United Nations
Educational, Scientific and
Cultural Organization

A primer for engaging education stakeholders in policy reviews

Education 2030

UNESCO Education Sector

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Acronyms and abbreviations

CapED	Capacity Development for Education
CBR	Country Background Report
EFA	Education for All
EPR	Education policy review
ESA	Education sector analysis
ESD	Education sector diagnosis
ESP	Education sector plan
ESPIG	Education Sector Programme Implementation Grant
FO	UNESCO field office
GPE	Global Partnership for Education
ICT	Information and communications technology
IIEP	UNESCO International Institute for Educational Planning
IOM	International Organization for Migration
ITECE	ICT Teacher Education Centres of Excellence
LEG	Local Education Group
NGO	Non-governmental organization
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
RB	UNESCO regional bureau
SDG 4	Sustainable Development Goal 4
TTI	Teacher training institutes
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UIS	UNESCO Institute for Statistics
UNHCR	Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
USD	United States dollar

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1. Context and purpose of this primer

Ideally timed, after the completion of an education sector analysis (ESA) and in the leadup to the drafting of the education sector plan (ESP), the policy review process is, in itself, conceived as an opportunity for capacity development in system-wide policy formulation. Seen from the outside, the most easily recognizable outcomes of the many education policy reviews (EPRs) carried out by UNESCO are the resulting review reports.[1] Yet, UNESCO's technical assistance with EPRs should not be solely identified with the final reports because, in the end, long-lasting effects stem from peer learning through the review process and its impact on the development of decision makers', administrators' and education stakeholders' capacities to formulate better, evidence-informed education policies in beneficiary countries. The launch of a report may represent an important milestone in the wider process of providing technical assistance in education policies, but it is not an end in itself. This is why a distinction has to be made between technical assistance with education policies, for which UNESCO essentially offers capacity development, and the singled-out policy review report, which is one visible output of the process.

Against this backdrop, this primer is designed to provide UNESCO staff and education stakeholders with an introduction to the methodology of UNESCO policy review in the wider context of SDG 4-Education 2030 and how it could be designed as a tool for capacity development leading to improved policymaking and planning in education. The contents of this primer draw largely on the experience gained during the first round of the EPRs carried out by the Section of Education Policy from 2011 to 2018. The primer benefitted from major contributions by UNESCO colleagues at Headquarters, regional bureaus (RBs) and field offices.

The contents of this primer elaborate on the following:

- the foundations of and methodological approach to EPRs as a tool for capacity development, from UNESCO's perspective;
- how to connect an EPR process with other development processes at various levels and, in particular, with the ESA and ESP;
- how to ensure that the review support process results in capacity development for education stakeholders;
- how to use the results of the EPR to foster a sector-wide dialogue on education, maximizing country ownership and the adoption of relevant policy recommendations; and
- how to plan for successful processes and outcomes.

This primer is not intended to provide a prescriptive, step-by-step process, nor does it seek to be a comprehensive 'how to' guide for undertaking policy research on education; rather, it aims at providing some key guidelines, clarifying expectations and ensuring consistency throughout the process and across themes and policy domains. It also aims at providing guidance to the international experts and members of the national team involved in the policy review process with regard to UNESCO's approach.

1 See the dedicated annex for the links.

After introducing the objectives and expected results, as well as the basic components of an EPR, this primer provides advice for each step of the policy review process. Specific guidelines are provided for drafting the policy review report, including the analytical sequence, policy recommendations and roadmaps. The primer also contains guidance on how to make strategic use of the review process in the context of education reform processes, as well as to optimize its contribution to capacity development, policy dialogue and sector management.

Finally, as this primer contains an extensive description of the approach and procedures, it can also be used to present what the process of providing policy support entails for potentially interested governments, development partners and education stakeholders.

Boundaries and limitations

An EPR is based on extensive research and numerous interviews held during several field visits, as well as available data and existing educational indicators covering access, equity, quality, efficiency, effectiveness, cost and financing, and management. That being said, it is by no means an exhaustive analysis of the issues at play. Such an analysis, were it possible, would require much greater access to primary data, a longer time frame and much wider consultations with stakeholders, in particular, non-State actors, to enable the triangulation of the evidence collected and, thus, more conclusive policy recommendations.

The review of education policies is sometimes difficult when it comes to gaining access to policy statements, thus making it necessary to rely on interviews with government officials with regard to policy objectives and specifications. This may add some bias to the analysis. In addition, the lack of available data and, in particular, disaggregated data make it difficult to reference specific information to validate policy findings.

One of the most significant paradigm shifts in education has been brought by the integration of the concept of lifelong learning into SDG 4-Education 2030. A renewed focus on lifelong learning principles in education could offer both opportunities and challenges in policy development in the areas of learning outcomes, skills acquisition and learning pathways.[2] The reviews carried out so far have not covered a range of learning pathways such as early childhood education, adult education and skill acquisition outside formal systems from a wider perspective of education and learning. An expanded review of the education system from a broader lifelong learning perspective may help Member States to further enrich policy discourse on education development as they work towards fulfilling Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4).

2 https://en.unesco.org/gem-report/report/2016/education-people-and-planet-creating-sustainable-futures-all

2. What is an education policy review?

Succinctly described, an education policy review (EPR) aims to provide an overall appraisal of the education system and the way in which development policies, regulations, structures and education-specific policies, plans, programmes and practices could be reformed to improve education in the country. Once a Member State has made an explicit policy request, UNESCO, after a previous data analysis to detect the main bottlenecks in its education system, and the interested party agree on the education policy domains to be addressed. In line with this agreement, an EPR provides a set of policy recommendations for the most pressing education policy issues identified by the beneficiary Member State. The review process mobilizes key stakeholders in identifying effective policies and thus generates momentum for change.

It is underpinned by ***a participatory process of capacity development in system-wide policy and planning*** facilitated by UNESCO at the request of a Member State, combining peer learning opportunities with thorough analytical work, involving national and international expertise and local consultations and discussions, for improved, evidence-informed policymaking.

The most apparent product of the review process is the final report, which summarizes the main findings and proposes a set of policy recommendations and roadmaps. However, this final output is the result of the deliberate capacity-development process, which combines formal and informal training with learning-by-doing opportunities.

Ideally drawing on a few sector analysis techniques and aiming to provide a sound foundation for a sector plan or reform, the EPR process focuses on a select number of critical and relevant policy domains as suggested by the national authorities, such as system governance, teacher policies, school leadership, curriculum, learning assessments or technology in education. The whole process is guided by evidence from sectoral analyses and international benchmarks. It brings together local expertise and international experts, the role of the latter being to support the formulation of the findings, facilitate their interpretation, share international experience and promote peer learning. Methodologically, the review process combines desk research, interviews, consultations and focus group discussions with the main stakeholders, as well as field visits conducted to enable in-depth analysis and the corroboration of the desk research findings.

Each review is conducted by a team of UNESCO experts made up of staff, professionals and academics in the field of education with specific expertise in selected policy domains for the country.[3] An important feature that distinguishes UNESCO's approach to EPRs is that the Organization works as an honest broker, facilitating discussions to improve the understanding of issues, implications for education policies regarding the range of possible policy options and strategies. Recognizing the many competing and, sometimes, conflicting interests in the field of education policies, UNESCO's convening power makes it possible to bring together different stakeholders, acting as a platform for fostering dialogue, multi-stakeholder partnerships and mutual learning. In particular, technical assistance with education policies bridges the gap between academic and policy communities and practitioners, by combining research findings with a focus on solving problems 'on the ground'.

3 The team is composed of international, regional and/or national experts in their respective fields of competence.

3. Designing policy reviews as a tool for capacity development

The formulation of effective policies and plans remains central to achieving equitable, quality and inclusive education and lifelong learning opportunities for all. In the context of SDG 4-Education 2030, UNESCO places growing emphasis on helping Member States to shape and guide their reform agendas through effective policymaking, action-planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation, which quite often requires investing time and resources in capacity development.

There is no one-size-fits-all approach to a policy review that can be used in all countries whatever their circumstances, as the review process is context-specific, which requires adapting a generic methodological approach. Yet, while some flexibility is needed, there is a growing consensus on the consideration that a successful policy review process should lead to the improved education policymaking capacities of the stakeholders involved. Its overall aim should be, therefore, to contribute to the development of their capacities to define relevant, feasible and evidence-informed national education policies, and effectively implement them. In doing so, EPRs contribute to fostering policy dialogues, knowledge sharing and strategic partnerships in support of policy implementation.

Objectives

An EPR is a **capacity development process** that results in a review report.

The review as a tangible output

A policy review involves a self-assessment conducted by national experts, followed by external perspectives of what a country's education development entails, based on international and comparative research. This triggers 'insider-outsider' knowledge sharing and policy dialogue. A set of policy issues in a particular domain (such as curriculum development, teacher policies, student assessment or the use of digital technology in education) or a whole sub-sector is examined to learn from past experience with a forward-looking eye, as well as from the experience of other countries, and enact changes in policy and legislation, if necessary.

Any review is meant to lead to a particular **output**, in this case a report in which the key policy issues are identified through the analysis of factors determining the relative success or failure of policy inception, funding, implementation and evaluation. The report suggests a set of relevant, feasible and prioritized policy recommendations intended to change how education systems work for the better. For this output to be relevant and meaningful, it is crucial that the review take place at the right moment in the national education policy and planning cycle. The more closely the review relates to an ESA and, subsequently, to an ESP or education strategy, the more useful the review is likely to be in informing policy actions (see Box 1).

Box 1: Effective handover to subsequent strategic planning processes in Saint Kitts and Nevis

The official handover of the policy review to the education authorities illustrated excellent coordination between the policy review process and the subsequent strategic five-year plan. The authorities had anticipated well in advance that the two initiatives should be aligned. Prior to the completion of the policy review, a three-day meeting was organized with UNESCO Headquarters, UNESCO International Institute for Educational Planning (IIEP) and the coordinator of the national team to explore policy priorities and objectives and develop an initial design for the five-year strategic plan. The policy review served as a foundation and was consistent with the upcoming five-year strategic plan, which contributed to the effective implementation of the strategic plan.

Beyond the beneficiary country itself, the report can also be shared with other Member States, as well as relevant policy communities and networks of policy researchers and development partners, thus contributing to the global body of knowledge for a better understanding of education.

With regard to sharing policy experiences, the reality is that many countries suffer from a lack of data or the capacities to translate data into evidence that can inform policy processes. The broad scope of SDG 4-Education 2030 presents particular challenges in this regard. A review process is therefore also able to identify information gaps and suggest ways in which they could be addressed. Given resource constraints and political pressures, a review may happen to start without the evaluation of the impact of a particular policy or set of policies, or an in-depth ESA. Often, to be effective, a review has to occur in quite a narrow time frame and would rarely provide an opportunity to conduct extensive empirical research such as large-scale surveys or a detailed budget analysis.

The review as a capacity development process

The review provides capacity development opportunities, both formal and informal, for relevant stakeholders and, notably, decision makers and system administrators in the country, while promoting an evidence-based approach to the sector-wide dialogue on education. This is why the review process contains, as a key component, a series of conversational opportunities for discussing different interpretations of the same phenomena and identifying alternative courses of action, including opportunities for formal training. The process can also stimulate interest within the country and beyond for further sustained national, regional and international cooperation on education and related policy areas.

Expected results

The most tangible output of a policy review is the final report, containing the evidence and analysis used to identify the main policy issues and support the policy recommendations intended to address them. It can be a very influential report, but it remains only an output and, if left as it is, may not yield any results. Expectations for an EPR greatly surpass a mere report. It should improve the capacities of the system and its main stakeholders to operate in an evidence-rich policy environment.

Therefore, an EPR should be seen mainly as a process for developing the capacities of the authorities and key education stakeholders in the particular domains of policy analysis, formulation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation. In other words, the ultimate aim is to strengthen the system through the development of **the capacities of national authorities, decision makers and system administrators, as well as other key stakeholders, to ensure that evidence fosters and informs the sectorwide dialogue on education and the whole process of policy formulation, implementation and evaluation.** In so doing, an EPR is bound to provide a credible, evidence-based policy analysis that, together with the sector analysis, lays the foundations for a relevant, feasible sector plan.

The assessment and subsequent recommendations should be validated by national stakeholders so that the national authorities are empowered to take ownership of the EPR report and ensure that, where appropriate, the recommendations are adopted (see Box 2).

Box 2: A policy review as a contributor to major reform efforts in Malaysia

Malaysia, the first country to benefit from a UNESCO EPR, provides a good example of how the EPR process not only contributes to the development of national capacities in system-wide policy and planning, but also national reform efforts. The review was commissioned by the government in 2011 as a means to enrich the design of their major reform efforts with international experiences. The final result later translated into the **Malaysian Education Blueprint 2013-2025**, an ambitious agenda designed to foster the inclusive and equitable development of education as the basis for higher economic growth. The policy review was, therefore, a unique process involving all key actors to craft an independent assessment and set of policy recommendations, to be followed by support for their implementation through capacity development and innovative approaches.

