

CALL FOR ABSTRACTS

AUSTRIAN LAUNCH OF THE UNESCO GLOBAL EDUCATION MONITORING REPORT 2026: COUNTDOWN TO 2030: ACCESS AND EQUITY

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON INEQUITY IN EDUCATION

Date: September 24-25, 2026

Format: in person

Place:

- UNESCO GEM-Report launch event, Sept. 24: Austrian Commission for UNESCO, Georg-Coch-Platz 2, 1010 Vienna
- International Conference, Sept. 25: Department of Education, University of Vienna & ÖFSE: Sensengasse 3+3a, 1090 Vienna

Conveners: Department of Education, University of Vienna, Austrian Commission for UNESCO, Austrian Foundation for Development Research

BACKGROUND

As the 2030 deadline for the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) approaches, interest in whether they will be achieved—or missed—is intensifying. SDG 4 focuses on education and states: “Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.” Yet current forecasts are sobering: on a global scale, none of the SDG 4 targets is expected to be met by 2030.

The Global Education Monitoring Report (GEM)—an annual publication by an independent team of UNESCO-based experts assessing progress toward SDG 4—will devote its 2026 edition to a comprehensive stocktaking of one of the most critical targets: access to and equity in education.

Although stagnation or even setbacks in recent years are often attributed to the Covid-19 pandemic, this alone does not fully explain the situation. Educational inequalities within and between countries, particularly along the North–South divide, have proven remarkably persistent, despite significant gains in access since the Second World War. These inequities profoundly affect individuals’ life chances and hamper broader societal development and social cohesion.

The persistent failure to address these challenges effectively underscores the need for a wide-ranging discussion of their dimensions, manifestations, root causes, and possible solutions. The launch of the GEM 2026 will therefore be followed by a one-day conference designed to foster deeper debate and bring together diverse perspectives on this multifaceted issue.

OBJECTIVES

The event aims to discuss achievements and challenges related to the implementation of SDG4 at the global level, with a particular focus on access to and equity in education. It seeks to promote critical examination of the topic from multiple perspectives and to contribute to the further development of dialogue among diverse stakeholder groups, including policy makers, researchers, education workers, and civil society.

Key questions

- What are the main international findings regarding progress or decline in access to and equity in education? What is the current status quo, and what are the prospects of achieving SDG 4 by 2030?
- What are the root causes of current challenges? What role have multiple crises (e.g. the Covid-19 pandemic, wars, and conflicts) played in delaying progress, and what more persistent or structural obstacles remain?
- What challenges are identified internationally across different contexts, and what strategies are recommended?
- What are the specific challenges for Austria in relation to this topic, and which strategies are suitable?

For this conference, we adopt a broad understanding of equity and access, welcoming both scientific and practice-oriented contributions from a wide range of perspectives. Submissions addressing diverse dimensions of equity – such as social, economic, gender-related, ability-based, religious, cultural, or other relevant aspects – are encouraged, whether they focus on the macro, meso, or micro level of education. We also welcome submissions across varied fields of education, including formal, non-formal, vocational, and adult education, as well as across levels from early childhood through higher education and lifelong learning. To foster dialogue and exchange, we particularly welcome contributions from various geographic contexts and from diverse stakeholders.

We invite abstract submissions for

- Individual papers
- Thematic panels (consisting of 3-4 papers)
- Workshops

Length of abstracts:

- Individual papers: maximum 400 words
- Thematic panels: Proposal description up to 300 words; paper abstracts up to 400 words each
- Workshops: maximum 500 words, including a description of expected outcomes, target participants, and a rough schedule

Please send your abstracts to Monica Schatara: monica.schatara@univie.ac.at by **April 30, 2026**. You will be notified of the review outcome by **July 1, 2026**.

Conference participation is free of charge, and refreshments will be provided. If you need assistance, please notify the organiser. Sign language interpretation can be provided.

PRELIMINARY PROGRAMME

Thursday, Sept 24: Conference opening and UNESCO GEM-Report Launch event

- 17.00 Welcome and introduction: Barbara Schulte (University of Vienna), Martin Fritz (Austrian Commission for UNESCO), Werner Raza (Austrian Foundation for Development Research)
- 17.15 Presentation of the Global Education Monitoring Report 2026: Manos Antoninis, Director of the GEM Report
- 17.45 Round table on the Austrian situation
- Christoph Wiederkehr, Minister of Education (TBC)
 - Manos Antoninis, UNESCO-GEM Report (TBC)
 - Barbara Schulte, University of Vienna
 - Expert on Early Childhood Care and Education
 - Civil Society Representative on children's rights
- 18.15 Q&A Session
- 18.45 Closure and information about the conference on the subsequent day
- 19.00 Networking – light snack and refreshment will be provided

Facilitation:

Stephanie Godec (Austrian Commission for UNESCO) and Margarita Langthaler (Austrian Foundation for Development Research)

Friday, Sept 25 – International Conference

- 9.00 Arrival and registration
- 9.30 Welcome and opening: Barbara Schulte (University of Wien), Stephanie Godec (Austrian Commission for UNESCO), Margarita Langthaler (Austrian Foundation for Development Research)
- 9.45 Keynote: Aina Tarabini, Università Autònoma de Barcelona
- 10.30 Q&A
- 10.45 Coffee break
- 11.00 Parallel sessions
- 12.30 Lunch break
- 14.00 Parallel sessions
- 15.30 Coffee break
- 15.45 Closing panel
- 16.30 Closure

Conference language: English