Fifth North and Central Asia Multi-Stakeholder Forum on Implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals

Building Back Better from COVID-19 while Advancing the Full Implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

Session 4: SDG 4 Quality Education

Virtual Meeting Format
6 October 2021, 12:00 – 13:50 hours (UTC+6)

CONCEPT NOTE

Background

Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4 aims to ensure inclusive, equitable, quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development recognizes that education at all levels and the support for its improvement are an important pillar of sustainable development. SDG 4 encompasses all levels of education from pre-primary to higher education and all dimensions such as access to quality and equitable learning, universal literacy and numeracy as well as skills development through enabling inclusive and effective learning environment and lifelong learning opportunities for all and leaving no one behind.

The overall picture for achieving SDG 4 in North and Central Asia (NCA) is mixed. While very good progress has been made in some areas, such as almost universal access to primary and secondary education, the subregion is not on track to achieve all targets under SDG 4. Figure 1 below shows that targets 4.1.1 (reading and maths) and 4.5.1
(reducing education inequality) are even regressing, while targets 4.2.2 (enrollment in pre-primary education) and 4.c.1 (teacher training) are lagging behind. Focused action is therefore urgently needed to accelerate trends for these targets.

**Figure 1: Progress of Goal 4 in North and Central Asia**

![Progress of Goal 4 in NCA](image)

*Source: Asia Pacific SDG Gateway*

Moreover, according to the 5-Year Progress Review of SDG 4 – Education 2030 in the Asia-Pacific (UNESCO and UNICEF, 2021), in terms of equity and inclusion in relation to SDG 4 there are challenges related to external (wider societal) barriers and internal (education-specific) barriers that prevent excluded children, youth and adults from benefiting from quality education.\(^{ii}\) The UNESCO Global Education Monitoring report also highlights that medical-focused views on disability continue to create segregation in education, with many more students excluded or discriminated against on a number of grounds, including poverty, ethnicity, language, sexual orientation and religion.\(^{iii}\) In addition, COVID-19 pandemic has further exacerbated these existing challenges in equity and inclusion, creating more obstacles for vulnerable groups to access learning.

To address these challenges, the Session will focus on **pre-school education** and **equitable access to learning services** in NCA countries.

According to a recent study, children who complete quality early childhood education and care programmes show higher academic performance\(^{iv}\). Provision of pre-school education is not adequately available. It varies widely across NCA countries and there is a notable gap between urban and rural areas in accessing pre-school education services. Moreover, mere preprimary enrollment doesn’t ensure a child’s proper development. Preprimary teacher training and pupil-teacher ratios directly define pre-schooler’s academic skills, but there is a lack of data in NCA indicating whether these targets are on track. At the same time, pre-primary education provides the highest return
on investment of all education sub-sectors. Yet, it receives the smallest share of government expenditure compared to primary, secondary and tertiary education. Less than 2% of education budgets are allocated to pre-primary education in low-income countries.

Building back better after the COVID-19 pandemic, countries in the subregion should further explore digitalized learning processes and application of blended-learning formats through expanded usage of electronic educational platforms. Last year has explicitly shown major barriers in implementing blended-learning formats - exacerbating inequitable access to learning services. Lack of digital skills both of students and teachers, patchy access to the Internet, especially in rural regions, and insufficient provision of devices became a bottleneck, leaving thousands of students behind. Notably, teacher training approaches across NCA countries are still not on track (see Figure 1, 4.c.1 progress).

There is also still discrimination and rejection in education participation due to disability, gender, age, location, poverty, ethnicity, language, migration, etc. Lack of disaggregated data and issues with defining “disability” mean that challenges remain overlooked. In 2019, UNICEF reported that more than 75% of children with disabilities in Eastern and Central Europe and in Central Asia did not have access to inclusive and quality education. This situation is likely to have worsened due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

**Objectives and Expected Outcomes**

This session will discuss the key dimensions of quality education in relation to pre-school education and access to equitable learning services in North and Central Asia. The discussions are expected to contribute to:

- Sharing of national experiences in providing accessibility of education services with particular focus on digital education and expanded opportunities for equitable access for all;
- Identifying country-specific and subregional challenges in implementing SDG 4 and formulating potential solutions and mechanisms.

Key discussion points and recommendations from this session will feed into the next Asia Pacific Forum for Sustainable Development (APFSD) and the 2022 High Level Political Forum (HLPF).
Participants

The session is open to all stakeholders interested in quality education, including but not limited to:

- Representatives of government institutions overseeing pre-school and secondary education sectors;
- Managers and staff members of pre-school and secondary school educational institutions, edupreneurs and edtech companies;
- Civil society organizations promoting children’s rights and well-being;
- Experts from think tanks and academia leading research projects on digitalization of education, inclusion and teacher training; and
- Representatives from international development partners.

Co-organizers

The session is co-organized by ESCAP, UNESCO and UNICEF.

