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SDG 4: Ensure quality education for all and promote lifelong learning

Introduction

It is education that largely determines a state's competitive advantage. Education is also an expression of the level of development of a society. Finally, education functions as a safeguard that every government in the world fears. It is therefore hardly surprising that the quality of education has become one of the main goals of sustainable development as set out in the United Nations 2030 Agenda. High-quality education is the foundation for improving the quality of life of every individual and of society. Societies in Western Europe do not, for the most part, experience significant deficits or constraints in access to good-quality education. The same is true of the United States. By contrast, when we look at the African and Asian continents, it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that, in practice, only the elite has access to good education. Goal 4 focuses on the situation in developing countries, where access to education at the primary level is limited, and at the tertiary level is unavailable to groups at risk of exclusion, above all people with low incomes, but often also those living in rural areas and girls.

The aim of this chapter is to analyse Goal 4, i.e. the quality of education, and to present the challenges and difficulties associated with it. The chapter is divided into several parts: this introduction, a discussion of the essence of education and the process of continuing learning throughout life, an examination of the challenges related to Goal 4, an outline of the tasks arising from Goal 4, and a conclusion.

Education and the importance of continuing it throughout life in the context of human rights

The simplest definition of education is the deliberate, long-term process of forming a person's knowledge, abilities, and attitudes via social and cultural interactions. This process-oriented perspective emphasizes that education is a lifelong process that takes place in the family, at work, at institutions, in social interactions, and through the media. It is not just about



school, textbooks, or diplomas. In this context, education should be viewed broadly as a long-term, structured, and diffuse learning process where people get the knowledge, abilities, and attitudes needed to fully develop their personalities and operate in society. It covers a wide range of non-formal and informal learning experiences that occur in the home, among peers, at work, or online, in addition to formal education (the school system and higher education). Thus, education has two aspects: a social dimension, as a vital mechanism for the transmission of culture, the development of citizenship, and the replication and modification of the social order; and an individual dimension, as a right and a chance for personal growth for every individual. When interpreting Sustainable Development Goal 4, this expansive view of education serves as the foundation. Instead of offering a novel, conflicting definition of education, the 2030 Agenda offers a political framework that establishes priorities, minimal requirements, and metrics for gauging advancement in the field. The significance of universal access to education, its quality as determined by learning results, equality of educational opportunities, and the concept of lifelong learning are thus highlighted in Goal 4, which chooses those elements that are especially significant from a global perspective. Goal 4 might be interpreted in this way as an effort to "translate" the normative vision of education—found, for instance, in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights—into the language of specific duties that nations and the international community have to one another. In the 2030 Agenda, what we refer to as the development of an individual's knowledge, skills, and attitudes at the general theory of education level is represented by a set of indicators pertaining to participation, the completion of successive educational stages, the level of fundamental skills, and the removal of access barriers.

- Consequently, examining Goal 4 necessitates a continuous “double perspective”: on the one hand, as a technical set of goals, metrics, and tools of education policy, and on the other, as a tangible update of a more comprehensive, humanistic view of education as a public good, a human right, and a prerequisite for the subjective growth of the individual. The potential and constraints of the global education agenda through 2030 are only apparent when viewed from this dual perspective. The paradigm of lifelong learning is gradually replacing the idea of a "one-off" period of education that occurs during childhood and early adulthood in the current discourse on education (A Memorandum on Lifelong Learning, 2000; Lifelong Learning for All: Policy Directions, 2026). This signifies a profound change: education is no longer viewed as a discrete period of a person's life but rather as a continuous aspect of their existence that is woven into their subsequent stages of professional and



