

## 2ND ASIA-PACIFIC REGIONAL EDUCATION MINISTER'S CONFERENCE (APREMC-II)

# Bangkok Statement 2022

*Towards an effective learning recovery for all and transforming education in Asia-Pacific*

## Preamble

1. We, Ministers of Education of the Asia-Pacific Region, high-level government officials and representatives of regional organizations, civil society organizations, teachers' organizations, United Nations agencies, development partners, youth, academia, and the private sector, having gathered in Bangkok, Thailand at the second Asia-Pacific Regional Education Minister's Conference (APREMC II) from 5 to 7 June 2022;
2. **Express** our deep gratitude to the Government of the Kingdom of Thailand for hosting this important event and for their warm welcome and to the Government of Japan for generously supporting the organization of this Conference;
3. **We reaffirm** that education is a fundamental human right, enabling the realization of other rights essential for inclusive, equitable and sustainable development, a culture of peace, global citizenship, health and well-being, and indispensable for economic recovery and growth in the Asia-Pacific region and globally;
4. **We have taken stock of** progress made on SDG4 in the Asia-Pacific region, and the gaps in implementation, especially major challenges in advancing equity, inclusion and learning and **reaffirm** our commitment to achieving the full SDG4-Education 2030 agenda, which was reconfirmed at the Asia Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development organized by UN ESCAP on 29 March 2022;
5. **We take note** of the outcomes of the sub-regional consultations undertaken prior to APREMC II, the NGO Statement and the Youth Statement presented during the Conference;
6. **We acknowledge** the great diversity of the Asia-Pacific region in terms of, among others, geography, demographic trends, culture, language, religion, level of economic development, the structure of education systems, participation in education and learning outcomes;
7. **We acknowledge** the inter-dependence and common future of our societies and economies and the ensuing need for solidarity and cooperation;
8. **We highlight** that this statement comes at a historical moment when the world and the Asia-Pacific region are facing the profound impact of COVID-19 on students' learning, health and well-being, exacerbating a pre-existing learning crisis, and causing a global and regional economic crisis, deepening poverty and inequities, coupled with global security concerns, increased migrations, environmental degradation and climate change to which Asia-Pacific countries are particularly prone;
9. **We recognize** the urgent need to safely reopen schools, re-enrol all learners, particularly the most marginalized and vulnerable, and enable learning recovery, health and well-being of all learners;
10. **We emphasize** the urgent need for reimagining and transforming education and its systems to become more equitable, inclusive, relevant, flexible, and resilient, address the current learning crisis, build more peaceful, inclusive, and sustainable societies, and realize SDG4 with meaningful youth participation.
11. We therefore, **commit** to the following priority actions in the Asia-Pacific region:

## Priorities for Asia and the Pacific

### **PRIORITY 1: Safe School Reopening, Learning Recovery and Continuity of Learning**

12. School closures in Asia-Pacific exacerbated inequalities in education and deepened the pre-existing learning crisis, impacting vulnerable learners the most. Many students experienced disruptions to their learning and did not learn at the levels they would have if schools and other education institutions had remained open. It is therefore urgent to re-open schools and set up effective learning recovery strategies with particular emphasis on the most vulnerable, to ensure that all learners catch-up on lost learning.

#### ***Safe return to school and creating enabling learning environments for all learners***

13. As an immediate action, we will ensure the safe return to and retention of all learners in schools and other learning institutions with a focus on the most vulnerable. This requires prioritizing safe reopening and setting up strategies to ensure that all learners return to school and other institutions with targeted measures for those most at risk of not returning, or who are out of school, including strengthening flexible alternative learning and equivalency programmes, and ensuring learners' and teachers' health and well-being. If schools are closed due to COVID-19 or other emergencies, we commit to ensuring the continuity of learning for all, underpinned by quality standards.

