

Global Education Meeting

31 October – 1 November 2024

Fortaleza, Brazil

Fortaleza Declaration

*Unlocking the transformative power of education
for peaceful, equitable and sustainable futures*





Preamble

1. We, Ministers, heads and members of country delegations, and representatives of United Nations agencies, humanitarian and development partners, international and regional organizations, civil society organizations, the teaching profession, youth and students, the private sector and foundations, have gathered in Fortaleza, Brazil, on 31 October and 1 November 2024, for the 2024 Global Education Meeting (GEM), organized by UNESCO and hosted by the Government of Brazil.
2. Together, we reaffirm that education is a fundamental human right and a public good. It is a prime duty of Governments and States to respect, protect and fulfil this right to education. We are committed to *ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all*, as enshrined in the Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4).
3. Education is a powerful enabler and main driver of progress across all SDGs. Inspired by the 2022 United Nations Transforming Education Summit and the 2024 Pact for the Future, we uphold our commitment to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and to SDG 4 with a renewed sense of urgency to accelerate action, leaving no one behind. As recognized in the Education 2030 Incheon Declaration, equity and inclusion in and through education is the cornerstone of this transformative education agenda and we reiterate our commitment to supporting those countries which are furthest behind.
4. We live in a rapidly changing world facing multiple crises and challenges, such as climate change and environmental degradation; worsening poverty, hunger and income inequalities with lingering impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic; a growing number of armed conflicts and humanitarian crises; and democratic backsliding. Our future depends on the ability of people to continuously learn, re-learn, adapt and innovate to address these challenges and foster pathways to peaceful, equitable and sustainable futures.
5. We are alarmed by the severity and urgency of the global education crisis. Some 251 million children and youth remain out of school and 4 out of 10 young persons are leaving school early. Nearly 60% of children in low-income countries do not have access to early childhood care and education. Some 40% of primary-school-age children globally are estimated to lack basic reading skills while this rate is as high as 84% in sub-Saharan Africa. About one out of seven young people and adults (754 million) lack basic literacy skills. Moreover, the frequent and widespread attacks on students, teachers and educational institutions are posing a grave threat to fundamental human rights, including the right to quality education. The global private, fiscal and social costs of children and youth not learning is estimated at US\$ 10 trillion per year.
6. Governments and global leaders must recognize that education spending is not a cost to be minimized but a strategic long-term investment. It stimulates economies; fosters resilience and innovation; reduces inequalities; and promotes social cohesion, sustainable lifestyles, peace and security. Yet, despite its critical importance, education is chronically underfunded: the funding gap for low and lower-middle income countries to reach their national SDG 4 targets amounts to US\$ 97 billion per year.
7. Much more has to be done nationally and internationally to prioritize quality education as one of the most critical, highest-return investments. Political will, multi-sectoral collaboration and targeted actions for the hardest-to-reach groups are crucial.
8. The 2024 GEM is a critical milestone on the roadmap to put education on top of the national, regional and global political and financing agenda as a key enabler of all SDGs. We recognize youth as agents of change in shaping our collective future—their voices, experiences and aspirations are essential in ensuring that education systems and curricula respond effectively to the evolving challenges of our time. With a few years left to the 2030 deadline, we shall embark on accelerated, joint actions to achieve SDG 4.

