



Q&A with ILO's Paul Comyn ahead of the 2018 Global Education Meeting (GEM)

Convened by UNESCO, the high-level gathering will be a milestone in the assessment of education policies, strategies and challenges related to Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4 in preparation for the 2019 High Level Political Forum (HLPF). The 2019 HLPF will review a number of SDGs including SDG 4. The 2019 HLPF theme - "Empowering people and ensuring inclusiveness and equality" – provides the framework for discussions at the GEM. In this interview, Paul Comyn talks about what to expect from the 2018 GEM meeting and how the ILO supports the implementation of SDG 4.



What are the main aims of this meeting, and why is it so important to talk about education today?

The Global Education Meeting (GEM) has been convened as a High Level Forum to review progress towards the global education commitments that exist as part of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. It has particular significance because next year the mechanism that is reviewing SDG progress includes a priority focus on SDG 4, the goal related to education, and within that there are specific targets related to vocational education and training. The GEM this year is about taking stock of progress towards the SDGs but also preparing the ground for the review of SDG 4 in 2019.

So, will the meeting focus exclusively on progress made on SDG 4, or will it also examine the interlinkages with other SDGs?

The GEM 2018 does talk about the interlinkages with other SDGs, but I think the focus is more on SDG 4. This is because SDG 4 is quite broad: it covers issues related to the teaching profession, early childhood education and development, partnerships for financing lifelong-learning, technical and vocational education and training, youth employment and higher education. What has been happening over the last years is that different countries and different regions have taken steps to move towards SDG implementation, working towards the targets and reporting on achievement. The GEM meeting this year is a way to bring together these experiences in moving towards SDG achievement as well as pooling together the information that is going to inform the submissions that will go to the HLPF next year. In conclusion, this meeting will focus on SDG 4 but it will also touch on how education more broadly is an enabler for the achievement of other SDGs like SDG 8 on employment and SDG 13 on climate change.



How is the ILO contributing the achievement of SDG 4, and why is the ILO's participation at this meeting important?

There are specific targets within SDG 4 that relate to skills development, youth employment, technical and vocational education and training (TVET), the teaching profession and gender equality in education and training, among other key thematic areas. As an international actor, the ILO is engaged in working at both the country-level and the global-level to address those themes so in that sense we are supporting SDG 4 implementation.

Moreover, the ILO is one of the partner convening bodies for the SDG 4 Steering Committee, which is unique across all the SDGs because most SDGs don't have a formal structure that is supposed to guide or, in some way, influence implementation. SDG 4 is the only one that does.

For the GEM event specifically, the ILO is providing support through some of the technical sessions: on the first day, we are jointly hosting a technical session on TVET and skills development and youth employment with UNESCO. We are also co-hosting with Education International a technical session on the teaching profession. As part of the ministerial sessions, as the ILO is unfortunately not able to attend, Sangheon Lee, Director of the Employment Policy Department, will be participating in a high-level technical discussion on learning and the future of work and will represent the Director-General.

What are the intended outcomes of this meeting and how might they affect the HLPF 2019?

The meeting will provide an opportunity to take stock on progress towards SDG 4 and to share national and regional experiences about implementation. It will also allow the SDG 4 Steering Committee to capture the information and inputs required to develop the report on SDG 4 implementation for the HLPF next year.

Is there anything else you would like to add about the event?

UNESCO should be congratulated for taking the leading role in convening this event. We are happy to be a part of this because the HLPF in 2019 is a milestone for SDG 4. Hopefully the information gathering at the 2018 GEM will reflect a good snapshot on where we are in terms of SDG 4 implementation and highlight areas that require further attention.

*Paul Comyn
Senior Skills and Employability Specialist
Skills and Employability Branch
Employment Policy Department, ILO*