

Udine, Italy, 29th and 30th June 2017



Institutional Greetings

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Good afternoon, Presidents, Rectors, Vice Presidents, the Mayor of the City of Udine and, of course, Minister Fedeli. Thank you very much for this invitation.

I wish to first and foremost highlight what I think most of you know: UNESCO is the UN organisation with a unique mandate for higher education. It is extremely rewarding for us that Italy, as part of its G7 Presidency, is paying such extraordinary attention to universities and their role for a sustainable future. UNESCO is committed to support the government and universities in order to implement the UN Sustainable Goal number 4: Education 2030. Within it, target 4.3 is specifically to ensure by 2030 an equal access for all women and men to affordable and quality universities. A long time ago, when I first started my job my supervisor told me, and you'll allow me this personal touch, "after one week of working, Ana Luiza will come back and make it simple". I went back to my office very happy, I said "Oh, this is going to be easy." Little did I know that to make things simple is the hardest of the challenges that we all face. So in preparing for today's meeting, I wanted to highlight concepts that I'm sure are known to all of you, but I think it's important for us all to remember that sometimes it's important to keep things simple.

So, I would like to highlight to you that UNESCO's engagement is based on four observations. Today's challenges go beyond national borders and are impacting everyone; thus, we need to find solutions and develop strategies at all levels, from the local to the global ones:

1. In a globalised world with unresolved global challenges that are very real, and with consequences at the local level, education must help learners of all ages to become responsible, productive and active citizens.

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EDUCATION FOR ALL UDINE

2. Education must be relevant and respond to the aspirations of the new generation; young people are concerned about the future and filled with hope; young people want to contribute to society and must have a voice in our societies.
3. Follow developments and educational practices must adapt to the needs of the 21st Century, hence the importance of quality and relevance of education. More focus on social emotional aspects of learning and non-cognitive skills and this sometimes requires a shift in the role of teachers and educators.
4. Last but not least, we believe that we must all comply and be in line with international commitments and agreements.

That being said, at present opportunities for access to university are often insufficient, with regard to gender, to social, regional and ethnic background and to age and disability. This results in a knowledge gap with serious consequences for social and economic development between and within countries. Therefore, it is imperative to reduce barriers to access to university and to provide various entry points in universities irrespective of gender, age, ethnicity or disability. Universities are critical for the education and skill development of future researchers, teachers and leaders; through their research function they play a fundamental role in creating knowledge and underpin the development of analytical and creative capacities of modern societies that enable solutions to be found for local and global problems of sustainable development.

Another important trend is the increasing mobility of staff and learners and the flow of students moving abroad to enhance academic credentials. As a consequence, the comparability, recognition and quality assurance of qualifications has become a growing area of concern. At the same time, mobility is an asset and an opportunity and should be enhanced to develop professors and students' competencies and global competitiveness. A well-established, properly regulated university system, supported by technology, open educational resources and distance education, can increase access, equity, quality and relevance; it can narrow the gap between what is studied in universities and what the economies and societies demand. UNESCO provides policy advice in the areas of quality assurance, comparability and recognition of tertiary education, qualifications and how to facilitate credit transfers between recognized institutions.

UNESCO's commitment to Education for a Sustainable Future is anchored in its vision of peace that is itself grounded in the belief that lasting peace is more than security and freedom from violence. As stated in UNESCO's constitution "since wars began in the minds of men and women, it is in the minds of men and women that the defense of peace must be constructed."

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Universities have an immense catalytically and transformative role to play in Education for sustainable development, Global Citizenship and to build the defense of peace in the minds of men and women.

In conclusion, I wish you all professors, rectors, chancellors, students, a very successful and productive discussion this afternoon and tomorrow. Thank you very much for this opportunity.