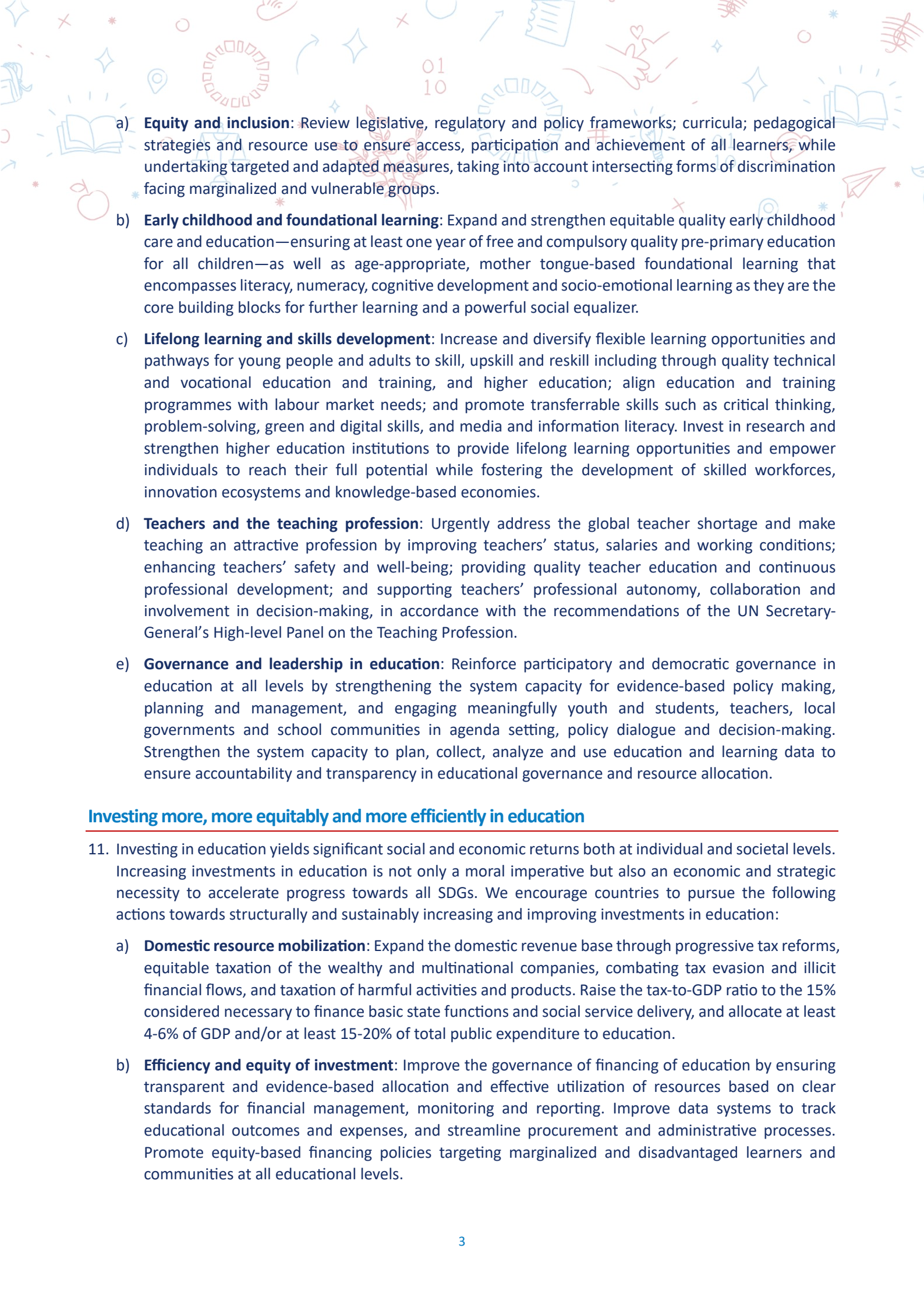
Multi-sectoral actions to unlock the transformative power of education

9. Effective cooperation through the whole-of-society and whole-of-government approach, as well as meaningful engagement of young people, students and teachers, is essential to unlock the transformative potential of education. We therefore commit to undertaking the following actions to address today's global challenges in accordance with national laws, values and cultural norms:

- a) **Climate and environment:** Integrate sustainability and crisis resilience into education systems through education for sustainable development (ESD), focusing on system capacity development and continuous professional development of teachers and policy makers, investing in greening education tailored to local contexts and specific environmental challenges, fostering sustainable lifestyles and engaging communities in climate action. To support these efforts, develop and implement policies that promote safe, equitable and continuous access to a quality education for all in climate crisis contexts, for which the ESD for 2030 Framework and Roadmap, as well as the Comprehensive School Safety Framework can serve as guidance.
- b) **Peace and human rights:** Protect schools, learners and educational personnel from attack in all circumstances; ensure the continuity of education during armed conflict and the access of all children and youth to quality education in emergencies in line with the Safe Schools Declaration; prioritize education as a life-saving intervention in humanitarian cross-sectoral programming. Integrate education for peace, human rights, democratic citizenship and sustainable development into school curricula, teacher education and community-level actions towards building peaceful and resilient societies; embracing cultural and linguistic diversity; tackling violence in and around schools; fighting against racism, xenophobia and all forms of intolerance, discrimination and violence.
- c) **Gender equality:** Establish integrated and inter-generational mechanisms across ministries, civil society and youth organizations to create inclusive, safe and equitable learning spaces free from gender-based violence and remove barriers to gender equality in and through education. Adopt gender-transformative approaches at all levels of education systems and ensure gender parity and non-discrimination in learning spaces as well as in teaching, STEM careers and leadership positions, including through the provision of financial support and incentives.
- d) **Health, nutrition and well-being:** Provide integrated health, nutrition and well-being services and education in schools, including gender-responsive water, sanitation and health facilities; healthy, nutritious school meals; immunization; physical and mental health support for learners as well as teachers; and age-appropriate, evidence-based comprehensive sexuality education.
- e) **Science, technology, innovation (STI) and digital transformation:** Invest in STI and digital transformation in education with a human-centred and human rights-based approach. Foster cross-sectoral partnerships across public sectors, the private sector, academia and research institutions, and civil society organizations to leverage STI and digital technologies, including artificial intelligence, share quality digital learning resources and enhance educational equity and quality. Enhance STEM curricula and encourage youth participation, especially girls and women, in STEM subjects. Improve equitable access and the quality of digital learning to close the digital divide, allow flexible learning pathways and experiences, and support learning continuity of those affected by conflicts, disasters or displacement, while ensuring the safe, ethical and responsible use of such technologies.