#### ***Learning recovery strategies***

14. While Governments undertook highly commendable efforts to provide education during the COVID-19 pandemic, school closures led to learning loss across Asia-Pacific, widening pre-existing inequalities, and disproportionately affecting the most vulnerable learners. We are determined that all learners re-engage with and continue their learning at the right level and thus prioritize the implementation of evidence-based, contextually appropriate learning recovery strategies with a focus on the most vulnerable. This is particularly important in countries with prolonged school closures and those that could not reach all learners equally with high-quality distance education. This includes developing assessment processes and tools to identify individual student learning and socio-emotional needs and deploying relevant catch-up and remediation measures. As teachers, schools and families are at the forefront of learning recovery, we commit to support them and provide necessary resources, guidance, and training. While learning recovery strategies differ across the region to respond to the diverse needs of each country, they should go hand in hand with the development of broader strategies to address the learning crisis in a longer-term perspective.

### **PRIORITY 2: Transforming Education and Education Systems**

15. Education and its systems must be transformed to become resilient and prepared for future shocks, address inequalities and the learning crisis, and contribute to peaceful, inclusive, and sustainable futures of humanity and the planet. Such transformation requires a holistic system reform that entails the review and strengthening of its interlinked components across policy, planning, financing, and implementation through consultative and participatory processes, in the following priority areas:

#### ***Equity, inclusion, and gender equality***

16. Noting the heightened inequities and disparities in learning and increased poverty in Asia Pacific, it is more urgent than ever to focus on equity in transforming education systems. We therefore commit to addressing all forms of exclusion, disparity, and inequality in access to education and learning based on age, sex, gender, socio-economic status, language, nationality, religion, caste, geographical location, disability, culture, citizenship status and health status among others. This includes protecting the right to education of girls and women. This requires more inclusive, equity-centred and gender-responsive sector planning and budgeting as well as targeted measures to overcome barriers to learning for the most vulnerable, including guaranteeing school safety and addressing gender-based violence.

### ***Quality and relevance of education***

17. We acknowledge that curricula, learning materials and pedagogies should be, learner-centred, inclusive, reflect our multi-cultural, multilingual, and knowledge-based societies and build the capacity of learners to become resilient and able to adapt to the fast-evolving economies, labour markets, and to the impacts of climate change while contributing to social cohesion, peace, and sustainable development in Asia Pacific. This requires re-thinking curriculum content and pedagogical approaches to reflect changing societal and economic demands including education for sustainable development, global citizenship and the world of work, the use of innovative and flexible learner-centred pedagogies, methods, and tools, including assistive devices and tools, and strengthening learning assessment systems to provide evidence-based information to improve learning outcomes. We also highlight the importance of inclusive learning environments that promote safety, health, and gender equality so that all learners have the optimum conditions to learn and thrive.

### ***Learning and skills for life, work, and sustainable development***

18. Transformed education requires a holistic life-cycle approach to learning and skilling, from early childhood care and education (ECCE) through to higher and adult education, acknowledging the importance of Education for Sustainable Development as a key enabler of all 17 SDGs. This needs to take into consideration the importance of building strong foundations at an early age, of preparing and supporting the transition from school to work during the second decade, labour market vulnerabilities and high youth unemployment, changing skills requirements and emerging sectors and opportunities. We recognize the importance of further investing in ECCE and strengthening adolescent learning and youth skills development with a focus on 21<sup>st</sup> century, digital, employability and life skills that are aligned with the needs of evolving labour markets and emerging green and blue economies. We acknowledge the need for strengthening multiple and flexible learning and skilling pathways at all ages and educational levels leading to recognized certification, including opportunities to re-skill and up-skill in a lifelong learning perspective.

### ***Developing a highly skilled generation of teachers***

19. Teachers are at the heart of education transformation. Effectively transforming education requires professional teachers who are highly motivated, valued in society, well-trained and supported throughout their careers and across all levels of education. Education systems must re-conceptualize the teaching profession and transform the role of teachers and educators from conveyors of knowledge into facilitators of learning and skilling. This requires reforming teaching standards and providing innovative pre- and in-service teacher training, encompassing professional learning communities and peer networks, and focusing on learner-centred differentiated pedagogies, which optimise the use of digital technologies. Policy measures should be taken to make the profession more attractive, including through improved recruitment processes, working conditions, continuous professional development and career pathways based on merit.