Read more at https://www.thestar.com.my/news/nation/2013/11/09/unesco-malaysia-education-blueprint/#qlxgeip1rmCZ2MP6.99

Furthermore, the review lays the groundwork for technical assistance that UNESCO and other development partners could provide to the country in the policy domains selected, in support of the corresponding recommendations. A review can thus be considered as a tool for strengthening international cooperation. Box 3 provides an indicative list of steps that countries may follow to develop an EPR.

Box 3: The generic process for producing an EPR report

- The **overall assessment** of the education system in relation to access and inclusion, equity, quality and relevance, performance and efficiency.
- A **detailed policy analysis** of the areas that the country considers as priorities, which may include, among others, governance, teacher policies, school leadership, social participation, transitions to the world of work and further learning, student outcomes, gender equality, social inclusion, global citizenship education and environmental sustainability, and, more broadly, the challenges and bottlenecks that may prevent the country from achieving its education vision, goals and targets in line with SDG 4-Education 2030 and the 2030 Agenda as a whole.
- An **international comparative analysis** of the key policy levers used in comparable countries, selected in consultation with the national authorities, so as to help policy-makers and decision makers to learn from the experience of others and critically assess the relevance of these policy experiences to their country context.
- **Consensus building** among key education stakeholders and development partners on key policy issues and possible future avenues and actions.
- A set of **recommended actions** designed to address the needs and challenges of the Member State in the field of education, in the context of national policies and plans, and especially in attaining SDG 4-Education 2030.

Finally, the policy review may have important demonstrative effects, as Member States can show other countries, in a specific region and beyond, why an education review could be valuable for their own policy processes, and how to conduct their own in the wider context of their education policy and planning cycle, and national development priorities.

4. Basic components

Many organizations and institutions, ranging from international agencies and research institutes to civil society and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), have sought to analyse education policies in specific countries or regions. Several such initiatives have attempted to distil best practices or provide guidelines on how to formulate, implement and measure the impact of relevant education policies. Some have made a case for paying more attention to the education of infants, children, youth or adults. Often, they have focused on a given subsector of the education system. Overall, most of these exercises have resulted in yet another report, sometimes written by individuals alien to the system. The work may contain valuable analysis and policy insights, but it may not have a lasting impact.

The uniqueness of UNESCO's approach to EPRs is: (i) its systemic approach to the development of education in light of internationally agreed development goals (IADGs), more particularly, SDG 4-Education 2030; (ii) its response to policy domains and issues that Member States perceive as critical for the development of education; and (iii) the participatory nature of the approach to identifying the root causes and solutions, accompanied with peer learning between local and international experts. The review process combines a number of actors and building blocks, which are identified below.

1. The first phase is an extensive analysis of the education system, carried out during the self-assessment phase led by the national team. Drawing on this, the EPR comprises a chapter dedicated to the assessment of the education system, accompanied by a full set of existing educational indicators covering access, equity, quality, efficiency, effectiveness, cost and financing, and management.
2. The second phase is an analysis of the initial findings (both at the central and local levels), conducted by undertaking two assessment missions. Qualitative analysis is carried out through focus group discussions, one-on-one interviews and meetings with the stakeholders, in addition to field visits. This is followed by presentations of the issues and policy responses.

More details can be found in the corresponding sections of this primer.

4.1. The principles

When planning for an EPR, a number of foundational principles must be considered.

1. **The main result of the review is the reinforcement of national capacities.** When considering options about how to plan or conduct the policy review, decisions have to be based on the expected value and implications for capacity development.
2. **The review process has to be informed by evidence.** Often it is found that, although the concept of evidence-based policymaking is well established in public discourse, practice tends to fall short of expectations. The review process is therefore an opportunity to identify critical gaps in evidence while contributing to promoting a culture of evidence in the country's education policy.
3. **The review should initially be demand-driven, led by the country, and include the participation of other stakeholders.** The degree to which national authorities drive the review will be reflected in its impact. Essentially, the review should promote a participatory approach, as the higher the consensus among stakeholders, the stronger the policy.

4. **The role of UNESCO in facilitating and providing technical support for the review.** In this context, UNESCO will function as the catalyst and facilitator of the review process. The participation of other sister organizations and international and national partners should always be sought.

4.2. The review questions

The review only works well when there is a clear understanding of the questions to be addressed. To be operational, the review questions have to be formulated very concisely. Usually, they will revolve around the following.

1. How far is the country from reaching its policy objectives and targets in the selected policy areas?
2. What are the bottlenecks that prevent success in these policy areas?
3. What can be done to address them?
    a. What are the (competing) views of the main stakeholders?
    b. What can be learned from international experiences?
    c. What does the review team propose as politically feasible and cost-effective recommendations?

Box 4: Examples of nationally designed review questions

How can we best ensure the equitable allocation of resources to the islands of Saint Kitts and Nevis respectively?

The country functions under a federal system that is highly decentralized. The two islands of Saint Kitts and Nevis function almost independently, with a high level of autonomy, in terms of educational provision at the school level. However, an equal share of education resources is not ensured. Being an honest broker, UNESCO is expected to provide evidence-based policy recommendations to the education authorities to address these equity issues.

How should we address equity and disparity issues in fragile contexts?

Sudan has one of the largest numbers of out-of-school children in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. Currently, three million Sudanese children between the ages of 5 and 13 are not in school. The SDG 4 targets require further progress to be made in reducing inequities across geographic location, gender and ability groups, and within crisis-affected settings. In reality, however, progress toward these targets is hampered by the limited resources allocated by the central government to aid in the ongoing decentralization process.

Data source: UNESCO/UIS (2018). http://uis.unesco.org/en/country/sd.

4.3. The review team

The review team consist of national and international sub-teams, as described below. It is also encouraged to respect gender balance.

1. **National team:** The national authorities will decide who will be in the national team as direct beneficiaries of the capacity-building process, with the responsibility of engaging in a policy-assessment exercise. This team will be made up of national directors and high-level officials. UNESCO recommends that most of its members be senior officers in the ministry responsible for education, but it also stresses the need to consider the views of other relevant ministries such as the Ministries of Finance, Gender, Health, Agriculture, Labour, Science and Technology, and Culture, as well as specialized national institutes or agencies such as those responsible for national statistics or those involved in educational research, teacher education and learning assessments.

   National coordinator: The national authorities will also appoint a national coordinator, who will act as UNESCO's counterpart and the coordinator of the national team, with the following main responsibilities:

   1. Focal point and interface for all communications with UNESCO in relation to the EPR process, and also within the country, regarding the review process, for example with different ministries.
   2. Meeting and exchange organizer for the members of the national team, with the following tasks:
      - organizing the meeting schedules for country visits and the corresponding logistics with guidance from the review team;
      - making the review team's travel arrangements within the country;
      - ensuring that the review team is accompanied to meetings and, where necessary, providing interpretation services.
   3. Coordinator of the drafting process of the Country Background Report (CBR), addressing feedback received, ensuring its completion and timely delivery and, when requested, providing additional information to the review team.
   4. Coordinator of the country's comments and validation of the draft EPR report.
   5. Organizer of consensual dissemination and follow-up activities within the country.

2. **UNESCO international team:** A team of international experts will be set up, involving as far as possible UNESCO staff from the regional offices and institutes, and Headquarters. Each selected policy area should have a dedicated international expert. At times, it may be appropriate to include a national expert, with knowledge of context and language(s), in the international team. This team will be crucial for capacity development and the conversational components.

   - **UNESCO Secretariat and overall coordinator:** When available, an education specialist from the UNESCO field office should act as overall coordinator. The National Commission for UNESCO has to be involved as well and can be critical, particularly in countries where UNESCO is a Non-Resident Agency (NRA)

Given the participatory approach of the review, the relevant education stakeholders should be identified from the outset and invited to participate. This applies notably to the members of the Local Education Group (LEG), who should be an integral part of the process.

4.4. The review process

Main stages

The review team will carry out a series of interrelated activities, which work as building blocks for the process, as follows.

1. **Needs assessment:** Once the government has formalized a request for a review process, it is crucial to identify, together with the national authorities, the policy areas to assess and the current capacity development needs. This will usually be the result of a dialogue between the Minister of Education, accompanied by the senior officials of the ministries, and UNESCO during the scoping mission.
2. **Desk research and Country Background Report (CBR):** UNESCO will facilitate the process of synthesizing the existing evidence in the selected policy areas. The main sources are sector analyses, existing national strategic plans and programmes, independent reports, international comparative analyses and academic papers. The resulting synthesized CBR will be used as input during the fact-finding mission and participatory phases of the review process.
3. **Training:** This is one of the most important components of the process, to be designed and organized by UNESCO in close collaboration with the national authorities. Formal face-to-face training (three to five days) focusing on system-wide policy and planning applied to the selected policy areas.
4. **Self-Assessment Country Report:** This report will be drafted by the members of the national team, led by the national coordinator, as the practical component of the training. UNESCO will elaborate guidelines for the drafting of the report, focusing specifically on the selected policy areas. The results of the report will contribute greatly to the fact-finding and participatory phases.
5. **Assessment phase through field visits:** The review team will pay a number of field visits to institutions relevant to the selected policy areas, and to educational institutions, to converse with local authorities, teachers, head teachers, parents and students, where appropriate.
6. **Assessment phase through policy discussions with the stakeholders:** These conversations, in the form of interviews and focus group discussions, will provide opportunities to learn from the perspectives of other education stakeholders and take them into consideration. The main findings of the desk research and CBR should inform these policy conversations.
7. **Final report and follow-up activities:** This report, including findings and actionable recommendations, will be drafted by UNESCO in close collaboration with the national team and then submitted to the main education stakeholders and, particularly, the LEG for validation. Changes can be made to the final report at this stage, before it is more widely disseminated in hard copies and made available online. It should lead to the organization of a number of follow-up activities by UNESCO, including the next strategic planning processes drawing on the policy recommendations.

8. **Evaluation:** All the participants involved will evaluate the whole review process. The results will then be shared with the national authorities for the preparation of the launch and dissemination of the report.
9. **Validation:** The validation phase precedes the launch and dissemination of the review report in the country.[4] The analysis and policy recommendations are refined at this stage, leading to their endorsement by the national team, as a prior step to the public launch of the report.
10. **Launch and dissemination:** The launch of the final review report is a major opportunity to gain visibility and media impact, while ensuring that the national authorities adopt the policy recommendations.

The figure below illustrates the main stages of the review process.

Figure 1: Stages of the EPR processes

Source: Authors

4 On a contextual basis, a wider audience such as parliamentarians and representatives from an education committee could be considered.

The whole process is initiated by a formal request from the national authorities to UNESCO. Following the request, UNESCO appoints a review coordinator and requests the national authorities to name a national coordinator. Both the UNESCO review coordinator and the coordinator of the national team then assist the national authorities with defining the scope of the review regarding their needs in the context of the policy and planning cycle, identifying the most important policy areas that will be covered and planning for the next steps.

Once the policy areas are defined, the process of gathering background information about the country's education policies begins, using an international comparative lens. This desk research work should lead to a CBR that will be used throughout the process by the review team. The UNESCO review coordinator will also recommend other UNESCO staff members or international experts who will form the international review team.

In parallel, over several discussions with the national authorities, UNESCO designs a formal training process, involving a face-to-face and an online component, for the members of the national review team. Its modules will address their needs in the domain of systemwide policy and planning. The practical exercises will provide the team with enough guided opportunities to draft their self-assessment of the status quo of the education policies in the selected areas, so they can identify the most salient policy issues and possible sensible policy recommendations, in the light of their views. The CBR and Self-Assessment Country Reports will, jointly, inform the rest of the review process. Where the national team has sufficient technical capacities, they may contribute significantly to the CBR.

Then, the field work starts. During this stage, the international and national review teams, will conduct a series of interviews, focus groups, discussions and visits to gather the views of as many governmental and non-governmental stakeholders as possible. Where relevant, international development partners, donors and NGOs should also be brought into the picture. The field work is intended to refine the identification of policy issues, gather additional evidence and test the relevance and feasibility of some policy avenues that may address them.

Immediately after and sometimes alongside the field work, the drafting process begins. A number of techniques that draw on UNESCO's past experience can be helpful when drafting the report. The drafting process is an extremely iterative process, in which both the international and national teams have to come to a consensus on the policy recommendations.