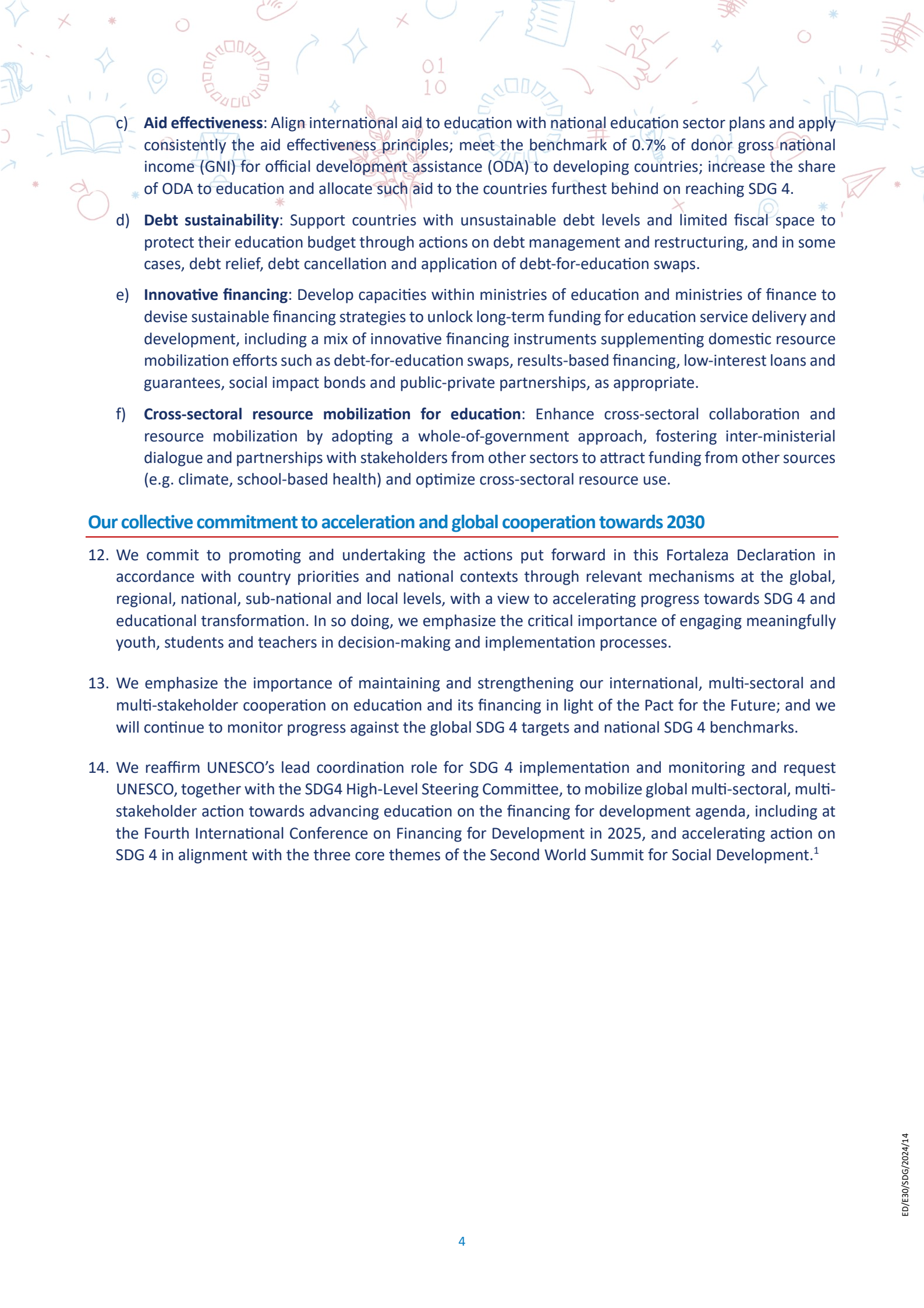
Critical levers to accelerate progress towards SDG 4

10. We will pursue a holistic and lifelong approach to education, with a focus on system strengthening and transformation, to accelerate actions towards SDG 4, in particular to:

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- a) **Equity and inclusion:** Review legislative, regulatory and policy frameworks; curricula; pedagogical strategies and resource use to ensure access, participation and achievement of all learners, while undertaking targeted and adapted measures, taking into account intersecting forms of discrimination facing marginalized and vulnerable groups.
 - b) **Early childhood and foundational learning:** Expand and strengthen equitable quality early childhood care and education—ensuring at least one year of free and compulsory quality pre-primary education for all children—as well as age-appropriate, mother tongue-based foundational learning that encompasses literacy, numeracy, cognitive development and socio-emotional learning as they are the core building blocks for further learning and a powerful social equalizer.
 - c) **Lifelong learning and skills development:** Increase and diversify flexible learning opportunities and pathways for young people and adults to skill, upskill and reskill including through quality technical and vocational education and training, and higher education; align education and training programmes with labour market needs; and promote transferrable skills such as critical thinking, problem-solving, green and digital skills, and media and information literacy. Invest in research and strengthen higher education institutions to provide lifelong learning opportunities and empower individuals to reach their full potential while fostering the development of skilled workforces, innovation ecosystems and knowledge-based economies.
 - d) **Teachers and the teaching profession:** Urgently address the global teacher shortage and make teaching an attractive profession by improving teachers' status, salaries and working conditions; enhancing teachers' safety and well-being; providing quality teacher education and continuous professional development; and supporting teachers' professional autonomy, collaboration and involvement in decision-making, in accordance with the recommendations of the UN Secretary-General's High-level Panel on the Teaching Profession.
 - e) **Governance and leadership in education:** Reinforce participatory and democratic governance in education at all levels by strengthening the system capacity for evidence-based policy making, planning and management, and engaging meaningfully youth and students, teachers, local governments and school communities in agenda setting, policy dialogue and decision-making. Strengthen the system capacity to plan, collect, analyze and use education and learning data to ensure accountability and transparency in educational governance and resource allocation.