personal growth. Learning new things throughout life is therefore not an extra or "luxury," but rather a requirement for surviving in modern cultures. At the individual level, the value of lifelong learning is evident. People today live longer, switch jobs and places of employment more frequently, and regularly move countries. As stretches of professional engagement alternate with pauses for childcare, relocation, illness, or retraining, biographical pathways become fractured. Maintaining previously obtained credentials is no longer enough in these circumstances; one must be able to upgrade their knowledge, pick up new skills, and rebuild their professional identities. Thus, lifelong learning enhances a person's agency, ability to independently direct their life path, and ability to adapt to the unpredictable nature of the workplace. Additionally, the socio-economic aspect is as significant. Rapid technological development and knowledge-based, innovation-driven economies don't so much need a single, "well-educated" workforce as they do societies that can continuously reorganize their competencies. Lifelong learning becomes a vital instrument for boosting competitiveness, productivity, and innovation while also lowering digital, vocational, and generational isolation. Education does not eradicate existing class and territorial inequalities; rather, it reproduces and widens them when access to different forms of continuing education is unequal, restricted to large cities, higher-income groups, or those who are already well educated. Lastly, there is a civic and political component to the value of lifelong learning. An acquired store of civic knowledge is no longer sufficient in a world of political polarization, information overload, and complicated global issues (such as the energy transition, migration, and climate disaster). Critical thinking, source verification, comprehension of intricate socio-economic interdependencies, and a willingness to continuously reevaluate one's own opinions are all essential. Thus, lifelong learning becomes a prerequisite for developing a mature democratic culture, being resilient to misinformation, and actively participating in public life.

From the perspective of Sustainable Development Goal 4, the idea of lifelong learning functions as the binding element of the entire education agenda. It brings together:

- an individual dimension (the right of the person to continuous development),
- an economic dimension (the ability of the economy to adapt and innovate),
- a social dimension (reducing inequality and exclusion),
- and a civic dimension (shaping a competent, critical demos).



The right to education is effectively limited to young days, limited portion of life when there are no genuine chances for lifelong learning, which are defined as access to both formal and wide-ranging non-formal and informal learning. Because of this, putting lifelong learning at the center of Goal 4 represents a significant rethinking of what education should be in the modern world rather than just a technical modification to existing educational policy. The importance of access to education is clearly articulated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which in Article 26(1) states: “1. Everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages. Elementary education shall be compulsory. Technical and professional education shall be made generally available and higher education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit.” Paragraph 2 adds: “Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. It shall promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups, and shall further the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace.” (Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 26(1)– (2)). These two quotations perfectly explain why access to good-quality education is so crucial. Article 26 formulates a subjective right: “everyone has the right to education.” This is the classic language of human rights – unconditional, universal, grounded in the dignity of the individual. The 2030 Agenda's Goal 4 operationalizes this concept rather than changing it. We are given a set of specific commitments pertaining to free and high-quality primary and secondary education for everyone, equal access to early childhood education, higher education that is "equally accessible to all" "on the basis of merit" (echoing Article 26(1)), and the removal of discrimination and barriers in place of the general formula "the right to education." In this regard, everyone has the right to education, according to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Goal 4 addresses how this should be implemented in terms of public policy, educational systems, and indicators through 2030. It should be emphasized that Goal 4 is an attempt to transform the idea that "everyone has the right to education" into the institutional language of policies, budgets, systemic reforms, and monitoring instruments rather than a wish list.

The ideological alignment between the 2030 Agenda and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights is also noteworthy in this regard. The primary focus of the 2030 Agenda is sustainable development and humanity's ability to address the social, technical, and climate issues, whereas in 1948 it was peace following the experience of war. The axiological and normative context for interpreting Sustainable Development Goal 4 is outlined in Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The 2030 Agenda converts the Declaration's



provisions regarding universal individual rights to education, free and universal primary education, equal access to higher and vocational education, and the educational role of education in promoting tolerance, peace, human rights, and personal growth into a set of specific commitments for governments and the global community. Therefore, Goal 4 is more about defining and operationalizing the right to education in terms of accessibility, quality, equality of opportunity, and education for the world's sustainable and peaceful development than it is about providing a new meaning.

Challenges for SDG 4

UN and UNESCO reports indicate that progress towards SDG 4 is too slow to meet the commitments by 2030. Only around 58% of students globally were meeting the required reading competency level even prior to the pandemic, and more recent research indicates that language and math performance is also declining in many nations. Furthermore, according to UN and UNESCO data, at least one-third of students had already fallen short of the minimal competency requirements in reading and math prior to the pandemic. These disparities were widened by the COVID-19 pandemic, widespread school closures, and the disorganized transition to remote learning; numerous nations saw a sharp drop in both domestic and international test scores (Quality Education, UN, 2024). The main causes include, among others: overcrowded classrooms, especially in countries with rapid population growth; staff shortages and insufficient preparation of teachers to work in diverse classrooms (in terms of language, culture and special needs); outdated curricula and the dominance of teacher-centred, exam-driven instruction; limited access to teaching materials and digital resources; and the lack of systemic support for students with learning difficulties (early intervention, tutoring, individualisation).