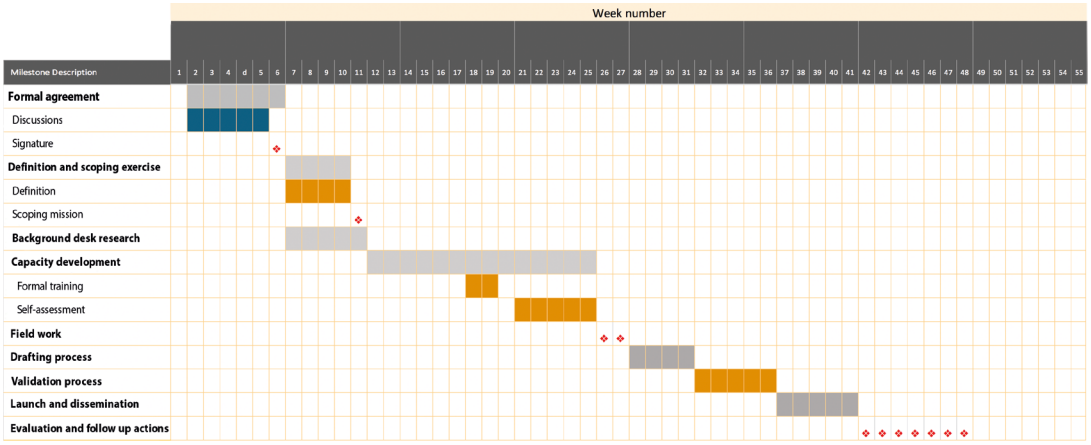
It is recommended that a validation phase precede the launch and dissemination of the review report in the country.[5] While the report is an important output of the review process, and certainly the most apparent one, the launch has to be accompanied by an evaluation of the whole process and its significance in terms of developing capacities in systemwide policy and planning. Ideally, it should also be considered a major opportunity to express how UNESCO, together with the national authorities and other development partners, will be contributing to the most relevant policy recommendations, continuing the process of capacity development.

5 On a contextual basis, a wider audience such as parliamentarians and representatives from an education committee could be considered.

Estimated duration and indicative timetable

The estimated duration of the whole review process is up to nine months. The table below provides an indicative timetable.

Table 1: Gantt EPR chart



Source: Authors

This table is purely indicative, as the whole review process quite often has to adjust to unforeseen or dramatic situations in the country, ranging from changes in government, elections, strikes and protests to major political crises.

Key: Colour-coded bars could assess the level of the progress made as well as anticipate any potential risk in progress. Blue bar (on track), yellow bar (low risk), and grey bar (medium risk).

Box 5. Frequent administrative turn-over – twice during the review process in Sudan

The policy review process took place during two cabinet changes – the first in May 2017 and the second in September 2018, just before the launch of the completed policy review. Because of this, the review took longer than originally planned. In close, regular collaboration with the UNESCO Office in Khartoum, a contingency plan was necessary as the original timeline could not be maintained due to the prevailing circumstances. Administrative turnover also carries a high risk regarding the loss of institutional memories at the institutional, organizational and individual levels. It may also cause uncertainty about whether a reform process and its momentum can be carried into the next administration.

5. Guidelines for the review process

This section provides overall guidance for each of the activities, stages and milestones of the review process. It defines the corresponding purpose of each activity and suggests a methodological approach based on UNESCO's EPR experience, in addition to clarifying the expected results and timeline.

5.1. Formal agreement

Purpose

A formal agreement is an opportunity to clarify the intended scope, duration and funding of the review process with the national authorities.

Methodology

A policy review should always be initiated by a formal request to UNESCO from the national authorities. This request then goes to the corresponding local office, the regional bureau or Headquarters.

The response to the formal request should be coordinated by the three UNESCO entities. It will include the contact details of the UNESCO focal point or coordinator of the policy review process. It will also request the contact details of the national coordinator to be appointed by the national authorities. An important element to clarify in the response is who will bear the costs. If the funds are expected to come from external sources to UNESCO, such as the country, an international partner or a donor, then it is important that the response includes an initial estimate of the costs.

A formal agreement may not always be necessary, but it is particularly recommended when the national authorities or an external partner commit to funding obligations, or when other agencies are involved.

In any event, no activities other than planning and budgeting should take place until the formal agreement is reached.

Expected output

While, in most cases, an exchange of letters may suffice, it may sometimes be important to sign a formal agreement, the specific modalities of which should be decided in line with the internal regulations of UNESCO and the government's rules and procedures.

Estimated duration

Concluding a formal agreement can be a lengthy process, as the intervention of the partners' legal services may involve a series of communications. At least one month is required.

5.2. Definition and scoping exercise

Purpose

Although cases involving a formal agreement exist, it is necessary for the national authorities and participants to engage in a first conversation about the technical elements of the review process for a detailed plan.

Methodology

The UNESCO review coordinator will set the dates for a first scoping mission, together with the concerned UNESCO teams and in close collaboration with the national coordinator. This mission will be organized by the UNESCO coordinator and, if deemed necessary, by other colleagues expected to have direct roles in the review process. This depends on the context and capacities of the entities within UNESCO Headquarters or the regional bureau.

The overall goal of the scoping[6] mission is to meet with the national authorities and to understand the needs of the country, and to start identifying and prioritizing the policy areas to be covered in the review process. It is important to discuss how the review might best contribute to ongoing policy and planning processes in the country and consider policy domains and issues that may be covered. The scoping mission will also provide the opportunity to present the EPR methodology and agree upon roles, responsibilities and the time frame for the work. The roles and responsibilities of institutions and individuals taking part in the process will be negotiated during the scoping mission and formally decided, when needed, through an exchange of letters following the scoping mission.

Box 6: Supporting national bodies to lead the process in Peru

After consultations through our UNESCO Office in Lima, Peru, it soon became clear that the Education Council, an independent consultative body to the Ministry of Education (MoE), was capable of leading the review process because of the past experience of its members, their qualifications and, above all, the additional impact foreseen. The UNESCO Secretariat therefore took on the role of supporting the decisions made by the Council, which, overall, complied with the methodological approach suggested by the Organization. Thanks to this transfer of responsibilities, the resulting report was instrumental in the educational debates that took place around the time of the 2017 presidential election.

The objectives of this mission are to:

- define, in consultation with the national authorities, the policy areas to be covered by the review;
- help the national authorities to identify the profiles of the members of the national review team;
- plan the next stages and agree on the dates of critical milestones such as the training component or the field visits based on agreed roles and responsibilities;

6 A scoping mission has been followed by assessment and validation missions for at least eight EPRs since their inception in 2010.

- raise awareness of the review process and the opportunities it offers for evidence-based policy debates within the broad range of national education stakeholders; whenever they exist, LEGs should also be contacted;
- coordinate the process with international development partners, bilateral organizations and NGOs' own activities in the areas of education policy and planning.

Expected output

At the end of the scoping mission, the UNESCO coordinator will share the main findings of the mission internally, as well as with the national authorities, from whom a confirmation of engagement to the review will be requested.

Internally, the UNESCO coordinator will identify the colleagues and international experts who will form the international review team.

Estimated duration

The scoping mission usually lasts three to five days, but may require two weeks for planning, if not more. The whole scoping exercise, including the agreement between the team coordinators and the national authorities, may require an additional two weeks.

5.3. Desk research and Country Background Report

Purpose

Once confirmation is received, the process of gathering background documentation and carrying out desk research based on secondary sources will start. The ultimate goal of this stage is to prepare the Country Background Report (CBR) that will support the work of the review team.

This CBR (for more details, see the section on tools and techniques below) will consist of a brief analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of the system in the broad areas of access, quality, equity, performance and internal and external efficiency, always with reference to the 2030 Agenda.

Content and methodology

The CBR is prepared as an invaluable source of information for the EPR process. It contains an overall description of the country context, development challenges and opportunities, and a presentation of the education system, with a brief analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of the system in the broad areas of access, quality, equity, performance and internal and external efficiency, with reference to the 2030 Agenda. The CBR stresses some key ideas, supported by data, that are intended to equip the EPR team with an overall assessment of the education system, in a comparative perspective with other countries. It seeks to identify social, economic and environmental issues that could be addressed by education policies.

The CBR is mainly a desk-based research process, drawing on national and international reports and assessments,[7] both quantitative and qualitative, as well as academic research articles. The preparation of the CBR is led by the UNESCO office responsible for the EPR, in cooperation with other UNESCO entities, national authorities and local development partners, depending on the resources, capacities and technical expertise available.

7 This may include background studies/reports by other partners such as the World Bank, UNICEF, UNHCR, the International Office for Migration (IOM), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), and NGOs.

Box 7: Adopting a comprehensive approach to research reviews in Thailand

In Thailand, there is a rich tradition of policy research, including in education, although it is not always published in English. To ensure that the desk review was comprehensive enough, the review team decided to organize several discussion groups with key research teams as a means to ensure that their findings were also taken into account. One of the panels was devoted to the research contributions made by other United Nations agencies, locally or regionally.

Relevant UNESCO Headquarters sections, regional offices and field offices, as well as institutes, will be mobilized to support the work on the CBRs. Data sources for the analysis include national statistics, policies and strategic plans, national education for all (EFA) assessment reports, national SDG 4 progress reports, the database of the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS), national reports submitted for the various procedural consultations on the implementation of standard-setting instruments on education, the UNESCO database on the right to education, other databases and the Global Education Monitoring (GEM) Report.

Expected output

For indicative purposes, the length of the CBR can be estimated at 8,000 words. The report will be submitted in either English, French or Spanish and translated into the national language whenever possible.

Box 8: How do we work when the official languages are not working languages of UNESCO?

In Sudan, the policy review team was able to engage high-level technical experts who could communicate in both Arabic and English. This effort was warmly welcomed by the national authorities. However, the situation presented some difficulties. For example, the fact that the document was originally drafted in English and then translated into Arabic made proofreading extremely challenging.
The same situation occurred in Mozambique, where the original draft had to be translated from English into Portuguese to allow wider feedback from national reviewers and experts.

Estimated duration

The estimated time span required for the development of the CBR is one month.

5.4. Capacity development: the training component

Purpose

While the whole review process is aimed at developing the participants' capacities in system-wide policy and planning, there is an opportunity for formal training with practical, hands-on components based on a self-assessment exercise.

The main purpose of the formal training component is to contribute to refreshing or upgrading the analytical skills of the national team, including a range of analytical tools.

The duration of the formal training is also flexible. Usually, it has a face-to-face phase (between three and five full days) and an online phase (usually no more than a month).

The practical exercises in both phases must be designed to provide the national team with enough time and guidance to draft the national self-assessment (for more details, see the section below).

Methodology

The formal training component has to be planned in such a way that it includes all the relevant tools and insights that the members of the national team require to successfully complete a policy self-assessment exercise.

The formal training will be designed to address the needs of the members of the national review team. It has to begin with a careful analysis of their current policy analysis skills, notably in the policy domains that will be covered by the review. Accordingly, the decision about which specific modules on system-wide policy and planning (for more details, see the section below) to include has to stem from a careful discussion and needs analysis with the national authorities and, whenever possible, the members of the national team.

Depending on the skills profiles and availability of the national team members, the formal training may cover some of the themes below:

- the education policy and planning cycle: introduction to an education sector analysis covering access, equity, quality, efficiency, cost and financing, and sector management;
- the basic components of an education sector analysis and the country's current status;
- the national and international education policy agendas: introduction to SDG 4 within the regional context and its impact on the definition of educational policies and programmes;
- the use of data and evidence in policy analysis, including planning management and the evaluation of digital policies;
- the added value of a policy analysis for better decision-making;
- simulation models, to understand the importance of using simulation models in education policy and planning and become familiar with UNESCO's new generic education simulation model, SimuED.

Box 9: Joining forces for a major hybrid training opportunity in Honduras

Honduras was one of the first countries whose national team benefitted from a formal training opportunity in system-wide policy and planning. The design of the hybrid course, with an initial one-week face-to-face module and a one-month online activities programme, was jointly prepared by the International Institute for Educational Planning (IIEP Buenos Aires, Argentina) and the UNESCO Office in San José,Costa Rica, in close collaboration with the Ministry of Education (MoE). Successful participants obtained an IIEP certificate. The course was designed so as to ensure that the proposed activities served the purpose of drafting the Self-Assessment Country Report (see below).

It is important to note that, given past experiences in which participants expressed a desire to hold such training, it has proved useful to divide the training into the following two phases:

- a face-to-face phase, with a minimal duration of three days, in which the basic contents are presented by a UNESCO facilitator, discussed and applied in such a way that they prepare participants for the analysis of the different policy domains covered by the review, enabling them to produce a self-assessment report (see next section); and
- a virtual phase, with a recommended duration of four weeks, during which the training can be further developed and the work on the self-assessment report completed.

The contribution of UNESCO's specialized institutes should always to be taken into account, notably IIEP, but also UIS, the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL), the UNESCO International Bureau of Education (IBE), the UNESCO Institute for Information Technologies in Education (IITE) and the International Institute for Capacity Building in Africa (IICBA), as appropriate.

Expected output

The expected output is the provision of a short training course (with a face-to-face and a virtual phase) covering the basic analytical tools and perspectives required for an EPR process.

Estimated duration

The minimal duration of this formal training component is of three days, but can go up to a full week. In addition, a virtual phase can be envisaged, with an additional duration of a month.

