including: ministries of education and other government officials; Ambassadors and Permanent Delegates of the Permanent Delegations to UNESCO; education practitioners and educators; researchers and experts; representatives of intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations supporting inclusive education.

Format

The high-level in-person event will include two moderated thematic panels of approximately 60 minutes each. The sessions will be webcast.

Interpretation will be provided in English, French, Spanish and International Sign Language.

A cultural event will close the panel discussions.

The high-level panel discussion will be followed by the **Global Inclusive Schools' Forum** on **14-15 March 2024**, in UNESCO's Headquarters in Paris, France.

Contact

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Provisional Agenda

Wednesday 13th March 2024

14.00 – 17.00

14.00 – 14.40	Official opening Setting the scene <i>Interactive discussion with experts and partners on progress towards Sustainable Development Goal 4.</i>
14.40 – 15.00	<i>Interactive session</i>
15.00 – 16.45	<u>Moderated High-level Roundtable I:</u> From Salamanca until today: what progress and what challenges? <i>The momentum for change generated by the Salamanca Statement favoured the development of local, national and international policies and strategies to enhance learning opportunities for all. It also contributed to transforming the perspective of inclusion in society. Nevertheless, there is an urgent need to implement policies that promote inclusion and equity more swiftly and decisively, thus helping to ensure the right to education for all and to move towards sustainable social development.</i> <i>The roundtable will explore challenges and strategies to overcome persistent barriers for vulnerable and marginalized groups and celebrate progress in moving towards education systems that leave no one behind, the promise of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.</i> <u>Moderated High-level Roundtable II:</u> Inclusion to ensure a better future in a fast-evolving world <i>The environmental, social and economic consequences associated with climate change, rapid technological innovation, persistent inequalities, growing polarization, increasing number of migrants, refugees and displaced persons due to war, emergencies, protracted conflicts, and climate change urgently require the transformation of education into a more inclusive one.</i> <i>The roundtable will discuss the need to adopt an inclusive approach in education to build futures that are socially more just, economically inclusive, and environmentally sustainable.</i>
16.45 – 17.00	Official closing and key highlights