Another challenge related to the implementation of Goal 4 is the shortage of teachers. According to UNESCO, there will be a shortage of approximately 44 million primary and secondary school teachers worldwide by 2030 (previous estimates even mentioned 69 million). Millions of new teachers are required in sub-Saharan Africa only to keep enrollment at the current level, making the situation there especially dire (Global report on teachers: solving teacher shortages and changing the profession, UNESCO, 2024). In light of issues like low pay and unstable employment, heavy administrative workloads and large class sizes, inadequate training for working in diverse and inclusive classrooms, a lack of professional development opportunities, and rising expectations (such as digital education, climate education, inclusive



education, and working with trauma in crisis situations), this challenge affects not only the quantity of teachers but also the quality and stability of the profession. Digitalization and the digital divide present yet another, undeniably significant obstacle to education and access to it. It is important to remember that the COVID-19 epidemic revealed a significant digital divide while also making technology a requirement for lifelong learning. Millions of students lacked access to the internet, devices, and appropriate home environments both before and after the pandemic; professors were frequently ill-prepared to teach online classes; and procedures for evaluating and helping struggling students all but fell apart. Therefore, it is not surprising that digital education is portrayed in the documents that support Goal 4 as a crucial tool for enhancing access and quality. However, in reality, where there is adequate infrastructure, technology fosters innovation, but where it is not, it only widens the gaps between schools, geographical areas, and social groups, leading to even more inequalities. One of the undeniable challenges for Goal 4 is ensuring access to education and the continuation of learning in areas affected by war and conflict. In countries struck by armed conflict, schools are destroyed or used as shelters, the lack of security makes regular attendance impossible, and there is a shortage of teachers, learning materials and basic infrastructure needed to provide students with even the minimum conditions for education (Crisis-Affected Children and Adolescents in Need of Education Support: New Global Estimates and Thematic Deep Dives, United Nations, 2023). Examples from Yemen, Sudan or, most recently, the Gaza Strip show that entire generations of children lose access to education for many years, which translates into long-term losses in human and social capital. The refugee issue is closely tied to this. The UN Global Goals and Forced Displacement: UNHCR's work on the Sustainable Development Goals, UNHCR, 2025, states that only about 65% of refugee children attend basic school, 41% attend secondary school, and just about 6% are enrolled in further education. Language barriers, legal restrictions (such as unresolved residence status or lack of a formal right to education), non-recognition of documents and qualifications, and chronic underfunding of education in camps and host communities (including funding cuts, as in the case of the Rohingya in Bangladesh) are just a few of the many difficulties in this area.

In the end, funding is one of the biggest obstacles to ensuring that everyone has access to education and the ability to pursue further education. According to UNESCO, the yearly finance gap for education in low- and lower-middle-income nations is approximately USD 97–100 billion (UNESCO, 2023 estimates that the annual financing deficit for education is nearly \$100 billion). The enormous volume of debt owed by poorer states makes this issue even worse. Globally, debt is being serviced at the expense of education investment, especially in Africa and



Asia, according to estimates that show debt servicing outpaces education spending many times over in many low- and middle-income countries (The Debt Crisis Derailing SDG 4, 2024). This indicates that the actual fiscal space is quite constrained, even in cases when the need for further funding is acknowledged. Therefore, discussions about Goal 4 invariably lead to discussions about debt restructuring, budgetary priorities and how much they consider the needs and difficulties of education, as well as the nature and circumstances of development cooperation, including support for access to and quality of education.

Measurement methodology of Goal 4 is another major obstacle to its implementation. In terms of the quantity and complexity of indicators, this objective is among the most complicated. The creation of methods and indicators is coordinated by a special Education Data and Statistics Commission, which was formerly known as the Technical Cooperation Group. The Commission is in charge of organizing statistics and data related to education worldwide. It is crucial in establishing guidelines and creating procedures for gathering and analyzing data on education. It focuses on creating and implementing theme and global indicator frameworks for tracking Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4), which is about providing everyone with access to high-quality, inclusive education and opportunities for lifelong learning.