### ***Digital transformation***

20. The COVID-19 education response has demonstrated the potential of and need for a learner-centred digital transformation that supports improved learning for all and prepares learners to navigate a world characterized by fast-evolving technologies and changes. This requires the development of comprehensive and contextualized digital education ecosystem underpinned by quality standards. This includes free, inclusive, and equitable access to online education for all, quality e-learning programmes, relevant teacher training, and policies that mainstream digital learning and ensure the safe use of digital technology and artificial intelligence. In order to reach all learners, effective low-tech and no-tech distance learning solutions also have to be provided.

### ***Planning, Governance and Monitoring***

21. Transformed education systems require planning for resilience, as well as reform and strengthening of governance, accountability and monitoring at all levels of the system. In acknowledging the need to build system resilience, we also stress the importance of empowering sub-national, local, and school-level actors -including learners and school management committees- in decision-making and the flexibility to adapt to the needs of all learners and local contexts as well as to set strong quality standards for public and private institutions and improve accountability. Further, we stress the need for strengthened data and monitoring systems and their effective utilization.

### ***Increased and improved investment in education***

22. We acknowledge the vital importance of adequate levels of domestic and international investment in education, complemented by adequate levels of social protection investments targeting the most vulnerable learners. We build on preceding calls for action to prioritize, protect and increase domestic finance for education, in particular the 'Paris Declaration: A Global Call for Investing in the Futures of Education', which urges governments to increase domestic resources for education and to use these resources effectively and equitably. We urge to adhere to the benchmarks of at least 4-6% of Gross Domestic Product and/or at least 15-20% of total public expenditure to education, according to the country context, and prioritize education within overall government expenditure, with additional investments to recover from COVID-19. We acknowledge the importance of allocating and spending resources more effectively and efficiently and prioritizing interventions that improve the quality of learning outcomes and increase equity and inclusion. Moreover, we urge international partners to prioritize financing of education in light of decreasing domestic funding due to the current economic crisis in Asia-Pacific.

### **Regional cooperation**

23. We recognize the need for stronger collaboration and mutual exchange to pursue these priority areas with determined collective commitment, to enable children, adolescents, youths, and adults across Asia-Pacific to develop their full potential as productive and healthy citizens of the world community.

24. We therefore commit to strengthen regional cooperation to address common challenges together by learning from each other's experiences, sharing knowledge and best practices, and developing joint initiatives at bilateral and regional levels while acknowledging individual countries' unique challenges and priorities.

### **Way forward**

25. We will work to meet our commitments affirmed in this Statement, taking into account national circumstances, with a view to achieving learning recovery and a deep transformation of education and education systems in Asia-Pacific and accelerating SDG4 implementation.

26. We request UNESCO, together with UNICEF and the regional Learning and Education 2030+ Networking group, to continue leading the coordination of the implementation and monitoring of the SDG4-Education 2030 agenda, and to support Member States in its implementation such as through capacity-building and progress monitoring, including with reference to national SDG 4 benchmarks.

27. We request UNESCO to follow up on the recommendations of this Statement by establishing a regional Asia-Pacific programme to support Member States in learning recovery and transforming education, in close collaboration with its partners.

28. We also request UNESCO to support Member States of the Asia-Pacific region to undertake a mid-term review of SDG 4 by 2023.

29. We will make this Statement available as a key contribution from the Asia-Pacific region to inform both the Transforming Education Summit Pre-Summit, to be organized in Paris in June 2022, as well as the Transforming Education Summit, to be convened in New York in September 2022 and recommend the participation of Asia-Pacific Member States in the process.

## ANNEX

### Policy Action Areas for Learning Recovery and Transforming Education Systems in Asia and the Pacific

In order to support the implementation of the Bangkok Statement 2022, taking into account national circumstances and priorities, we agree to endorse a set of policy options as follows:

#### 1. Safe return to School and Learning Recovery

##### 1.1 *Safe return to school and creating enabling learning environments for all learners*

- Reopening schools, care centres, community learning centres, post-secondary and higher education institutions, and keeping them open, with adequate public health and social safety measures and trained school personnel to implement them;
- Establishing an enabling learning environment by putting in place WASH facilities in schools as well as establishing comprehensive, integrated social protection, school health and nutrition programmes and the provision of psycho-social support and increasing internet connectivity, access to affordable devices and technology;
- Implementing return-to-learning campaigns, and setting up targeted measures to overcome barriers for those learners at risk of not returning including incentives, monitoring re-enrolment, and establishing early warning systems and appropriate response mechanisms;
- Establishing or strengthening equitable flexible learning pathways and alternative learning programmes, including non-formal education to reach children and youth who have dropped out of school or who were never enrolled in education;
- In cases where schools are still closed due to COVID-19 or other emergency situations, we commit to ensuring continuity of learning through equitable quality alternative education and distance learning and supporting parents and communities so that all students are effectively learning at home.