Tentative Programme

*all times in Almaty local time [UTC +6]

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<td>12:00 – 12:30</td>
<td><strong>Housekeeping Announcements</strong>: Natalja Wehmer, Economic Affairs Officer, ESCAP [2 min]</td>
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<td><strong>Minute of Silence for Turkmenistan’s Day of Remembrance</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Moderator</strong>: Mr. Rafis Abazov, Honorary Director of the Institute for Sustainable Development named after Ban Ki-moon</td>
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<td><strong>Welcome and Opening Remarks</strong>:</td>
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<td>• Ms. Michiko Enomoto, Deputy Head, Subregional Office for North and Central Asia, ESCAP</td>
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<td>• Ms. Meirgul Alpysbayeva, Education National Professional Officer UNESCO Almaty Cluster Office for Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan</td>
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<td>• Mr. Parmosivea Soobrayan, Regional Education Adviser, UNICEF Europe and Central Asia Regional Office</td>
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<td><strong>Keynote Speech</strong>: [7 min]</td>
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<td><em>Modern Trends and Innovative Approaches in Teacher Training in Times of COVID-19</em></td>
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| 12:30 – 13:10| Presentations on Pre-school Education [15 min]                         |          | Overview of pre-school education in the subregion, highlighting recent trends and potentially overlooked areas for national policy improvement and multi-stakeholder involvement, in areas such as early childhood education and care, teacher training and retention, as well as financing. | Ms. Ivelina Borisova, Early Childhood Development Advisor for Europe and Central Asia, UNICEF [9 min]
|              |                                                                        |          |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               | Mr. Thomas Radinger, Analyst, Early Childhood Education and Care, Directorate for Education and Skills, OECD [6 min] |
|              | Discussants and Q&A [20 min]                                           |          | Discussion around pre-school education by leading experts on early childhood development, teacher training and financing.                                                                                   | Ms. Elena Ten, Deputy Head of the General Directorate for Policy Formulation and Strategic Development of the Preschool Education Sector, Ministry of Preschool Education, Uzbekistan [4 min]
|              |                                                                        |          |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               | Ms. Gaukhar Kiikova, Head, Institute of Childhood OYNA, Kazakhstan [4 min]                           |
|              |                                                                        |          |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               | Ms. Aigul Kamalova, Teacher, Kyrgyzstan [4 min]                                                     |
|              |                                                                        |          |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               | Q&A [10 min]                                                                                         |
| 13:10 - 13:44| Presentation on Equitable Access to Learning Services [8 min]           |          | This part of Session 4 will reflect on multifaceted aspects of access to and quality of education, namely digitalization, inclusion, and rural and urban education gaps.                     | Ms. Anna Cristina D’Addio, Senior Policy Analyst (Thematic Lead), Global Education Monitoring Report, UNESCO |
|              | Discussants and Q&A [26 min]                                           |          | Experts on disability inclusion, digitalization of education and representatives of grassroots initiatives to narrow down Internet access gap will amplify messages from main presentation.                        | Ms. Zakhira Begaliyeva, Director, “iTeachMe” competence development centre, Kazakhstan [4 min]
|              |                                                                        |          |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               | Mr. Aziz Soltobaev, Co-founder, Kyrgyz Internet Society, Kyrgyzstan [4 min]                         |
• Ms. Diana Koroleva, Director, Laboratory for Educational Innovation Research, Higher School of Economics, Russian Federation [4 min]
• Q&A [10 min]

13:44-13:50 Wrap-up [6 min]
• Participant’s Feedback on the Session, ESCAP [4 min]
• Concluding Remarks, Moderator [2 min]

Guiding Questions for the Session

• How has the COVID-19 pandemic affected the ability of the relevant stakeholders to pursue SDG 4? Have national strategies/implementation processes or needs changed or shifted because of the pandemic? How will the education sector address COVID-19 impact such as accumulated learning losses?
• What are the main challenges in ensuring pre-school education and equitable access to learning services in the sub-region? How can pre-school education and access to learning services be inclusive and sustainable?
• Which best practices or innovative approaches can accelerate progress of North and Central Asia on SDG 4? How to prioritize the most vulnerable group of learners have an inclusive access to quality learning?

Further Information and Registration

The 2021 subregional SDG Forum is taking place in virtual modality. It is conducted in English and Russian languages and is open to all interested participants.

• Online registration for the Subregional SDG Forum is possible here or via QR code
• Detailed information will be available on the official website here.
• For further information, please contact escap-sonca@un.org and m.alypsabayeva@unesco.org

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1 ESCAP’s North and Central Asia (NCA) subregion includes the following nine ESCAP member States: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan.
2 UNESCO and UNICEF, 2021. 5-Year Progress Review of SDG 4 – Education 2030 in Asia-Pacific
3 UNESCO 2021. Central and Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia Report - Inclusion and Education: All Means All
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