The Commission also examines and evaluates the progress made in tracking a number of educational aspects, including the measurement of literacy and learning outcomes, the estimation of indicators for children and youth who are not enrolled in school, the evaluation of indicators related to teachers, the estimation of data in times of crisis and prolonged conflict, and more. The incomparability of studies and tests, the difficulty of capturing "soft" aspects (civic competences, social skills, the quality of the learning environment), and the lack of high-quality data in many countries remain significant obstacles to measuring the achievement of particular indicators. The issue of the "relevance" (adequacy) of education is also being raised with increasing urgency, along with attempts to answer questions such as:

- to what extent do education systems prepare learners for the world of work in conditions of automation and a digital economy?
- to what extent do they develop civic, ecological and intercultural competences linked to the climate crisis, migration and social polarization?
- to what extent do they support mental health and resilience to stress in a world of chronic uncertainty?

According to UNESCO reports (The SDG4-Education 2030 High-Level Steering Committee's contribution to the 2023 High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development, UNESCO, 2023), the "learning crisis" is caused by a mismatch between what schools teach and



what is necessary for sustainable, peaceful development. This is especially crucial because, although Goal 4, specifically target 4.7, introduces the category of "education for sustainable development and global citizenship," in reality, curricula are frequently out of date, content pertaining to gender equality, human rights, or climate change is politically contentious, and teachers lack the necessary training to deal with these issues. This problem, which involves disagreements about the ideals that should be taught in schools, is also extremely political and cultural. Lastly, the internal development of Goal 4 itself presents a significant obstacle. The argument draws attention to a number of conflicts in Goal 4's design. First, there is discussion about a sort of goal and indicator inflation. Goal 4 covers nearly everything, from infrastructural problems to education focused on certain values, from literacy to higher education, and from early childhood education to lifelong learning. As UNESCO has often emphasized, this scope makes the objective politically appealing because "everyone" can relate to it, but it also makes it challenging to administer, define priorities, and communicate (Monitoring SDG 4, UNESCO, 2025). A strong emphasis on measurability (indicators, scorecards, benchmarks) encourages a focus on what is easy to count, such as attendance, years of education, and enrollment rates, at the expense of things that are much harder to quantify, like the quality of relationships in school, the learning climate, organizational culture, or the learner's agency. This is related to the risk of technicization.

The conflict between context and universality presents another difficulty. While education is firmly anchored in particular national and cultural settings, SDG 4 is global in scope and speaks in terms of universal rights and standards. Conflicts arise when "global" indicators and recommendations are translated into national policy language. Examples of these conflicts include those involving curriculum reforms, adopted evaluation standards, the extent of teacher and school autonomy, or how to handle ideologically sensitive content. Lastly, there is a clear conflict between political declarations and political will. Many states expressly support Goal 4 in international forums, but they have not succeeded in converting this support into sufficient funding for educational systems, daring and consistent structural changes, or genuine crisis protection for education, which is defined as maintaining education as a budgetary priority in the face of competing demands and scarce resources. The primary obstacles to achieving Sustainable Development Goal 4 are not reducible to a single "deficit," but rather represent a multi-level, overlapping triad of crises: a learning crisis, where mass education fails to result in the acquisition of fundamental skills; an equality crisis, wherein unequal access to education and its quality persists and intensifies; and a financial and staffing crisis, which limits the capacity of educational systems to meet growing demands. The



pandemic's consequences, the digital gap, armed conflicts, and mass population displacement, as well as disagreements about how relevant curricula are to the problems of the twenty-first century, all serve to strengthen these. Because of this, Goal 4 is not only a bold political agenda but also a reflection of the structural inconsistencies of modern societies: the gap between the declared right to education and the way resources are actually distributed; the global rhetoric of "no one left behind" and the practice of selective inclusion; and the idea of education as a tool for emancipation and its role in perpetuating the status quo.

Tasks for Goal 4

In Goal 4, the 2030 Agenda lays out several relatively precise tasks, which at the same time function as indicators. It is important summarizing their content in brief.