5.5. Capacity development: the Self-Assessment Country Report

Purpose

As a companion to the desk research and CBR prepared by UNESCO, the Self-Assessment Country Report is for the national team to synthesize the status of development processes and education in the country, the main issues at stake and how they are seen internally. It is also the second component of the capacity development process.

Methodology

The Self-Assessment Country Report is conducted by the national team, with technical contributions from UNESCO if needed, to assess major challenges and opportunities, the degree of alignment with SDG 4-Education 2030 and possible factors and bottlenecks that could prevent the country from reaching 2030 Agenda targets. Accordingly, it has to address the following questions.

- What does the country perceive as its major development issues and opportunities, and how does education feature in the national development vision/plan?
- What is the current status of education in the country in relation to SDG 4?
- What are priority policy domains for the country and the main issues at stake in these domains, as perceived by the national team?
- What are the policy initiatives being implemented to address these issues and which ones are currently being considered?

This is a major opportunity for capacity development and is intended to maximize countries' involvement in the EPR process from the outset. With this in mind, the drafting of this national report will be initiated as a set of practical activities during the formal training and continued and finalized during the virtual phase of the training.

UNESCO will provide a questionnaire to be taken as a preliminary table of contents for the Self-Assessment Country Report. The final version, however, may incorporate changes resulting from the dialogue between the national authorities and UNESCO. For example, the structure may be adjusted in the light of the particular domains and issues on which the government wants to focus the policy review.

Although led by the national authorities, the work will generally require some support from UNESCO education specialists, who can provide advice on the legal and policy framework regarding the right to education and on the simulation and/or projections, using appropriate tools and combining national and UIS data. Several meetings with UIS, the statistical and planning units at the ministries of education and finance, and the national statistics agency will be needed.

The national team completes a first version of the **Self-Assessment Country Report** to its own satisfaction. This is then shared for comments with the responsible UNESCO coordinator, which are addressed by the team, thus leading to a final version. This is the version that shall be shared with the international experts participating in the field visits.

Expected output

For indicative purposes, the length of the **Self-Assessment Country Report** can be estimated at 20,000 words, although additional information can be annexed. The report shall be presented at least in English, if possible, to facilitate its dissemination to the international experts.

Estimated duration

The estimated time span required for the development of the **Self-Assessment Country Report** is two months.

5.6. Field work

Purpose

Field visits provide an opportunity for in-depth research, data collection and analysis, and the dialogue needed to identify key policy issues with the major stakeholders in the education sector and test the feasibility and likely acceptance of the policy recommendations.

Field visits essentially have three main objectives:

a. to provide for meetings and discussions with the main stakeholders, civil society organizations and development partners;

b. to visit schools and other educational institutions to listen to teachers, head teachers, families and local communities; and

c. to collect relevant documents that may not be available electronically.

Methodology

The EPR team, composed of national and international experts, will meet a wide range of stakeholders and conduct interviews and focus groups to investigate, in greater depth, the policy domains and issues identified in the CBR and the Self-Assessment Country Report. The mission schedule should be designed in close collaboration with the national authorities, so that the EPR reflects a variety of perspectives.

Missions should be planned well in advance to ensure that the experts are available to travel and that the visit is at a convenient time for the national authorities. The detailed schedule for each mission shall be agreed upon at least two weeks before the team arrives in the country, to allow adequate preparation time. A draft Self-Assessment Country Report shall also be shared for review.

Typically, the mission will begin and end with high-level courtesy meetings, with the minister responsible for education, the Permanent Secretary/Chief Education Officer and the Secretary-General of the National Commission for UNESCO. These meetings will be used to clarify the objectives and scope of the EPR and the proposed collaborative methodology, roles and responsibilities. The EPR process should be country-led, with support from UNESCO. Where possible, education specialists from the field office or regional bureau should join for all or part of the field mission. Consultations will also be held with other United Nations agencies and development partners to ensure that the EPR benefits from synergies and complements other processes in support of SDG 4-Education 2030 and the 2030 Agenda.[8]

The national coordinator will arrange meetings with officials in the Planning Unit and officials responsible for information, statistics and research on education, as well as the officers responsible for the selected policy domains. Where possible, meetings will also be held with officers in the ministry responsible for development planning. The team will request and collect hard and electronic copies of relevant reports, data and other documentation.

The review team will also meet key development partners such as the co-convenors of SDG 4, bilateral donors, representatives of civil society organizations and teachers . The field mission should include initial visits to national education agencies and local education institutions,

8 A mission programme and agenda are attached to the annexes in Section 8.

including university research centres, to meet with staff, students and other stakeholders, preferably in both urban and rural areas. The team will also organize regular briefings to ensure the team members have the most updated information.

Expected output

The expert team will record the main findings of the field visits and discuss the main findings on a daily basis. An initial analysis of the interviews, focus groups and information collected is likely to identify issues or questions for follow-up at a distance or, if needed, during a subsequent visit to the country.

Estimated duration

The duration of the field mission is normally two weeks, the first week being mostly devoted to meetings with stakeholders and the second week usually more focused on school visits, whenever possible including the capital city and at least a second site. The mission can sometimes be split into two separate weeks, depending on scheduling considerations and financial implications.

5.7. Drafting the review report

Purpose

The review report is the synthesis of the CBR, the Self-Assessment Country Report and the inputs collected from the field visits, with the added expertise of the members of the international review team. It is, therefore, a document intended to be shared and submitted to the whole review team during the validation stage.

The review report should:

- record, and disseminate to key education stakeholders and the wider public, the findings, policy issues and priority recommendations;
- showcase the education system and policies of the country and the efforts under way to align it with SDG 4-Education 2030;
- communicate future challenges and opportunities that could involve technical cooperation with national and international partners, including UNESCO.

Methodology

The international review team is responsible for the drafting process, with the support of the national team. The UNESCO review coordinator will lead the process by ensuring a clear understanding of the drafting procedures and requirements, assigning deadlines and providing a coherent approach to the policy issues and the submission of a set of policy recommendations.[9]

The methodology is based on empirical research using a variety of sources, both quantitative and qualitative, first drawing on multiple components (country context including demography, economy and society) and second, the performance of the education system.

9 The table on page 36 clarifies the roles and responsibilities of each entity.

Building upon prior research, field data gathered from each of these stakeholders provides the foundation for the identification of both domain-specific and crosscutting issues, without the imposition of any explicit theories for interpreting the data.

Through the interpretation of the country's demography, economy and society, the analysis of the performance of the education system and the verification of findings through stakeholder interviews, the resulting report offers a series of recommendations addressing the issues identified in each domain. The weight or significance of these recommendations is also measured against criteria including cost, difficulty, priority and the estimated time needed for implementation. Through these different sets of data collections, interpretations, analysis and verifications, the reliability, validity and accuracy of the findings are guaranteed.

The typical structure of the review report is as follows.

1. Introduction: contextual factors determining the development of education in the country.
2. Overall assessment of the education system through the following angles of analysis with the corresponding indicators:
   a. Access and participation
   b. Quality of the education processes
   c. Equity
   d. Performance (graduation and learning outcomes)
   e. Efficiency, internal and external.
3. Elaboration of each policy issue and consideration of policy avenues and possible recommendations for each policy domain and key policy issue (using the conventions described in the following chapter). A logical problem analysis sequence is used to facilitate discussions on policy issues and findings.
   - **Statement of a key policy issue:** what is the major policy issue at stake?
   - **Evidence of the issue:** what evidence underlies this statement?
   - **Discussion:** the importance of the finding and its relevance to policy.
   - **Policy recommendations:** they should be succinct and short. A text following the policy recommendation with the evidence and the discussion presents the rationale for such a recommendation.
4. Transversal issues and overall priorities.
5. Possible follow-up actions with UNESCO.

Each member of the EPR review team will be designated as the lead author for the sections of the policy review report corresponding to one of the priority policy domains. Beyond this, each expert will be asked to review and provide comments on the work done in the other priority policy domains and to contribute to the identification and analysis of cross-cutting issues emerging from the analysis. Under the supervision of the UNESCO specialist, one expert will work as an overall editor to ensure the consistency of the EPR report as a whole and guarantee that content and style are as harmonized as possible and that the report clearly communicates the main findings and recommendations.

The UNESCO coordinator is also responsible for the writing of the introductory chapter, the chapter on the overall assessment of the education system and the selection of transversal issues and overall priorities, as well as the suggestion of possible follow-up actions.

Expected output

Typically, the first draft has a length of around 50,000 words, although additional information can be annexed. It is drafted in English, French or Spanish, but, depending on the national context, it may have to be translated into a local language if a critical mass of the stakeholders is unable to read it in the original drafting language. It will be formatted in accordance with UNESCO's style guidelines, printed and made available in the online UNESDOC database.

Estimated duration

The draft EPR report should be completed two months after the field research. The drafting process should take no more than four weeks, as all the basic information will already be available in the existing documents. The overall edition, with the corresponding versions, usually takes at least another four weeks.

5.8. Validation process

Purpose

The validation of the draft review report is an iterative process whereby the analysis and policy recommendations are refined, leading to their endorsement by the national team as a prior step to the public launch of the report.

Therefore, the validation process should be an opportunity to:

- share the edited draft EPR report and validate the wording of the policy issues, the analysis of policy avenues and the draft recommendations with the national authorities and other stakeholders;
- take into consideration any factors known to the national authorities and stakeholders that may affect the desirability or feasibility of the proposed recommendations;
- maximize opportunities for policy dialogue, policy learning and capacity development through the discussion of evidence-based policy analysis and recommendations;
- support country ownership of the EPR process and its findings and recommendations;
- collect feedback prepare for the finalization of the EPR report and its dissemination in the country.

Methodology

To ensure that the policy issues, possible avenues and recommendations are set out in a way that reflects the combined findings of the CBR, the Self-Assessment Country Report and the field visits, the edited draft report will be discussed with national counterparts and stakeholders. This will usually take place during a field mission, but could also be conducted at a distance. The validation process is especially important when the EPR report is in more than one language.

Meetings will be held to brief the Ministry of Education, National Commission for UNESCO, United Nations resident coordinator and agencies and development partners active in the field

of education about preparations for the dissemination event and media launch of the report. The country's Permanent Delegation to UNESCO can facilitate communications and contribute to the validation process and the planning of the dissemination event.

The validation process is led by the UNESCO coordinator, who submits the first completed draft of the review report to all the members of the review team for feedback. They should be asked at least four questions, as follows.

1. Are the analyses of the policy issues included in the report well supported by evidence?
2. Are the policy recommendations well documented in relation to:
   a. relevance,
   b. feasibility,
   c. estimated costing,
   d. prioritization?
3. Are the transversal issues and the overall priorities consistent with the analyses?
4. Do you have any other suggestions for possible follow-up with UNESCO?

Past experience shows that the validation process greatly benefits from a dedicated workshop involving at least the members of the national review team and, ideally, as many education stakeholders as possible. Such a workshop would usually be organized by the national review coordinator and last a full day. At the end of the workshop, it is easy to see which analyses or recommendations are controversial and reach a consensus on how to improve them to ensure the full endorsement of the national team.

Expected output

The validation process should result in:

- a clear endorsement of the EPR report by country stakeholders and development partners;
- the collection of comments to be integrated into the final EPR report;
- the basic preparations for a dissemination event and media launch.

Estimated duration

The validation process should take no more than four weeks, including preparation. The validation of the EPR report should be completed within four months of the last research visit.

5.9. Launch and dissemination

Purpose

The launch of the final review report is a major opportunity to gain visibility and media impact, while ensuring that the national authorities adopt the policy recommendations. It is thus an opportunity to:

- present, together with the national authorities, the EPR report to key stakeholders including ministers and deputy ministers, national and provincial education officers, the ministers and officials of other government ministries, teachers', students' and parents' associations, NGOs and the public;
- engage a wide range of stakeholders in dialogue on the policy issues and recommendations to address the challenges and opportunities of the education system and support the alignment of education reforms, strategies, programmes, institutions, research and evaluation with SDG 4-Education 2030.
- increase the visibility of UNESCO's work on policy review, capacity development and advice to support Member States as the lead United Nations agency for SDG 4-Education 2030;
- ensure media attention for the EPR capacity development process and resulting policy recommendations.

Methodology

The launch event should be designed jointly with the National Commission for UNESCO, in consultation with the national authorities. The Permanent Delegation to UNESCO in Paris can also be helpful for the success of the presentation and dissemination event. Ideally, the opening of the dissemination event would include a senior government representative, the minister(s) responsible for education and the senior representative of UNESCO and/or the United Nations. It is suggested that the event be organized in partnership with the LEG, where relevant, to ensure that the EPR report feeds into other processes under way in the country, for example, an ESA or ESP.

When planning the dissemination event, particular attention should be paid to the division of the roles and responsibilities of the partners involved in the event. This includes, for example, the lists of guests and speakers, the venue and refreshments, simultaneous interpretation, the printing of the agenda and the coordination of the press release, presentations and media invitations.