##### 1.2 *Learning recovery strategies*

- Undertaking assessment of individual students' learning levels to identify both cognitive and socio-emotional learning gaps, and put in place adequate differentiated instruction and remedial programmes and involving parents and community members in the process;
- Adapting the curriculum to prioritize foundational and core competencies at each level, extending instructional time to catch up or adapt the school calendar as needed;
- Preparing and supporting teachers and non-formal educators to carry out learning recovery strategies as well as provide them with professional capacity development in IT-supported teaching and blended learning as well as with accessible digital technology and content and ensure their well-being;
- Providing blended teaching and learning for all learners, and strengthening preparedness and resilience within schools and other learning institutions for future emergencies and outbreaks;

## **2. Transforming Education and Education Systems**

### **2.1 Equity, inclusion, and gender equality**

- Strengthening legal frameworks and ensuring that education sector plans, policies and strategies are inclusive, equitable and gender-transformative, coupled with equity-based budget allocations;
- Eliminating barriers to access to education and learning of persons with disabilities, ethnic and linguistic minorities, girls, and children living in extreme poverty and/or in remote locations and those from refugee and migrant families;
- Establishing flexible learning pathways with multiple re-entry points at all ages and educational levels, and the recognition and accreditation and validation of alternative education, in particular for out-of-school children, adolescents and adults;
- Adapting curricula to learners from diverse ethnic and linguistic backgrounds and promoting access to initial literacy and further learning in the mother tongue;
- Strengthening monitoring systems and the availability of relevant, timely data on vulnerable groups to develop targeted services and track progress on their participation in education.

### **2.2 Quality and relevance of education**

- Re-designing curricula to provide learners with foundational, digital, 21st century and socio-emotional competencies, and strengthening the delivery of education for sustainable development, global citizenship and comprehensive sexual education;
- Transforming pedagogies so that they are learner-centred and facilitate learning across multiple domains (knowledge, skills, attitudes and values) and are based on the principles of cooperation and solidarity;
- Strengthening the effective use of assessment for learning and reducing the negative effect of high-stake examinations;
- Formulating clear competency-based learning achievement standards and strengthening national and regional large-scale assessments to monitor learning outcomes and inform reforms of teaching and learning policies and practices;
- Developing safe, inclusive, gender-just, climate-protective and stimulating learning environments which foster learners' health and psycho-social well-being, so that all children and young people have the required conditions to learn and thrive;
- Empowering families and communities to engage in learning and granting flexibility to teachers, parents and learners to adapt learning content to the learners' needs.

### **2.3 Learning and skills for life, work, and sustainable development**

- Prioritizing pre-primary education through increased provision and investment, and leverage innovative early learning programmes that extend beyond the school and include home engagement;
- Strengthening equitable access to and the relevance of secondary education by developing a more modular approach and flexible transitions between secondary programmes and reforming end of secondary certification so that it takes into account all programmes and assesses a wider set of competencies including transferable and 21st century skills;
- Strengthening adolescent and youth skills development with a focus on life and employability skills, creativity, digital literacy, entrepreneurship by aligning programmes' content and pedagogical approaches with youth's aspirations, the needs of the labour market and socio-economic demands taking into account fast evolving technologies, scientific innovations and the digital and green transition of economies;
- Establishing flexible learning pathways with multiple re-entry points at all ages and educational levels, and the recognition and accreditation and validation of alternative education, in particular for out-of-school children, adolescents, and adults, recognizing

qualifications earned through online and blended learning through micro-credentials and providing opportunities for re-skilling and upskilling in a lifelong learning perspective;

- Promoting education for sustainable development throughout education levels, harnessing local and indigenous knowledge in educational programmes to respond to climate change, and to facilitate sustainable development and peace building.