Target 4.1 concerns the commitment to ensure that by 2030 all girls and boys complete free, equitable and good-quality primary and secondary education leading to relevant and effective learning outcomes. Universality (everyone should be a part of the system), equality of opportunity (the system should make up for differences based on social background, gender, place of residence, disability, or immigration status), and quality (the school should actually teach, not just "cover the curriculum") are the three components that this entails in practice. While "equitable" suggests that more assistance should be given to underprivileged groups, "free" relates directly to the human rights norm and extends beyond the lack of tuition fees to encompass the elimination of hidden costs of education (textbooks, transportation, other charges). The reference to "relevant and effective learning outcomes" is also crucial because the goal is now to achieve minimum, and eventually high, levels of competency in reading, writing, math, and other critical competencies rather than just having a child attend school. Therefore, Target 4.1 calls for the establishment and upkeep of a stable school network, consistent funding, investments in professional development and teacher preparation, the creation of inclusive education, and quality monitoring mechanisms. However, it also highlights the agenda's main conflict, which is how to balance increasing access with actually raising educational standards in the face of constrained funding.

Assuming that all girls and boys should have access to high-quality early childhood development, care, and pre-primary education by 2030 so that they are prepared for primary school, target 4.2 moves the emphasis to the earliest stages of life. This makes pre-primary education a strategic tool for equalizing educational possibilities even before a child enters school, rather than being viewed as an "optional" extra or a place to "park" kids while parents



work. An integrated approach is indicated by the focus on "early childhood development," which addresses the child's cognitive, linguistic, emotional, and social growth as well as the provision of a secure, engaging setting where care and education are intertwined. This includes both the accessibility of facilities (kindergartens, nurseries), as well as the caliber of those facilities in terms of curricular standards, physical attributes, parent engagement, and the training and professional standing of instructors and caregivers. Target 4.2, however, calls for significant infrastructure development in rural and outlying areas, improved social and educational policy coordination, and the removal of cultural obstacles in places where institutionalized pre-school care is still viewed with suspicion. Its execution has far-reaching effects: investments in high-quality pre-primary education reduce later school challenges and the danger of exclusion, and they provide some of the highest social and economic benefits.

By establishing the goal that all women and men should have equitable access to reasonably priced, high-quality technical, vocational, and tertiary education—including university education—by 2030, Target 4.3 expands the viewpoint to include adults and children. In contrast to the previous phases of education, three factors are important here: (1) affordability of education (defined as designing systems of fees, scholarships, loans, and social support so that costs do not exclude capable but less affluent candidates), (2) equality of access (with special attention to barriers related to gender, social background, place of residence, and economic status), and (3) the quality of education in the context of the mass expansion of post-secondary education. In contrast to hierarchically ordered "better and worse tracks," this target assumes that all forms of education, from technical and vocational schools to various models of vocational education and training to higher education, can serve as pathways to valuable qualifications. This calls for not just the establishment of an institutional network and its connections to the labor market, but also the development of frameworks for qualifications, quality verification systems, and transitional processes between various educational levels and kinds. The implementation of Target 4.3 is crucial from the perspective of economic development and social cohesion: the extent to which access to vocational and higher education is truly equal and affordable determines the scale of human potential that is utilised, the level of innovation in the economy, and the possibility of breaking the intergenerational transmission of inequality.

The promise to significantly raise the proportion of adults and youth with the technical and vocational skills necessary for employment, decent jobs, and entrepreneurship by 2030 is known as Target 4.4. With this goal, the focus is shifted from the simple "completion" of a certain educational level to the practical application of competencies in the job market and in



economic activities. In actuality, it involves the creation of contemporary vocational education and training as well as lifelong learning programs that allow adults and youth to improve their digital and entrepreneurial skills, update their credentials, and alter their occupational profiles. Since education is now seen as a vital tool for boosting employability, productivity, and the economy's capacity for innovation rather than merely as a means of imparting general knowledge, there is an obvious connection between this and Goal 8 (decent job and economic growth). In order to avoid reducing students to the role of workers or entrepreneurs, Target 4.4 presents a challenging task for educational systems: striking a balance between teaching "for labor market needs" and upholding education's larger, humanistic purpose.