Prior to the launch, a suitable number of copies of the review report should be printed. Ideally, the Minister of Education should take the floor and chair the event, but it is also important that other important actors can speak, such as the UNESCO representative and/or the Secretary-General of the National Commission for UNESCO.

The launch will have to allow enough time for the presentation of the main policy recommendations, as well as opportunities for interaction and discussion with the main stakeholders. A good arrangement is to have several members of the review team, both national and international, presenting, followed by dedicated panels.

The national coordinator should be responsible for the organization of the event, including a press release and opportunities for media dissemination. It is thus important that the press release include:

1. the context of the EPR, with reference to the national and international education agendas;
2. a selection of the most urgent and important policy recommendations;
3. an indication of the follow-up activities to be carried out with the support of UNESCO in the different policy domains covered by the review.

In some cases, the launch of the report has gained visibility and impact when it has coincided with a major education event such as an education conference. For instance, the dissemination event of the EPR could be combined with other UNESCO meetings or activities in the country, possibly relating to SDG 4-Education 2030. In some cases, the EPR report might attract sufficient interest in its own right and, in other cases, the dissemination event could be combined with another UNESCO meeting or activity in the country. It may make sense for the dissemination event to be organized in cooperation with the members of the United Nations country team or SDG 4 co-convenors, especially in countries where UNESCO does not have a field presence.

Box 10: Using an education conference as a major opportunity for dissemination in Thailand

At the time of the launch of Thailand's EPR, the national authorities organized a yearly teachers' conference, which usually gathered around 3,000 participants. The necessary preparations were made to ensure that the official launch of the report coincided with this major conference, which provided opportunities for several well-attended panels, maximizing the opportunities for discussions with teachers and the resulting impact.

As UNESCO will not generally be able to provide financial support for the dissemination event, funds should be mobilized by the national authorities in consultation with development partners.

Expected output

The expected output is a launch event that generates awareness of the results of the EPR, covered by the media and accompanied by a press release.

Estimated duration

The launch event usually lasts one full day, no later than two months after the validation process.

5.10. Evaluation and follow-up actions

Purpose

To ensure the process leads to a potential partnership with UNESCO, it is critical that the relevant UNESCO office suggests an evaluation of the implementation of the policy recommendations and the agreed follow-up actions.

Methodology

Several platforms may be used by UNESCO to ensure that the work carried out during the review process leads to change. The most important opportunity is provided by the revision of the ending policy cycle or ESP, or the preparation of a new one. In both cases, the ESP can be key and it is therefore important that the relevant UNESCO office or representative ensures that both the analytical insights and the policy recommendations are taken into consideration during the process.

Box 11: The EPR reinforces UNESCO's position as a lead partner for the development of the next ESP in Mozambique

Mozambique's EPR coincided with the start of the implementation of the internationally agreed SDG 4-Education 2030 Framework for Action, and was therefore conducted as part of the CapED Pilot, aimed at developing national capacities to operationalize SDG 4. This offered an opportunity not only to review existing national policies and strategies in the light of SDG 4, but also identify policy gaps and suggest necessary alignment with the Education 2030 Agenda. This EPR also included a simulation of the estimated values of the Education 2030 targets and indicators for Mozambique, with different scenarios, making it possible to assess the effort required to fill the possible gap, as well as related resource implications, taking into account technical possibilities and financial constraints. As part of the review, a report on the right to education was produced, which contributed to informing national debate and resulted in the review of the education law. The results of the whole exercise laid the foundations for UNESCO to emerge as lead partner for the development of the country's next ESP, including the Global Partnership for Education (GPE) process for the mobilization of the ESP development and implementation grants.

Expected output

The expected output is a recurrent reference to the policy recommendations and follow-up activities, prompting a revision if needed.

Estimated duration

The duration of the evaluation and followup phase is variable, as it should be embedded into the regular dialogue process with the national authorities.

5.11. Summary table

The following table summarizes the roles and responsibilities of each entity involved in the EPR processes.

Table 2: Roles and responsibilities of each entity

Milestone/activity	Expected output	Timeline	Main responsible entities
1. Formal agreement	Exchange of letters and/or a signed formal agreement	1 month	UNESCO HQ
2. Definition and scoping exercise	Main findings of the mission: policy domains	3-5 days	UNESCO HQ in coordination with national authorities and RB/field office
3. Desk research and Baseline report	Background report, including benchmarking of key indicators	1 month	UNESCO HQ
4. Training	Short training course on policy and sector analysis	3-5 days	UNESCO HQ
5. Self-Assessment Country Background Report	Self-Assessment Country Background Report	2 months	National authorities
6. Field work	Initial analysis of the interviews and focus groups	2 weeks	Joint mission (UNESCO HQ, RB/ field office)
7. Drafting a review report	First draft	1 month	UNESCO HQ in consultation with RB/field office and national authorities
8. Validation process	Endorsement of the EPR by the national authorities, integrating their feedback.	1 month	UNESCO HQ in coordination with national authorities and RB/field office
9. Launch and dissemination	A launch event accompanied by a press release	1 day	UNESCO HQ in consultation with national authorities
10. Evaluation and followup actions	A recurrent reference to the policy recommendations and follow-up activities	Variable	UNESCO HQ and national authorities

Overall logic

Usually, the report resulting from a policy review consists of an introduction to the context and education system of the country, followed by a section reviewing the policy domains (such as teachers, curriculum or technology in education, for example), drawing on the requirements of the country. Recommendations are made on each of the key policy issues.

Each thematic section, both in the interim and final reports, should share the same overall sequence or logic to facilitate the discussion and use of the findings by the government. To this end, supporting the statement of a policy issue with evidence is as important as the statement itself. It is also important that the evidence upon which statements are based is discussed, as it may be controversial or diverse according to the context. Only when the evidence has been presented and discussed will the statement of a policy issue and the resulting policy recommendations make full sense.

Analytical sequence

Many policy issues can be identified in each section, but it is important that when addressing them, the logical sequence should be consistent within each policy domain, as follows.

1. **Statement of a key policy issue:** what is the major policy issue at stake? For example: *"The strong centralization of the educational administration has an adverse impact on the innovative capacities of the whole school system and is particularly concerning in upper secondary education".* The finding has to be as clear-cut as possible, but can then be further elaborated upon so as to include all the necessary nuances and caveats.
2. **Evidence of the policy issue:** what supports the statement of this policy issue? Evidence can be from the Self-Assessment Country Report, in the literature or gathered during the meetings and interviews with government officials and other stakeholders. For example: *"A recent comparative study carried out by UNESCO and the World Bank shows that country x ranks among the most centralized systems in the region, particularly in primary education. In addition, most stakeholders as well as government officials confirm this view and, in fact, many of them expressed concerns about it during the interviews".* It is important that all the supportive evidence is brought into play, so there is a need to be as comprehensive as possible. In case of discrepancies, which may arise across different stakeholders, these should be noted.
3. **Discussion and analysis of the policy issue:** the importance of the issue and its policy relevance. In many respects, the discussion has to smoothly pave the way for the elaboration of the policy recommendations in the final report. Policy dialogue is crucial at this stage, because national counterparts are more knowledgeable about the local context and situation and can advise on how to present the policy issues.

   For example: *"Decentralization is highly controversial and cannot be taken as necessarily positive in all contexts. Rather, it may lead to an empowering process at local and school level as well as to an important decrease in equity and accountability. Albeit many voices in the system of country X openly advocate for decentralization, the national authorities should always consider both the benefits and the risks. In the current circumstances, there seems to be more to gain in an incremental process of decentralization than in keeping the current status quo".* Again, while the reasoning can be further elaborated here, the rationale behind suggested courses of action should be presented.

4. **Policy recommendations:** although they should be tentative until the final report, the interim report may weigh up different policy avenues and contain indicative recommended actions as a basis for further reflection and discussion. This is because policy recommendations are generated, and not imposed, and national counterparts understand how realistic and feasible the various policy options are.

Drafting the policy recommendations

When formulating policy recommendations, the following guidelines should be used.

- Phrase the recommendation in one sentence, if possible.
- As is usually done with the presentation of evidence, be clear and concise.
- Under each recommendation, add a description of the rationale behind such a recommendation. As far as possible, bring in international and comparative evidence and discuss how other countries have been tackling the same policy issue.
- Whenever possible, discuss the likely implications of the recommendation if implemented (what would happen if…) and if not implemented.
- Anticipate, drawing on past experience, the reactions of the main stakeholders following the discussions you have had with them during visits.
- Mention, if any, the links with additional recommendations in the policy domain or in other domains.
- In addition, try to add succinct indications and, eventually, comments about:
  - the **priority** to be assigned to the recommendation (high, medium, low) in comparison to the rest of recommendations suggested in the section;
  - the level of **difficulty** for successful implementation (high, medium, low);
  - the **cost estimates** (high, medium, low or no financial costs), although it is not necessary to provide a figure;
  - the **time frame** (long, medium or short-term).

Highlighting links and identifying cross-cutting issues

A set of general policy recommendations dealing with crosscutting issues across the board will be identified in the different policy domains. These recommendations are likely to summarize the key areas for policy intervention and phrased as general principles. The process of drafting them will help to coordinate the recommendations contained in the different sections. The transversal, cross-cutting or systemic issues should benefit from a holistic policy intervention.

6. Making strategic use of the review process

As previously indicated, the impact and added value of a policy review depends on how well the process is able to contribute to develop the capacities of decision makers and other stakeholders. This means not only that the process needs to be participatory enough to engage the right people, but also that the work needs to be carefully coordinated so that, to the extent possible, the components of the policy review and the methods used demonstrably meet capacity and knowledge gaps in a timely way. The CBR, Self-Assessment Country Report, field missions and validation processes should therefore aim to be in synergy with other relevant processes under way in the policy cycle, so as to complement and reinforce them.

Box 12: Fostering a multi-agency perspective in Thailand

Thailand is a good example of a strong partnership between two organizations, UNESCO and the OECD, to provide a richer approach to education policy. At the request of the national authorities, both organizations joined forces and provided the country with one shared EPR report. While it is often difficult to forge such partnerships, when they can be made, the emerging synergies result in a better service to the Member State.

Coordination with the national education policy and planning cycle in the context of an ongoing education reform process

The value of UNESCO's EPR support is greatest when it is integrated into, or at least connected with, relevant phases of the education policy and planning cycle. As said earlier, the opportune moment for an EPR is when a country has conducted an ESA and intends to deepen the review of specific critical policy domains for sound policy formulation in these reform areas.

It is therefore helpful for UNESCO staff to have a good understanding of where a country is in its cycle at any point in time. Where a new education policy, sector plan or strategy has already been adopted, UNESCO's policy review support is probably most helpful at a later stage, when it comes to the mid-term or final review of the implementation of the strategy and the development of a new strategy. Then, there is a particular need for intensive reflection, analysis and policy dialogue. UNESCO's policy review support can help the national authorities to convene relevant stakeholders and identify policy issues that need to be addressed, as well as potential future avenues, by analysing data and information.

Box 13: Effective handover to subsequent strategic planning processes

Sudan is yet another good example of the handover of the review to the next phase: the transfer of responsibility to the education authorities for the implementation of the new strategic five-year plan (2018–2022), with funding support from the Global Partnership for Education (GPE), which plans to provide up to $58 million (estimated). The policy review served as a foundation for the upcoming five-year strategic plan and was well aligned with it. The review functioned as overall policy guidance for the government, assisting it with reaching its objectives and making strategic choices for the implementation of the current five-year plan (2018–2022). This made the best use of the limited resources and means available.

Sometimes, Member States request policy review support from UNESCO because they are entering a relevant phase of the education policy and planning cycle. This may occur in synergy with other processes supported by development partners, such as the preparation of a new ESP. In such cases, communication and coordination with the national authorities and donors are essential to avoid potential duplication and to explain the added value of UNESCO's EPR support. For example, for countries supported by GPE, a credible ESP endorsed by a country's development partners is one of the essential criteria to receive an Education Sector Programme Implementation Grant (ESPIG).

Comparison with the education sector analysis (ESA)

An education sector analysis (ESA) or an education sector diagnosis (ESD) should provide a description of the situation of the education system and an analysis of the causes of system weaknesses and difficulties. As described earlier, the first chapter of an education review is devoted to a comprehensive analysis of the education sector. Such compilation and analysis is based on evidence and data consolidated from the CBR and the Self-Assessment Country Report drafted by a national expert team. It is an evidence-based description and analysis of the current situation of an education system, achieved by examining access, equity, efficiency, effectiveness, quality, relevance, financing and management. It provides an overall assessment of the education system, focusing particularly on quality and equity, and describes how overall development policies, regulations, structures and education-specific policies and practices could be reformed to improve education in the country.