#### **2.4 Developing a highly skilled generation of teachers**

- Reviewing and reforming teaching standards and competency frameworks so that teachers are equipped with innovative learner-centred pedagogical skills, digital literacy and competencies to teach in a digital and blended eco-system, have the ability to manage diversity in the classroom, and to support learners' socio-emotional well-being;
- Investing in pre- and in-service training and ensuring that it remains up to date with teaching standards and competency frameworks and responsive to evidence on effective teaching and learning approaches;
- Taking policy measures to make the teaching profession attractive and improving teachers' selection processes to attract the most promising candidates and developing performance-based career structures;
- Providing teachers with strong support structures including digital platforms and adequate opportunities to exchange with peers, promoting collaborative learning, improving their practices including through professional learning communities;
- Improving teachers' working conditions and ensuring that their health, well-being, and labour rights are protected;
- Recruiting and supporting teachers from disadvantaged backgrounds.

#### **2.5 Digital transformation**

- Prioritizing and investing in connecting schools and making digital platforms and programmes available in particular in remote areas and small island developing states;
- Providing free and quality access to connectivity and devices in schools and homes for the most disadvantaged learners;
- Developing public and public-private partnerships to provide free, inclusive and equitable access to online education and open education resources;
- Developing coherent and costed policies for integration of technology in education which are aligned with education sector plans and broader national ICT policies;
- Leveraging technologies to support in-person learning and enhance the relevance, resilience, and quality of education delivery. This includes high-tech as well as quality and contextualized flexible low-tech and no-tech solutions to reach all learners;
- Developing regulations and safeguards regarding learning technologies, so that education remains a public good, accessible to all learners, with safe and secure use of digital technology and protection of their privacy.

#### **2.6 Planning, Governance and Monitoring**

- Undertaking a systemic risk analysis and planning to prepare for future shocks as well as for learning continuity between the school and home environments;
- Setting strong quality standards for public and private institutions and improving accountability structures to achieve greater quality of teaching and learning, other key cross-sectoral services in schools and efficiency of spending;
- Empowering local-level decision-making and planning and improving capacity to develop and implement local contextualized responses, in particular in emergency situations and to support school quality improvement and resilience;
- Strengthening autonomy, flexibility, leadership and planning at school level and train school leaders for improved school management and resilience;

- Enhancing cross-sectoral collaboration between health, education and other relevant ministries, local governments, communities and parents to ensure inclusive and protective learning environments in and around schools, delivering adequate services and preparing for future risks including climate change and other humanitarian disasters;
- Improving monitoring and evaluation through strengthened data systems and its utilization, by integrating various quality data with improved disaggregation from education management information systems, household surveys and learning assessments, while leveraging technology, big data and AI with adequate data privacy protection and governance.

### **2.7 Increased and improved investment in education**

- Prioritizing and protecting financing of public education in national budgets and progressively increase financing of education and urging to adhere to the minimum benchmark of 4-6% of the Gross Domestic Product and/or 15%-20% of total public expenditure according to the country context;
- Ensuring sufficient investments to recover from COVID-19 and achieve SDG4 including by exploring innovative financing mechanisms at national, regional and global levels;
- Committing to safeguard and expand critical social spending for all learners to minimize the negative impacts of the economic crisis on the most vulnerable and marginalized;
- In fulfilment of commitments made at Incheon, increasing the efficiency of spending by prioritizing areas with the highest impact on quality and equity;
- Establishing equity-based, pro-poor budget allocations so that education expenditures serve to reduce inequities and are efficiently linked with strengthened social protection schemes for children;
- Promoting partnerships with development partners to provide technical assistance, and financial support to leverage domestic resources for education as governments are the primary duty-bearers for efficient and sustainable financing of public education.



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### The Global Education 2030 Agenda

UNESCO, as the United Nations' specialized agency for education, is entrusted to lead and coordinate the Education 2030 Agenda, which is part of a global movement to eradicate poverty through 17 Sustainable Development Goals by 2030. Education, essential to achieve all of these goals, has its own dedicated Goal 4, which aims to *"ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all."* The Education 2030 Framework for Action provides guidance for the implementation of this ambitious goal and commitments.