Assuming that by 2030, gender disparities in education should be eradicated and that the most disadvantaged groups—such as persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples, and children in vulnerable situations—should have equal access to all levels of education and vocational training, Target 4.5 formulates one of the most normatively charged commitments. Since the goal goes beyond the broad principle of equality and instead names particular groups that have historically been systematically marginalized and excluded from education, this is effectively the "core of inclusiveness" under SDG 4. In addition to equal enrollment and completion rates for boys and girls, gender equality entails the eradication of more covert forms of discrimination, such as gender-based violence in schools, limitations on career goals, and stereotypes in curricula. In order to include people with disabilities, indigenous communities, and children in "very difficult situations" (such as extreme poverty, conflict, or forced migration), inclusive education, flexible learning options, linguistic and cultural support, and sufficient funding for schools functioning in the most trying circumstances are all necessary. Therefore, Target 4.5 makes it abundantly evident that the language of "education for all" is meaningless if it does not address profound, systemic disparities.

Target 4.6, which focuses on the most fundamental aspect of the right to education, is predicated on the idea that by 2030, all children and a significant percentage of adults, both male and female, should be proficient in reading, writing, and math. This brings us back to the issue of illiteracy and "functional illiteracy," but in a different context: in an information-rich environment, inadequate reading comprehension and numeracy abilities essentially equate to exclusion from social, civic, and economic life. This target applies not only to the least developed nations, where sizable populations remain illiterate, but also to middle- and high-income nations, where a lack of basic skills among adults and children has become an issue (e.g., among older people, migrants, or those who drop out of school early). In order to reach individuals that do not benefit from traditional educational provision, the planned methods



include both raising the standard of primary education and creating adult literacy programs, remedial courses, community-based initiatives, and the use of new technology. . SDG 4's inclusion of 4.6 emphasizes that literacy and numeracy continue to be the cornerstones of all other competencies; without them, participation in a complex world and lifelong learning are unattainable. Target 4.7 is the most programmatic and axiologically charged of the targets. It makes the assumption that by 2030, all students will have the knowledge and abilities necessary to advance sustainable development, including through education on sustainable lifestyles and sustainable development, human rights education, gender equality education, the advancement of a nonviolent and peaceful culture, and global citizenship. According to this viewpoint, education is specifically "tasked" with a mission: it is no longer just about imparting neutral knowledge but also about fostering the attitudes, values, and competencies that will help people and societies deal with the major issues of our day, such as the climate crisis, rising inequality, conflicts, migration, and political polarization. Human rights, environmental responsibility, and the capacity to work together across national, religious, and cultural boundaries are to be taught in schools and other educational institutions. Because it touches on highly politicized and ideological topics, Target 4.7 creates tensions. It raises questions about what “sustainable development,” “global citizenship,” or “gender equality” mean, how schools should influence students' values, and where the boundaries between education and indoctrination reside. 4.7, on the other hand, most effectively realizes the humanistic aspect of SDG 4, connecting the new agenda of sustainable development, ecological responsibility, and global interconnectedness with the old notion of education as a place for personal growth and the establishment of peace.

By focusing on the construction of new educational facilities and the renovation of existing ones to better meet the varied needs of students, Target 4.a draws attention to the material and, at the same time, highly social aspects of achieving Goal 4. The problem is not merely “more schools,” but schools that are different from those of the past—schools that are sensitive to the needs of children of various ages and from a variety of social backgrounds, designed with gender differences in mind (e.g., in terms of safety, sanitation, and space organization), and architecturally accessible to people with disabilities. The establishment of a “safe, non-violent, inclusive, and effective learning environment” is crucial in this context. This means that infrastructure is more than just a setting for the educational process; rather, it co-creates the school environment in a way that influences students' sense of safety, their connections with teachers, their ability to work with active techniques, and their openness to diversity. The achievement of this goal necessitates not only the adoption of particular standards for anti-discrimination policies, violence prevention, and systems of psychological and social