Investing more, more equitably and more efficiently in education

11. Investing in education yields significant social and economic returns both at individual and societal levels. Increasing investments in education is not only a moral imperative but also an economic and strategic necessity to accelerate progress towards all SDGs. We encourage countries to pursue the following actions towards structurally and sustainably increasing and improving investments in education:
 - a) **Domestic resource mobilization:** Expand the domestic revenue base through progressive tax reforms, equitable taxation of the wealthy and multinational companies, combating tax evasion and illicit financial flows, and taxation of harmful activities and products. Raise the tax-to-GDP ratio to the 15% considered necessary to finance basic state functions and social service delivery, and allocate at least 4-6% of GDP and/or at least 15-20% of total public expenditure to education.
 - b) **Efficiency and equity of investment:** Improve the governance of financing of education by ensuring transparent and evidence-based allocation and effective utilization of resources based on clear standards for financial management, monitoring and reporting. Improve data systems to track educational outcomes and expenses, and streamline procurement and administrative processes. Promote equity-based financing policies targeting marginalized and disadvantaged learners and communities at all educational levels.

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- c) **Aid effectiveness:** Align international aid to education with national education sector plans and apply consistently the aid effectiveness principles; meet the benchmark of 0.7% of donor gross national income (GNI) for official development assistance (ODA) to developing countries; increase the share of ODA to education and allocate such aid to the countries furthest behind on reaching SDG 4.
 - d) **Debt sustainability:** Support countries with unsustainable debt levels and limited fiscal space to protect their education budget through actions on debt management and restructuring, and in some cases, debt relief, debt cancellation and application of debt-for-education swaps.
 - e) **Innovative financing:** Develop capacities within ministries of education and ministries of finance to devise sustainable financing strategies to unlock long-term funding for education service delivery and development, including a mix of innovative financing instruments supplementing domestic resource mobilization efforts such as debt-for-education swaps, results-based financing, low-interest loans and guarantees, social impact bonds and public-private partnerships, as appropriate.
 - f) **Cross-sectoral resource mobilization for education:** Enhance cross-sectoral collaboration and resource mobilization by adopting a whole-of-government approach, fostering inter-ministerial dialogue and partnerships with stakeholders from other sectors to attract funding from other sources (e.g. climate, school-based health) and optimize cross-sectoral resource use.

Our collective commitment to acceleration and global cooperation towards 2030

- 12. We commit to promoting and undertaking the actions put forward in this Fortaleza Declaration in accordance with country priorities and national contexts through relevant mechanisms at the global, regional, national, sub-national and local levels, with a view to accelerating progress towards SDG 4 and educational transformation. In so doing, we emphasize the critical importance of engaging meaningfully youth, students and teachers in decision-making and implementation processes.
- 13. We emphasize the importance of maintaining and strengthening our international, multi-sectoral and multi-stakeholder cooperation on education and its financing in light of the Pact for the Future; and we will continue to monitor progress against the global SDG 4 targets and national SDG 4 benchmarks.
- 14. We reaffirm UNESCO's lead coordination role for SDG 4 implementation and monitoring and request UNESCO, together with the SDG4 High-Level Steering Committee, to mobilize global multi-sectoral, multi-stakeholder action towards advancing education on the financing for development agenda, including at the Fourth International Conference on Financing for Development in 2025, and accelerating action on SDG 4 in alignment with the three core themes of the Second World Summit for Social Development.¹