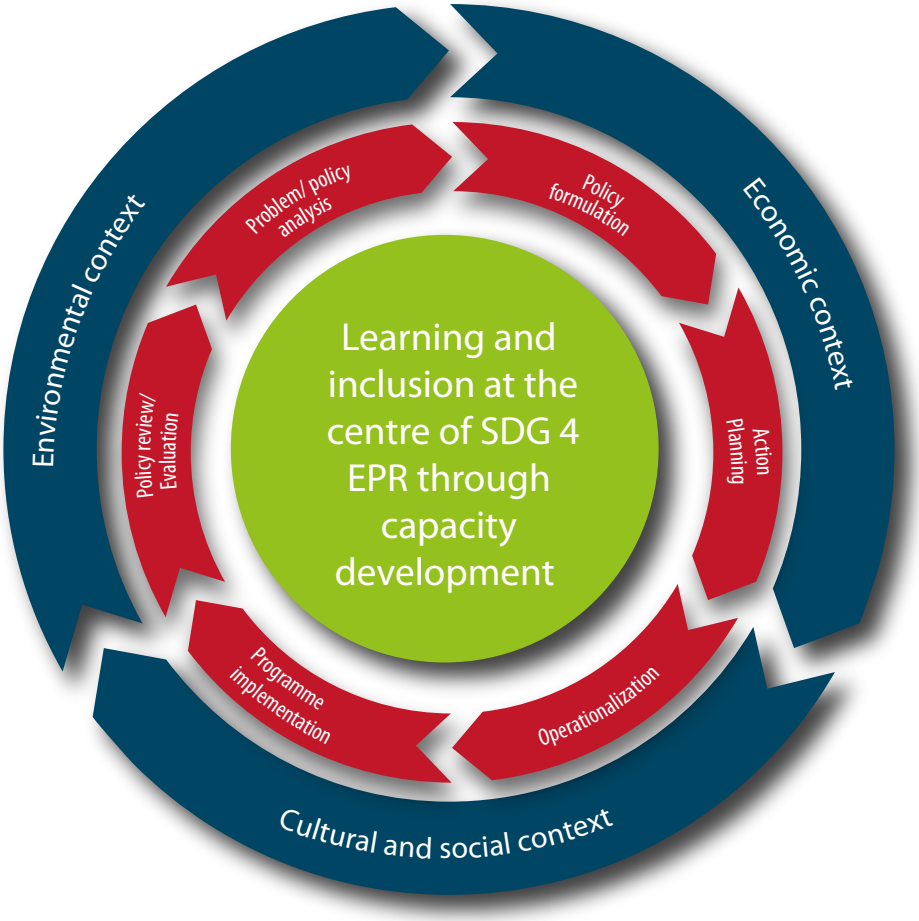
In sequential order, the EPR should be carried out between the ESA and sector planning. In reality, however, that is not the case. Rather, the ESA and sector planning are carried out almost simultaneously, whereas the EPR could be an essential part of the ESA as well as sector planning. Therefore, the EPR is an entry point to inform policy reform in the context of as sector planning. It provides strategic responses to the question of the nature of the bottlenecks and opportunities in the wider context of national development plans, reforms and ESPs.

In sum, UNESCO's approach to EPRs differs from and goes beyond the usual ESA as it:

1. takes a broader look at education policies in the context of sustainable development challenges and opportunities;
2. recommends elaborating policy issues according to a logical problem analysis sequence to facilitate the discussion of policy issues and findings: statement of a key policy issue, evidence of the issue, discussion and policy recommendations;
3. attempts to understand the impact of policies on the achievement of the right to education, considering how education policies support or hinder the realization of that right. In other words, UNESCO takes a rights-based approach that respects relevant international and regional normative instruments such as conventions, recommendations and other frameworks;
4. acknowledges the role of comparative research, international exchange and the value of sharing country experiences and promising practices for the development of an uptodate knowledge base on education policies;
5. assesses how international policy initiatives, legislation, declarations and agreements have influenced national policies and recognizes the role of donors and development partners in influencing education policy development and practice.

Figure 2 presents how the sector-wide policy and planning cycle functions in the context of SDG 4. An inner cycle around the circle requires a systemic, sector-wide and intra-sectoral approach and an outer cycle requires strengthening the relevance of education and inter-sectoral collaboration.

Figure 2: Integrating SDG 4 into the policy and planning cycle



Source: Authors

Capacity development for system enhancement is more significant when it is led by strong national ownership of the process, as well as the strong leadership of the education authorities. Demonstrated country leadership that shows determination to achieve shared goals is more likely to support efforts towards capacity development.

Typically, it is also observed that capacity development is effective when the policy review is anchored to an ongoing or new education reform process, where an effort is being made to consult with wider and emerging stakeholders through a participatory approach, while taking into account capacity development needs at individual, organizational and institutional levels. In the medium to long term, capacity development should reduce dependency on external expertise.

Box 14: Demonstrated national ownership and leadership in Saint Kitts and Nevis

A strong national team, led by a dedicated national coordinator, demonstrating full national ownership of the review process, was instrumental to the success of the policy review. This leadership led to the recommendation to revisit the functions of the existing strategic planning unit within the MOE in order to better coordinate policy priorities for the subsequent implementation of the policy recommendations of the review and the five-year strategic plan. Without the national team's resolute leadership and full ownership, the effective implementation of the review's policy recommendations would have been unrealistic. The success of the review depended on the team's determination to carry it forward and use it as a driving force for their ongoing education reform.

Fostering education sector dialogue

UNESCO promotes sector-wide dialogue at all levels, including the country level. One of its key functions is to operate as a "catalyst for international cooperation", a function that has been carried out through an education sector working group in order to promote a quality sector dialogue at the country level.[10] Sector dialogues are essentially steered by national stakeholders, especially when it comes to middle-income countries,[11] while various forms exist that are co-led or essentially led by development partners.

This dialogue mechanism leads to enhanced partnerships and better aligned, more effective aid arrangements. Such coordination is essential to translate the principles of ownership, alignment, harmonization, results management and mutual accountability enshrined in the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness into action, particularly in contexts in which national authorities have limited capacity, which impedes their leadership.

LEGs are platforms chaired by the national authorities, by which domestic and international partners can support effective national planning for the advancement of results, delivery and financial management with predictable and timely disbursements from donor partners.

While the formats of the mechanisms may differ, the principles underlying a successful dialogue mechanism are quite similar: ownership demonstrated by national stakeholders and close alignment with national development policies and priorities. Ideally, an EPR process provides an opportunity to review existing dialogue mechanisms and suggests strategic directions as part of its policy recommendations, with a view to:

- demonstrating that a strategic presence of UNESCO in LEGs or any type of sector dialogue mechanisms, including in middle-income countries, could contribute to mobilizing potential funding and enhancing policy coordination in education;
- reinforcing UNESCO's strategic presence in the education sector vis-à-vis the education authorities and other development partners on the ground so that it can play a catalytic role for international cooperation in the future.

10 Diverse forms exist from country to country. However, for the sake of clarity, this paper defines it as an education sector working group.

11 Malaysia is a case in point.

Leveraging funding for education

The EPR can make an evidence-based case for increased domestic and international investments. It can also contribute to meeting the eligibility criteria set by financial institutions such as the World Bank or regional development banks.

For example, to be eligible for an Education Sector Programme Implementation Grant (ESPIG) from the Global Partnership for Education (GPE), countries have to meet a number of conditions, including having an education sector plan endorsed by its development partners. Furthermore, countries applying for an ESPIG must have conducted an education sector analysis no more than three years prior to the grant application submission, as the basis for the development or revision of an education sector plan (GPE, 2018 p. 4). The likelihood of an EPR being critical for leveraging funds for education depends significantly upon its timing, its key messages, and the dissemination of its findings to domestic stakeholders, ministries of finance, and development partners, including GPE.

Box 15: The EPR led to UNESCO providing Zambia with technical support to enhance teacher policies and development

Zambia validated its EPR report focusing on five thematic areas, namely assessments and learning outcomes, literacy, sector-wide policies and programme, teacher policy and development, and technical, entrepreneurial and vocational education and training (TEVET). While the review recommended national capacity development as a way to address most of the issues identified throughout these five areas, there are also a number of issues that require solutions in terms of increased funding or enhanced management of the government budget, which are not covered by UNESCO's mandate or comparative advantages. This is particularly the case for low TEVET funding and weak budget performance due to late, erratic and inadequate public funding.

The Zambia EPR provided opportunities for UNESCO to provide technical support, namely through the CapED Programme and the UNESCO-China Funds-in-Trust (CFIT) Project. The CapED is focusing on the professional standards of practice for the Zambian teaching force to improve teaching quality and effectiveness and school performance, while also strengthening synergies among development partners active in the area of teacher training and development. The CFIT complements this effort by training teacher trainers and teachers in using pedagogical information and communication technology (ICT) through the establishment of two ICT Teacher Education Centres of Excellence (ITECE), knowledge creation and the delivery of ICT capacity building, the creation of an ICT platform to strengthen networking among the ITECEs and partnerships with other teacher training institutes (TTIs).

7. Way forward

This primer has attempted to summarize the cumulated experience of UNESCO in the area of EPRs. It is, in this way, a knowledgesharing exercise that could be useful to UNESCO staff in the field of education, but also in other sectors. Many sections of the primer could also appeal to UNESCO's partners and education policy specialists, both in academia and in government.

It is important to note that the methodological approach described here is in constant evolution not only to adjust best to the needs of individual countries, but also to increase the efficiency of the whole process. Readers are therefore invited to submit comments and feedback on this version to the Section of Education Policy of UNESCO's Education Sector, preferably by email, at educationpolicy@unesco.org

8. Annexes

1. Guidelines for the preparation of the Country Background Report (CBR) with all the guiding questions already prepared for the policy domains
2. Sample terms of reference for the work of external experts
3. Sample mission agendas

Links to UNESCO education policy review reports
https://en.unesco.org/themes/education-policy-planning/resources

Mainstreaming SDG 4-Education 2030 in sector-wide policy and planning: technical guidelines for UNESCO field offices
https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000246475

Link to the GPE technical guidelines
https://planipolis.iiep.unesco.org/en/2016/guidelines-education-sector-plan-appraisal-6149

Link to unpacking Sustainable Development Goal 4, guide
https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000246300

1. Guidelines for the Country Background (CBR)

CONTEXT OF THE EDUCATION POLICY REVIEW IN SUDAN

UNESCO, in its mandated role of leading and coordinating global efforts towards SDG4, promotes the Education Policy Reviews as a means to help its Member States to strengthen their education systems, mainstream the SDG4 in their policies and strategies, and develop their capacities for reaching the 2030 Education targets.

Consistent with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, governments have the primary responsibility for the successful implementation of SDG 4 at the country level. In a broad consultative process to translate global commitments into action, UNESCO together with Member States and partners developed and adopted the Education 2030 Framework for Action (FFA), which sets the groundwork and provides guidance for implementing SDG 4 at the country, regional and global levels. The FFA further requests UNESCO, in collaboration with relevant partners/stakeholders, to undertake capacity development, facilitate policy dialogue and knowledge-sharing, provide policy advice and promote normative instruments and South-South and triangular cooperation to assist countries to deliver on SDG 4.

The education policy review of Sudan coincides with the start of the implementation of the internationally agreed SDG4-2030 agenda for education development. This offers an opportunity not only to review existing national policies and strategies in light of SDG4, but also to identify policy gaps and suggest necessary alignment with the Education 2030 Agenda. As recommended by the FFA in its Para. 28: "Governments are expected to translate global targets into achievable national targets based on their education priorities, national development strategies and plans, the ways their education systems are organized, their institutional capacity and the availability of resources".

In light of the above, the education policy review of Sudan will include five basic components:

- A **simulation/projection** of the estimated values of the 2030 education targets and indicators for Sudan, assuming that the current trends hold. This would allow assessing the effort required to fill the possible gap, as well as related resource implications, taking into account technical feasibilities and financial constraints;
- A **contextualization of the 2030 Education Agenda** within the country's broader socio-economic context. This would help to establish a more realistic and feasible targets and indicators locally.
- An **analysis of the opportunities/success factors and potential bottlenecks** towards the SDG4-2030 education targets, based on a critical assessment of the lessons learnt from the EFA era. The analysis will focus (but not limited) on the five themes that emerged as key policy priorities;
- A **set of prioritized policy recommendations** intended to address the challenges faced, and particularly to improve education access, quality, effectiveness, equity and efficiency towards the realization of the SDG4-2030 targets;
- A **proposal of UNESCO follow-up activities** that would help the country to enhance their capacities in implementing the 2030 Education Agenda.

It is important to note that this should be undertaken as a forward-looking initiative and should by no means impede the ongoing sector programmes; rather appropriate measures should be taken to create the necessary synergies with the current education plans and ensure their gradual alignment with the SDG4-2030 agenda.