support, but also the investment in buildings and equipment (such as architectural accessibility, laboratories, sanitation, access to water and energy, and digital connectivity). Target 4.a makes it abundantly evident that the standard of the physical and social environment in which learning occurs is inextricably related to the quality of education. Assuming a significant increase in the number of scholarships available to citizens of developing countries, particularly those in Africa, small island developing states, and least developed countries, Target 4.b focuses on the dimension of international solidarity and educational mobility. This will allow them to pursue studies and training in technical, engineering, and scientific fields, as well as higher education, vocational education, and information and communication technologies in both developed and developing nations. This goal reflects the belief that there are still global inequalities in access to high-quality education, particularly at higher and technical levels, and that promoting educational mobility from the global South to the North (as well as within the South) is one way to help close these gaps. As long as appropriate circumstances for return and employment are established, scholarships are intended to act as a tool for developing human capital that may be utilized in the recipients' home countries in addition to offering them personal chances. However, 4.b highlights the ambivalence of such programs: in addition to their potential for development, there is a chance of "brain drain," which occurs when the most highly qualified graduates stay in their home nations. This is why, rather than focusing only on individual study abroad programs, collaboration that connects individual mobility with institutional projects, university alliances, and support for education systems in developing nations is becoming increasingly important.

Target 4.c highlights teachers, a factor that essentially determines if the other SDG 4 targets are feasible. It makes the assumption that by 2030, there should be a significant increase in the number of qualified teachers, primarily through the growth of international collaboration in teacher education and professional development in developing nations, with a focus on the least developed nations and other areas with the worst staffing shortages. This goal stems from the understanding that, in many regions of the world, schools face challenges related to not only a teacher shortage, but also inadequate professional preparation, limited opportunities for ongoing professional development, the profession's low status, and challenging working conditions. Therefore, Target 4.c recommends a shift in perspective from considering teachers as a "self-replenishing resource" to considering them as strategic players in development policy who need funding, systemic support, and cross-border experience sharing. Scholarship and training programs, institutional partnerships between teacher-education institutions, and the sharing of expertise in areas like inclusive education, developing digital competence, and



working in conflict or humanitarian crises are all examples of international cooperation in this regard. Therefore, 4.c unifies the entire SDG 4 agenda, reminding us that without a robust, qualified, and well-supported teaching workforce, no institutional, curricular, or infrastructure reform will produce the desired results.

Summary

One of the most important prerequisites for the advancement of modern societies, both locally and globally, is education, according to the chapter on Sustainable Development Goal 4 (“Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all”). The entire study demonstrates that education is one of the primary ties that hold the contemporary world together; it is much more than just a system of educational institutions, curricula, and tests. Here, education is seen as a process that permeates every stage of a person's life, from early childhood to late adulthood, and as a human right and public good. Sustainable Development Goal 4 is positioned within this broad framework, not as a technical set of indicators but rather as an effort to translate a humanistic understanding of education—such as that found in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights—into the language of specific international agreements and governmental regulations. We have attempted to demonstrate in this text that the core of Goal 4 is the simultaneous insistence on universality, equality, and excellence. The idea is that everyone should have real access to meaningful education, from early childhood care and development through primary and secondary education, to vocational, technical, and higher education, as well as various forms of lifelong learning, regardless of their origin, gender, place of birth, disability, or social standing. From this angle, education has two inseparable aspects: (1) the socio-economic (human capital, innovation, social cohesion, democracy) and (2) the individual (personal growth, liberation, agency). However, the picture of Goal 4's execution is far from perfect. Intersecting crises are highlighted. Mass education frequently does not result in actual learning, and systemic injustices pertaining to gender, poverty, disability, armed conflict, or migration still prevent entire communities from receiving an education. For their part, education systems face persistent underfunding and a teacher shortage in a setting where digitalization frequently widens gaps rather than levels them. In light of this, there is a chance that the aim itself will be “technicized,” reduced to scorecards and indicators that can't adequately represent the caliber of relationships, the atmosphere at school, or the experience of the learner.



Finally, it should be mentioned that Goal 4 is a mirror of current contradictions as well as a normative project. It highlights the conflict between the promise of "education for all" and the real allocation of wealth and power, as well as between the idea of education as a place of liberation and its role in perpetuating the status quo. However, it also implies that a larger discussion about how we understand development, justice, and responsibility in a world of profound interdependencies and crises is currently taking place in the context of Goal 4 disputes, which center on funding, the meaning of lifelong learning, the role of the teacher, and education for sustainable development, human rights, and peace.

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