

UNESCO Higher Education Activity Report for the Bologna Follow-up Group Meeting

September 2024

This report provides an overview of UNESCO's activities since spring 2024 which are of relevance to the European Higher Education Area.

1. UNESCO's Education Strategy and Results

UNESCO recently published its **Strategic Results Report** detailing the Organization's strategic impact since 2020. The following paragraphs provide a short summary of key achievements in the field of education over the past four years, with the full report available [here](#).

UNESCO led a comprehensive overhaul of the global education architecture, elevating education to the highest levels of the global agenda. The establishment of the [SDG 4 High-Level Steering Committee \(HLSC\)](#) and the [Multilateral Education Platform \(MEP\)](#) underscored this effort and helped pave the way for the 2022 [Transforming Education Summit \(TES\)](#), and its pre-summit in Paris, which helped to reignite the sense of urgency around SDG 4.

Through the SDG 4 HLSC and the [Global Education Monitoring \(GEM\) report](#), UNESCO has driven advocacy on education financing, fostering regular dialogue between Ministers of Education and Finance and launching the [Multilateral Financing of Education Initiative](#) as part of the New Financing Pact. This has been crucial in maintaining momentum for education investment and ensuring continued progress towards SDG 4.

In addition, UNESCO also introduced a new [Recommendation on Education for Peace, Human Rights, and Sustainable Development](#), adopted unanimously by 194 Member States, which marks a significant step toward enhancing education's role in contributing to a more peaceful and sustainable world.

UNESCO's thought leadership has shaped the global education agenda through key reports such as the [Futures of Education](#) report and the *GEM reports*. These reports have informed national consultations in over 100 countries and have been among UNESCO's top publications, translated into multiple languages.

2. Higher Education

In 2023, the [Global Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications in Higher Education](#) entered into force.

Thirty three (33) countries have ratified it, representing over 25% of the world's 6.4 million internationally mobile students, with Georgia, Luxembourg, Ecuador, New Zealand and South Africa being the latest to join. More than 30 UNESCO Member States report to be at an advanced stage in the ratification process, including Canada who recently completed its national procedures.

The implementation of the [interim work programme](#) (2024-2025) adopted by the Intergovernmental Conference of the States Parties in 2024 is underway, in particular related to the development of operational guidelines for the Global Convention, research studies on quality assurance, including

transnational education, and the recognition of refugee qualifications as well as advocacy.

An open-ended working group has been elaborating the draft operational guidelines since July 2024, which will also be consulted with the regional convention committee bureaus and all States Parties before submission to the next ordinary session of the Intergovernmental Conference in June 2025.

The call to ratify and implement the Global Convention featured prominently in the **Tirana Communiqué**, adopted at the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) Ministerial Meeting in Tirana, Albania in May 2024. During the meeting, UNESCO promoted the convention and also brought together the presidents of the regional convention committees, with the support of the In-Global Project, to discuss ways to enhance inter-regional cooperation.

At the regional level, Greece ratified the **Lisbon Recognition Convention** in September 2024, allowing the treaty to reach nearly universal ratification within the region. At the same time, Qatar became the third country to ratify the regional **Arab States Convention**, which requires two more ratifications to enter into force.

With regard to information exchange, the [ENIC-NARIC Annual Meeting](#) took place in Naples, Italy, in June 2024, supported by the Council of Europe, European Commission and UNESCO as the co-Secretariats. The **African Network of National Implementation Structures** held an informal meeting in September 2024, following its establishment two years earlier, to discuss ways to operationalize the network and start developing a workplan. The [Asia-Pacific Network of National Information Centres \(APNNIC\)](#) will meet in early December 2024, while the **Network of National Information Centres in Latin America and the Caribbean (CINLAC)** continues to have regular sessions online.

The **UNESCO Qualifications Passport (UQP)** is being implemented in Kenya, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe. More than 30 new evaluators have been trained, 139 passports have been issued, some 30 UQP holders have been admitted to universities and more than 200 scholarships have been identified to support further learning of the UQP holders.

The **Campus Africa Flagship**, launched in 2022 as part of UNESCO's Operational Strategy for Priority Africa 2022-2029, is aimed at supporting more inclusive, quality-assured, equitable and gender-responsive higher education systems in Africa by focusing on three key action areas: (1) Strengthening Africa's local research, development and innovation systems to propel inclusive growth, innovation and development, particularly in three sectors relevant to the Continent, i.e. agribusiness, renewable energy, and technology (including artificial intelligence); (2) Enhancing the mobility and employability of higher education students and doctoral candidates, including through scholarships; (3) Revitalizing and connecting Africa's tertiary education systems and institutions through data collection and knowledge capacities, research collaboration and academia-industry partnerships and employability services for students.

On the third component, the UNESCO-China Funds-in-Trust Phase III project promotes youth employability by enhancing the quality and relevance of technical higher education in Côte d'Ivoire, Ethiopia, Gabon, Senegal, Tanzania and Uganda. Since 2022, partner universities of the project have completed labour market analyses and student tracer studies, launched competency-based curriculum reforms, and developed new programmes tailored to labour market demands and skills forecasts. The project has reached over 13,000 youth through awareness-raising campaigns, capacity-development workshops, entrepreneurship challenges, with some 1,500 graduates benefiting from substantial skills development opportunities in STEM subjects. Additionally, over 500 educational staff received training in competency-based pedagogy.

Three **higher education data-based initiatives** were also launched in recent months. The most notable of these is the [UNESCO Higher Education Policy Observatory](#), which provides detailed country profiles, comparisons and global and regional overviews. In addition, the [Internationalizing Higher Education](#) report showcases data from 63 States on recognition and mobility, international cooperation as well as policies and practices in higher education. To complement this, a [factsheet](#) with the most recent data from the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS) on global and regional enrollments, mobility and gender parity was produced.

In addition, higher education also featured prominently at UNESCO's [2024 Digital Learning Week](#) in September 2024, including a session dedicated to AI in higher education and discussions on developing a competency framework in this area.

3. Major Upcoming Meetings

- **International Forum of UNESCO Chairs and Partners** (Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, 25 – 27 September), including sessions on the futures of higher education and Campus Africa. More information [here](#).
- **World Teachers' Day** (Paris, France, 4 October). More information [here](#).
- **Global Education Meeting** (Fortaleza, Brazil, 31 October – 1 November), including a session on Equitable access, quality, and mobility in higher education. More information [here](#).
- **UNESCO International Forum on the Futures of Education** (Suwon – Gyeonggido, Republic of Korea, 2- 4 December). More information [here](#).