

## The Challenges for Education in the Future: the UNESCO Report

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When discussing the future challenges facing education systems, it is inevitable to talk about the technological changes that society is experiencing and the demand for new competencies to meet the challenges of interpersonal relationships in increasingly complex contexts. There are numerous works on these issues, and the perspectives on what education should be or how these social challenges should be met vary considerably. The following are the main conclusions of the document “Reimagining our Futures Together: A New Social Contract for Education,” published by UNESCO’s International Commission on the Future of Education in 2022.

Created by UNESCO’s Director-General in 2019, the International Commission worked on realizing education projections for the year 2050. It is an initiative to rethink how knowledge and learning can project the future of humanity and the planet. The Commission was responsible for carefully considering the input received through the various consultation processes and ensuring that this collective feedback was reflected in the final report.

The report of the International Commission on the Futures of Education results from two years of work by an independent international commission of education experts informed by a global consultation process involving more than one million citizens, the expertise of 400 associated schools, and 200 UNESCO Chairs worldwide.

The report proposes a new social contract for education to rebalance our relationships with others, the planet, and technology. This new social contract must be based on the right to quality education throughout life and reinforce teaching as a social and common public good. These universal principles must become the basis for education everywhere. The report is based on the central issues facing human beings related to climate, democratic participation, digitalization, and work.

The report denounces that one of the most severe problems of the current educational context worldwide is that knowledge and its structures continue to respond to a colonialist, hegemonic and biased mentality. As a result, it has been standardized and distributed in a way that suits

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a few privileged elites to whom quality education is offered as a tool to “earn more,” not to make the world a better place.

According to the experts in the report, society and the planet are in imminent danger. Suppose we do not begin to work together to build a new, fairer social contract, which will serve as the basis for the future of education. In that case, our outlook will be even more plagued by inequalities and a lack of essential resources. Moreover, the best education available is still only for certain privileged groups. The exclusion of a considerable part of the population, who cannot access knowledge of great relevance to improve their living conditions, only makes the opportunity gap more acute every day.

According to UNESCO, the new social contract for the education of the future must be based on the principles of inclusion, equity, cooperation, solidarity, collective responsibility, and interconnectedness and actively seek a more just, peaceful, sustainable, and innovative society. These four ideal characteristics are essential, as they aim to solve problems that have to do directly with economic inequalities, weakening democracies, labor precariousness, resource exploitation that exceeds the planet’s capacities, and the digital divide that causes only a few to innovate and is generally based on private interests.

The report calls for pedagogies that move away from teacher protagonism to emphasize cooperation, collaboration, and solidarity. It also calls for the curriculum to evolve toward ecological, intercultural, and interdisciplinary learning. It indicates the need to further professionalize teaching as collaborative work and recognize teachers as crucial figures in educational and social transformation. Finally, it calls for protecting schools as indispensable centers to promote inclusion, equity, and collective well-being and redesigning them to foster greater collaboration and become examples of sustainability and carbon neutrality.

The report also calls for a collaborative research agenda on the right to lifelong learning and for renewed global solidarity and international

cooperation to expand educational opportunities throughout life and in different social, cultural, and professional fields. It is affirmed that the right to education must be developed to last a lifetime and include the right to connectivity.

Concerning this theme, the report gives importance to social and emotional education. Students must develop social skills that include compassion, empathy, social responsibility, solidarity, and cooperation. They must also strengthen other soft skills such as communication, leadership, and self-management. All this is to work together to improve the living conditions of all, not to climb individually in the socioeconomic pyramid.

The report calls for institutions, organizations, and individuals worldwide to cooperate in solidarity to advance and realize the new social contract for education. UNESCO urges educators, young people, researchers, and decision-makers to renew education by discussing what we should continue to do, what we should stop doing, what needs to be rethought through a new and creative approach, and how to make it happen in their educational institutions and communities. To this end, it will promote a comprehensive dialogue and action that harnesses the enormous diversity of human creativity, ingenuity, and capacity for innovation to transform educational policy and practice. The Commission argues that there has never been greater scope for such joint action, thanks to access to extensive knowledge and collaborative tools.

We believe that this document will be a reference for discussion in educational institutions in the coming years and joins an important number of works that have been developed around what the education of the future will be and how it will contribute to facing the problems that humans will have to face regarding the social changes resulting from technological innovations, environmental changes and the way we will relate to each other in these new contexts. The Reimagining Our Futures Together report is an invitation to work together to act together to improve education.