PURPOSE OF THE COUNTRY BACKGROUND REPORT

Against the above context, the Country Background Report (CBR) should provide an overview of the education system and detailed information about the in-depth issues of analysis of the Review. In particular, the CBR should provide information about the context, key issues and policy responses in Sudan regarding: (i) an overall perspective of the education system *(ii)* system- wide policy and planning; *(iii)* teacher policies; (iv) literacy policies. The CBR should therefore contain a self-evaluation of the education system with a problem-oriented and dynamic view, in light of the SDG4-2030 Education Agenda.

The CBR is intended for three main audiences and for the following purposes:

- The UNESCO Secretariat and the team of external reviewers. The CBR will assist in identifying issues that should be explored, the policies that should be examined, and the consultations that should be held during the Review visit.
- National stakeholders in education. The CBR can be an important means of focusing national attention on key issues that need to be addressed and will be used as a documentary reference to be shared with the national stakeholders involved in the review process.
- An international audience interested in the Sudanese education system of as well as in the themes covered by the review.

The National Coordinator is responsible for the drafting of the CBR and will act as the focal point for any questions or additional information requests that UNESCO Secretariat may have.

THE MAIN ELEMENTS OF THE COUNTRY BACKGROUND REPORT

Structure

The proposed structure for the report is an executive summary followed by five chapters (see a detailed structure and questions to guide the CBR). The CBR should provide a comprehensive view of the education system, including TVET and higher education, and it should cover in sufficient breadth and depth the core issues of analysis of the Review. It should also provide, to the extent possible, an assessment of the current and anticipated situation in light of the SDG4-2030 Agenda. To do so it is expected that each area of analysis will provide at the end some concluding remarks in reference to:

1. Evidence: What are the strengths and areas for improvement in the education system as seen by the national team?

2. Interpretation: What possible causes can the national team evoke to explain the current state of affairs in each area? What particular policies and initiatives have framed the education system and positioned it where it is now? If possible identify the key factors that have impelled improvement and the reasons why.

3. Policy issues: What are the policy issues that the national team thinks that have to be addressed in each area as a priority? In particular, critical policy issues that are subject to current public debates and reform calls have to be described and analyzed here. This is instrumental to help guide the focus of the UNESCO's external review during the visits.

To facilitate drawing out coherent analyses and discussions, several questions have been formulated for each area of analysis. (Please follow the structure and the questions below to guide the report)

Editorial style

The information provided in the CBR should be supported by source(s) wherever possible (e.g., legislation, formal agreements, research articles, literature reviews, surveys, evaluations, publications, administrative data). Statistical and other data should be provided to support and illustrate the points made in the report and it should be accompanied by brief notes to clarify the concepts and terms that are used, and the methodology used to collect the data. Where evidence is missing on particular points this should be indicated. Also, the CBR should provide the range of views or opinions held by stakeholders in matters where there is no clear evidence or where views may differ among key stakeholders.

Where possible, please provide hyperlinks or electronic copies of key documents. Since some information might be limited or difficult to access, it is encouraged to include summaries of the key issues addressed in these documents in the CBR, or as annexes.

Length

The text of the CBR should be about 60 single-spaced pages in length. Additional material can be included in annexes in the form of tables, charts, diagrams and extracts from other documents.

Language

The CBR should be made available in English.

Time Schedule and Report Preparation

The CBR is likely to take around 1 month and a half to complete. The suggested timeline follows:

- Week 1-4: Drafting of the background report (Government through the National Team)
- Week 5: Review of the first draft (UNESCO). In addition, the Secretariat can also provide comments on the draft CBR or clarify any substance or technical points at any moment.
- Week 6-8: Finalization of the report (Government through the National Team)

The Sudanese authorities will set up a National Team comprised of the key entities within the Ministry that are responsible for the three policy domains (planning, teachers and literacies). A National Team will be responsible for providing various inputs to a National Coordinator, who will be responsible to consolidate various inputs received from the team.

The National Coordinator will be responsible for ensuring that the CBR is completed on schedule. If needed, the Sudanese authorities may establish a National Consultation Group comprised of key stakeholder groups, including relevant development partners, to ensure that a variety of perspectives are reflected in the CBR.

Format

To ensure that the CBR has a consistent appearance and is easy to read for different audiences, the following format guidelines can be useful:

- Font Times 11;
- Single spacing;
- Page size A4;
- Pages numbered (bottom center of each page);
- Normal text, single spacing within paragraphs, with a space between paragraphs;
- Paragraphs should be numbered sequentially throughout the document (1, 2, 3, etc.);
- Lists should be indented; points in a list should be indicated with bullets or numbers;
- Tables and figures should be prepared in Excel or Word, if possible. Each table and figure should have a title and a source, as well as notes as appropriate. Please, note that the underlying data contained in tables and figures may be requested by the Secretariat;
- References should appear as needed throughout the text in round brackets, specifying the author and the date, like (Smith, 2004), and a complete citation should be provided in the References section.
- The draft versions should be provided as a Word document.

STRUCTURE AND QUESTIONS TO GUIDE THE REPORT

The questions listed below are intended to guide identification of problems faced by the school system as a whole, followed by detailed analyses of teacher policies, curriculum, student assessment and mobile learning. The questions are not prescriptive and may be combined, rephrased or expanded in the light of national circumstances. The CBR should be written as a coherent, self-contained document and not just a series of responses to questions. It can also include information not mentioned below but considered relevant by the Sudanese authorities.

The following structure is suggested:

- *Table of Contents*
- *List of acronyms and glossary of terms*
- *Executive Summary*
- *Chapter 1. The education system*
- *Chapter 2. System-wide policy and planning*
- *Chapter 3. Teachers*
- *Chapter 4. Literacy*
- *References*
- *Annexes (if any)*

Chapter 1. The education system

This chapter should provide an overview of the education system, including higher education and TVET. The chapter should provide a sufficient description of the system components and their institutional and organizational interaction to help understand the operation of the education system. It should also highlight the achievements made in the past years, especially in terms of: access and participation, quality of the provision, equity and the overall system and student performance. In addition, a section should elaborate on its efficiency and more broadly on its financing. Whenever possible, please provide and analyze the past trends of the relevant indicators. Also, to the extent possible, provide an assessment of the current and anticipated situation in light of the SDG4-2030 Agenda.

Overview of the school system and policies

- What are the strategic goals and directions assigned to school education? What are, specifically, the more immediate policy objectives and education targets? How far are they linked to the overall education development and wider socio-economic or political goals?
- What are key components of the current school provision by levels (please use ISCED as a reference)? Provide a diagram of the structure of the education system with indication of the length of the programmes, expected ages of entry and exit, equivalence to ISCED levels, and information about the transitions between levels as well as the flows outside the education system.
- Who is responsible for the provision and funding of public schools in pre-primary, primary and general secondary levels? What are the role and responsibilities of these responsible bodies? How do they coordinate in policy design and implementation?
- What kinds of private schools exist? How are they established? What legal and regulatory frameworks and mechanisms are in place and implemented? What are the main responsibilities of the different layers of government (central, intermediate, local) in education? What are the main specialized national agencies in basic education? How far are individual schools enjoying autonomy and in what areas (finance, teacher recruitment and management, curricula...)? How far are schools and teachers held accountable? How far are private schools constrained by the same regulations than public schools?
- Please describe the role and importance of supplementary education (shadow education).
- Provide information about the curriculum, age focus, pedagogical goals, teacher qualifications, costs, and number and socio-economic composition of students. What are the links to the compulsory school system? What is the current approach to supplementary education and, if relevant, what policies have been implemented?
- Are there integrity concerns in the education system? If so, which mechanisms have been designed to prevent and address them?

Access and participation

- What are the access and participation rates in education? Please provide the latest national data, disaggregated by age, gender, socio-economic status and location. How have they evolved in recent decades? What are the main challenges in relation to access? How is the system dealing with out-of-school children? What are the national policies addressing them?

- What are the current graduation rates in compulsory education? Please provide the latest national data, disaggregated by gender, socio-economic status and location. How have they evolved in recent decades? What are the main issues, causes and challenges in relation to drop- outs? What are the national policies addressing them?
- What is the average number of years in school? Please provide the latest national data, disaggregated by age, gender, socio-economic status and location. How has this average evolved in recent years?

Quality of provision

- How far has the quality of provision evolved over time?
- In particular, has class size been reduced? How has school size evolved over time?
- Have the qualifications of teachers improved?
- What are the main challenges in relation to the quality of school provision? What are the national policies addressing them?

Overall performance

- How have learning outcomes improved over time? Please provide the latest national data on learning outcomes, disaggregated by age, gender, socio-economic status and location. How have they evolved in recent years? What are the main challenges in relation to learning outcomes? What are the national policies addressing them?

Equity

- What are the main concerns on equity in education? Which characteristics are associated with a higher risk of student low performance? Are advantaged and disadvantaged students distributed evenly across schools (public and private)? Are there significant differences between public schools as regards of the inputs and performance? How do these differ to private schools?
- How is the equity of the school provision currently being monitored? Are dedicated equity policies intended to address access and learning inequalities particularly in relation to gender disparities, minorities or students from lower socio-economic backgrounds and in other than Bangkok areas? Are there specific policies to support low performing schools? What are the national policies addressing them?

Efficiency

- What is the total budget allocated to the public school system? Outline the trends in the education budget in recent years in relation to the main drivers of expenditures. How financial resources are spent in the public school system on different education levels and budget items (i.e. capital, current spending), and what elements are taken into account in the distribution of resources across regions, local authorities and schools? What is the contribution of families, if any?
- Can private schools receive public funding? What is the relative importance of private schools?
- How is the efficiency of the school system currently being monitored? What are the main issues in this domain? What are the national policies addressing them?

Concluding remarks

- **Evidence:** Overall, what are the strengths and areas for improvement in education as seen by the national team?
- **Interpretation:** What possible causes can the national team evoke to explain the current state of affairs in education? What particular policies and initiatives have positioned it where it is now? If possible identify the key factors that have impelled improvement and the reasons why.
- **Policy issues:** Overall, what are the main policy issues that the national team thinks that have to be addressed?

Chapter 2. System-wide policy and planning

This chapter should provide an overview of the governance and planning system for education in Sudan, with particular emphasis on the systems and institutions involved, notably at the school level. The chapter should provide sufficient description of the system components at various levels of education governance. It should also highlight the achievements made in the past years, especially in terms of: access and participation, quality of the provision, equity and student performance. Moreover, special attention should also be made on the implementation of monitoring and evaluation initiatives. In addition, a section should elaborate on financing needs and procedures. Whenever possible, please provide and analyze the past trends of the relevant indicators. Also, to the extent possible, provide an assessment of the current and anticipated situation in light of the SDG4-2030 Agenda.

Levels of education governance

- What is the relationship between education governance at the national, intermediate and institutional level. Which are the policy-making and executive bodies? What is the national capacity to translate policies and strategies into plans and programs, and is there a difference between the two islands? How are plans and programs implemented effectively?
- How effective are the existing governance structures at the institution level in helping to improve teaching and learning? What is the support mechanism in place to enable governing bodies at the institution level to shoulder their responsibilities? Where is the evidence that it works?
- How inclusive and participatory is the process of constituting the governance and accountability structures at the institution level? Does the composition of the governance body reflect the diversity of critical stakeholders? What are the criteria for identifying these stakeholders? What are the mechanisms for their effective engagement? Where is the evidence of the effectiveness of that engagement?

Education policies

- What are the strategic goals and directions assigned to school education? What are, specifically, the more immediate policy objectives and education targets? How far are they linked to the overall education development and wider socio-economic or political goals?

- Who is responsible for the provision and funding of public schools in pre-primary, primary and general secondary levels? What are the role and responsibilities of these responsible bodies? How do they coordinate in policy design and implementation?
- What kinds of private schools exist? How are they established? What legal and regulatory frameworks and mechanisms are in place? What are the main responsibilities of the different layers of government (central, intermediate, local) in education? What are the main specialized national agencies in basic education? How far are individual schools enjoying autonomy and in what areas (finance, teacher recruitment and management, curricula ...)? How far are schools and teachers held accountable? How far are private schools constrained by the same regulations than public schools?
- Are there integrity concerns in the education system? If so, which mechanisms have been designed to prevent and address them?

Planning

- In reference to pre-tertiary education, who is responsible for the planning cycle? How are the responsibilities distributed at different levels?
- What tools are used to estimate schooling needs? In particular, is there an Education Management Information System in place?
- How are human resources, including teaching posts, being planned and assigned to schools and by whom?
- How are financial resources being planned and assigned to schools and by whom?
- How are material resources, including furniture, textbooks, appliances and devices, being planned and assigned and by whom?
- What are the main challenges in planning? In particular, are there any implementation challenges?

Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E)

- How is the efficiency of the school system currently being monitored? What are the main issues in this domain? What are the national policies addressing them?
- What are the mechanisms and processes that exist in the country for quality assurance of different types and levels of education? Are there structures with a clear mandate for promoting quality? What aspects of quality learning form the objects of monitoring and evaluation? How effective are these structures in assuring quality? What is the evidence of their effectiveness?
- What are the types of M&E systems currently in place and to what extent have they been developed? Types of possible M&E systems include systems that monitor inputs (e.g. Education Management Information Systems[1]), process (e.g. school inspection and evaluation systems[2]), and outputs (e.g. student assessment and examination systems).

1 An information system designed to collect, compile, collate and analyze school level data (students, teachers, facilities, finance, etc.) for policy and programme formulation, implementation and monitoring at different administrative levels.

2 A procedure usually carried out by the Ministry of Education to observe and inspect whether schools comply and follow the rules, regulations and standards set by the relevant authorities.

- Briefly describe the main features of the evaluation and assessment framework, including the (i) purposes, main components (e.g. system evaluation, school assessment, teacher appraisal, student assessment, evaluation of local educational authorities, evaluation of programmes) and its interrelation, (ii) assessment criteria, instruments and areas of focus, (iii) distribution of responsibilities and competencies to perform the assessment, and (iv) usage of evaluation results and mechanisms to ensure that evaluation results are used for improving school practices and student outcomes.
- What are the policy priorities in the area of evaluation and assessment? What initiatives have been undertaken or are planned? Are there key developments and trends that have led to a greater emphasis on evaluation and assessment policies in recent years? How do these to other features of the school system (e.g., school autonomy, decentralization)?
- What forms of student assessment exist in the school system (e.g. formative assessment in the classroom, summative assessment in the classroom/school, national examinations at key stages of the school system with a formal civil effect for students, national assessments with no formal civil effect for students, international standardized tests)? How are the different forms of student assessment interrelated? What is the rationale for the current approach to student assessment?

Funding

- What is the total budget allocated to the public school system? Outline the trends in the education budget in recent years in relation to the main drivers of expenditures. How financial resources are spent in the public school system on different education levels and budget items (i.e. capital, current spending), and what elements are taken into account in the distribution of resources across regions, local authorities and schools? What is the contribution of families, if any?
- Can private schools receive public funding? What is the relative importance of private schools?
- How much foreign aid does the education sector receive on average? Where does most of the aid go usually? Are there specific education programs managed directly by foreign donors/NGOs? To what extent do new education projects require foreign monetary assistance?

Concluding remarks

- **Evidence:** What are the strengths and areas for improvement in system-wide policy and planning as seen by the national team?
- **Interpretation:** What possible causes can the national team evoke to explain the current state of affairs in system-wide policy and planning? What particular policies and initiatives have positioned it where it is now? If possible identify the key factors that have impelled improvement and the reasons why.
- **Policy issues:** What are the policy issues that the national team thinks that have to be addressed in system-wide policy and planning as a priority?

Chapter 3. Teacher policies

This chapter will provide an analysis of the main features of the teacher-related issues. The chapter will provide a specific focus on:

Context and policy development

- Provide an overall assessment of the teacher workforce and teacher effectiveness, particularly regarding teacher quality.
- Provide a brief description of recent reforms and policy initiatives regarding teachers, including their main objectives, implementation difficulties and effects. If current policies have been evaluated or are being reviewed, indicate what policy aspects have been considered effective and ineffective or require improvement.
- What are the perceived teacher-related challenges and highest priorities for consideration in policy and implementation in the short, medium and long-term? What further policy initiatives and strategies are envisaged?
- What is the teachers' role in school (teaching and other tasks)? Are these specified in standards? Do these vary by types of school or teaching experience?
- What organizations are involved in the design and implementation of teacher policies? Are there effective frameworks to promote dialogue and common action among the main stakeholders? What are the key issues at stake and what are the viewpoints of relevant stakeholders? How many teacher unions exist and how are they structured? What is the level of unionization of teachers by school type and sector?

Teacher recruitment and licensing

- What are the main pathways by which people can become teachers or former teachers can return to teaching? What is the teacher recruitment system and requirement? Are there any issues related to bribery or corruption? What is the status of teaching profession in relation to the labour market trends?
- Briefly describe the main features of the teaching workforce. Indicate the number and composition of the teaching workforce as well as relevant trends over the past 10 years in terms of (i) gender, (ii) age, (iii) ethnicity; (iv) socio-economic background; and (v) academic performance. Are there relevant differences between schools?
- What are the challenges of teacher supply and deployment? In which educational stages, types of schools, subject-areas or geographical zones has Sudan identified present or future teacher shortages?
- How do recently qualified teachers typically obtain their first teaching position? How are vacancies for teaching positions determined, applications invited, and successful candidates chosen? Are teachers assigned to schools or do they apply? Does this vary depending upon the type of post and their career stage? How does the system ensure an equitable distribution of teachers among schools? Is there a probationary period?
- Briefly describe the career structure and promotion system. How do salaries, benefits and working conditions compare with other occupations with broadly similar qualification levels at the beginning and after 5 and 10 years of employment? Is there any evidence on the impact of salaries, benefits and working conditions on decisions to enter teaching or staying in the profession?

Teacher initial education

- What are the major requirements to qualify for employment as a teacher? Have any major changes been recently initiated in this regard or are any planned? What are the reasons involved? How does the private school system differ in this regard?
- Describe the structure of initial teacher education, including (i) the types of institutions, (ii) financing and scholarships, (iii) entry requirements, (iv) length of courses, (v) extent of in-school experience, (vi) graduating requirements, and (vii) the roles of teacher employers and teacher unions or professional associations in shaping course content or certification. Have any major changes been recently initiated in these regards or are any planned? What are the reasons involved?

Professional development

- Is there any special support or induction programme for teachers in the early years of their careers? If so, how does it operate, and what is the evidence on its impact?
- What are the links between teachers' initial education and continuous professional development (CPD)? Are TTIs systematically involved into or mobilized to support CPD?
- What types of professional development options and programmes exist for teachers? Who decides what type of learning opportunities teachers need? Are training programmes school-based? How are such programmes monitored for effectiveness? Are there any formal links between professional development programmes and maintenance of certification to teach, salary rises, and career pathways? What evidence is available on the impact of such links on teacher performance?

Teacher appraisal

- What are the performance criteria and the reference standards used in teacher appraisal? What are the instruments used to perform a teacher appraisal (e.g. classroom observation; self-evaluation; teacher portfolio; interview; student results or learning outcomes; teacher test)? What is the methodology followed for teacher appraisal (mix of instruments; range of evaluators; frequency)? Is it mostly a process internal to the school or is the external component dominant?
- What aspects are the subject of the appraisal (e.g. planning and preparation; the classroom environment; instruction; professional responsibilities; non-teaching responsibilities within the school)? How is teacher appraisal differentiated by type of teacher (e.g. primary vs. secondary teacher; teachers at different stages of the career)? Are teachers tracked over their teaching career? What are the perceived difficulties to implement teacher appraisal?
- What are the uses of teacher appraisal results? What are the links with professional development for teachers, opportunities for teachers to improve their practice, teachers' reward systems or their career progression? What happens to teachers that are considered ineffective?

School leadership

- What are the current practices in regard to school leadership and what is the role of teachers in school leadership? To what extent teachers are involved in the decision-making at school level? Is there any support to develop teachers' leadership?
- What is the role of school leaders in teacher development?

Concluding remarks

- Evidence: What are the strengths and areas for improvement in teacher policies as seen by the national team?
- Interpretation: What possible causes can the national team evoke to explain the current state of affairs in teacher policies? What particular policies and initiatives have positioned it where it is now? If possible identify the key factors that have impelled improvement and the reasons why.
- Policy issues: What are the policy issues that the national team thinks that have to be addressed in teacher policies as a priority?

Chapter 4. Literacy policies

This chapter should provide an overview of literacy policies and detailed information about the current national initiatives in this domain, if applicable.

Literacy rates

- What are the current literacy rates? Please provide the latest national data, disaggregated by age, gender, socio-economic status and location. How have they evolved in recent decades? Has there been a noticeable progress in recent years and, if so, what factors and policies have contributed to it?
- How would you describe the current thinking about literacy in society? Is it part of the national debates on education? Is the discussion just limited to adult education or second opportunity learning?

National policies

- Who is responsible for the national policies on literacy? Is there any kind of multi-stakeholder partnership on literacy and, if so, how is it coordinated with the national authorities?
- Are there dedicated institutions targeting different modalities of literacy or specific literacy related targets? If so, under whose responsibility?
- What are the national policies addressing literacy? Is there a national campaign and, if so, how is it currently being monitored and assessed? What are the main obstacles for implementation?
- How effective is the combination of formal and non-formal resources being used?
- Is there a role attributed to technology in promoting literacy?

Literacy challenges

- How is literacy currently being monitored and assessed?
- How are literacy initiatives connected to skills development policies and, in particular, with the qualifications system?

Concluding remarks

- **Evidence:** What are the strengths and areas for improvement in literacy as seen by the national team?
- **Interpretation:** What possible causes can the national team evoke to explain the current state of affairs in literacy? What particular policies and initiatives have positioned it where it is now? If possible identify the key factors that have impelled improvement and the reasons why.
- **Policy issues:** What are the policy issues that the national team thinks that have to be addressed in literacy as a priority?

2. Terms of Reference (TOR)

I. Background:

Prepare a background paper which, for references purposes, is entitled (a) "Education policy review in Sudan: teacher policies". This background paper is to be considered as an input to the report entitled "Education Policy review in Sudan in the context of Education 2030".

II. Objectives of the Work:

The deliverable shall contribute to the final education policy review document which covers three different policy priorities, namely 1) teacher policies, 2) literacy policies and 3) sector-wide policy and planning. The detailed instructions are specified in the organization of the work below.

III. Organization of the Work:

1. One text on the theme of teacher policies listing the policy issues that the country is currently facing in this domain. The list will have to comprise, for each policy issue, a clear statement of the issue at stake, the supporting evidence and an elaboration of the policy relevance of the issue, either from a national or an international perspective

The Work shall be written in English at a very good level. The estimate number of issues is around ten per theme, with an indicative total number 4800 words (15 pages: 320 words/per page) including spaces.

- A draft version of the Work will be submitted to UNESCO.
- The final version of the Work integrating UNESCO's comments will be submitted to UNESCO for approval.

2. A set of policy recommendations on the theme of teacher policies, based on the previous listing, which will have to be discussed with government representatives and other stakeholders. The set of policy recommendations will indicate, for each policy issue, what are the recommended courses of action, the estimated effects and, whenever possible, with reference to the experience of other countries, particularly in what they may be seen as good practices.

The Work shall be written in English at a very good level. The number of policy recommendations will at least match that of the policy issues, but can be larger if required. The final work will consist of approximately 7360 words (23 pages: 320 words/per page). It shall follow a logical sequence of problem analysis to facilitate discussion of policy issues, findings and related options for improvement as follows: 1) statement of a key policy issue, 2) evidence of the issue, 3) discussion and 4) policy recommendations.

The work shall follow the UNESCO Style Manual:

http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0014/001418/141812e.pdf

3. Sample mission TOR – A scoping mission

1. To pave the way for this work, particularly through high-level policy meetings with the Minister of Education (and any other relevant Ministers), the Permanent Secretary and the National Commission for UNESCO.
2. To identify the themes, sub sectors and policy domains to be covered by this policy review. This decision is crucial for drafting a more precise project document and has to be taken jointly after having carried out a series of interviews with key officials, namely:
    - Ministry officials, including those responsible for curriculum development, teacher development, M&E and finance and others suggested by the education authorities
    - Representatives of other concerned line ministries or Agencies (such as ICT, labor, finance and planning)
    - The national review team
3. To clarify the overall methodology and assist in the setting up of a National Team, responsible for the drafting of country background report (CBR), whose guidelines will be developed in the light of the themes to be covered.
4. To expose the main stakeholders to the rationale, objectives and methodology of the review, with the aim of setting clear expectations. These include (other than the ones already mentioned):
    - Teachers' unions
    - Parents' organizations
    - Private sector representatives
    - Development partners, including bilateral donors and UN agencies
    - Civil society organizations
    - Academics and researchers in the area of education

Education Sector

United Nations
Educational, Scientific and
Cultural Organization

A primer for engaging education stakeholders in policy reviews

This primer aims to provide education stakeholders with an introduction to UNESCO's education policy review (EPR) methodology in the wider context of SDG 4-Education 2030, and how it could be designed as a tool for capacity development leading to improved policymaking and planning in education. It draws largely on the experience gained during the first round of EPRs carried out by the Section of Education Policy from 2011 to 2018.
The primer benefitted from major contributions from UNESCO colleagues at Headquarters, regional bureaus and field offices.

As a tool for capacity development, this primer provides the foundations for and methodological approach to EPRs. It also guides education stakeholders and authorities on how to use the results of the EPR to foster education sector dialogue and maximize country ownership and the adoption of relevant policy recommendations.

4 QUALITY EDUCATION

Sustainable Development Goals