

THE IMPACT OF GLOBAL CHALLENGES ON UNESCO'S EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMMES AND INITIATIVES

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Global challenges have become the hottest topic of our time, as no strategic decision can be made without taking them into consideration. The material in this article is of practical nature for all actors involved in the process and structure of education. The article examines main UNESCO programmes and initiatives in this field, highlighting the nature of their implementation and focuses on the impact of the global challenges on the education process. Overall, UNESCO has all the necessary tools to adapt to global challenges and achieve sustainable peace.

Key words: UNESCO; global challenges; equal opportunities; sustainable development; lifelong learning; rethinking education; COVID-19.

Global challenges such as climate change, economic development, wars, conflicts and migration have a major impact on UNESCO's initiatives in education. One of the UNESCO's main priorities in this area is to ensure equal educational opportunities for all people, regardless of their social status, ethnicity and place of residence. The organisation calls for improving the quality of education, reducing illiteracy and making higher education more available. UNESCO also builds partnerships with governments, civil society, business and international organizations to deliver its programmes.

UNESCO is engaged in educational efforts to promote learning in science and technology. It also works with public institutions and private companies to improve the quality of vocational education. It has an ambitious Education for Sustainable Development initiative, which aims to ensure access to quality education around the world. In developing countries, where many barriers hinder education, UNESCO introduces innovative solutions, such as blended learning methods, increased access to the internet and the use of mobile technology. UNESCO is also actively engaged in promoting intercultural education and combating xenophobia, racism and other forms of intolerance and discrimination [1; 2].

Outdated norms and methods of organizing education in many countries are making it much more difficult to address new challenges and problems. The fact that old approaches were no longer sufficient was reflected as early as the 1989 UNESCO General Conference, which recognized "the importance of reliable and up-to-date statistical information at both national and international levels" and called on the organisation to provide "statistics that are essential for researchers, planners and decision-makers at various levels" [3; 4].

Modern practices require people to constantly develop, improve their abilities and understand new trends. All of these demands have also affected the field of education. Thus, the concept of "lifelong learning" was born. UNESCO is one of the pioneering institutions that have introduced "lifelong learning" on a global scale. In 1997, UNESCO organized the Fifth International Conference on Adult Education, where adult literacy, adult basic education, vocational and technical training for further learning were discussed in the perspective of lifelong learning. The conference was continued in Brazil in 2009. The Conference Report demonstrated the importance of adult learning within the concepts of sustainable economic and human development. The report also talked about how adults like to lead their lives, enhancing their personal and working lives through the development of skills. [5; 6; 7].

In 2015, UNESCO published 'Rethinking Education', a document on the challenges and needs of education in the 21st century. The Report showed that education is a right and is viewed as a public good. Education policy is recognized, taking into account the Sustainable Development Goals as a focal point. Following the adaptation of the SDGs at the 70th session of the UN General Assembly, UNESCO emphasized global literacy and took steps to implement the 2030 SDGs through lifelong learning. More recently, UNESCO has focused on adult learning and education to promote lifelong learning. Thus, the concept of lifelong learning is changing in line with global learning needs and realities [7; 8].

The year 2020 marks UNESCO's 75th anniversary. However, in this anniversary year, UNESCO and the international community as a whole are facing a new global challenge posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. Some of the most devastating consequences of this international crisis are felt in the fields of education and culture. The COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in the closure of schools and universities worldwide and left millions of children and young people without access to education [9; 10].

UNESCO conducted a comprehensive assessment of the education disruptions caused by the pandemic. The assessment found that nearly 1.6 billion young people were affected by school closures in April, representing 94 per cent of all students in more than 190 countries. This analysis forms the basis for the report of UN Secretary-General António Guterres entitled Education in the era of COVID-19. The document identifies specific problems that have been exacerbated by the crisis, including lack of equal access to education, declining budgets, poor technical equipment for schools and teachers who were not ready to work remotely. In response, UNESCO has developed a number of strategies and recommendations aimed at ensuring that education continues, subject to the constraints imposed to prevent the spread of the virus [9; 10].

Overall, global challenges are significant factors affecting the development of education in the world. As a UN organization, UNESCO responds to these challenges by developing appropriate strategies and calling upon governments, civil society, business and other international organizations to address them. In this way, UNESCO continues to play an important role in creating a more just and sustainable society through the development and improvement of education. Its initiatives in this area are supported by the global community and aimed to achieve common goals of the whole world free of poverty, inequality and conflict.

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