

UNESCO, a leading agency for sustainable development and global citizenship education, has promoted the concept of holistic learning reflected in Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4, and particularly SDG 4.7, based on three pillars: cognitive, socio-emotional, and behavioral. And many countries are shifting their learning goals to respond to the emerging education needs of the 21st century. In the Asia-Pacific region, UNESCO Bangkok, through its regional platforms Educational Research Institutes Network (ERI-Net) and Network on Education Quality Monitoring in the Asia-Pacific (NEQMAP)—has undertaken a series of collaborative research studies with countries in Asia, focusing on different aspects of 21st century skills learning. Most recently, NEQMAP's 6th Annual Meeting held in December 2018 in Bangkok, focused on issues and challenges in the integration of 21st century skills in curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment. UNESCO Bangkok has a coordination role in monitoring the progress toward SDG4 by member in Asia and the Pacific. The globally agreed indicator 4.7.1 aims to measure the "extent to which (i) global citizenship education and (ii) education for sustainable development, including gender equality and human rights, are mainstreamed at all levels in... education]."

However, a limitation is that it addresses a country's efforts to improve education provisions but does not measure its impact on learners. It is clear that many countries put significant effort into reflecting the importance of 21st century skills in their education policies and plans. Some countries are taking steps to mainstream SDG 4.7 in the curricula through techniques such as project-based learning and field studies, while many seek to integrate and assess competencies such as critical thinking, collaboration, and global citizenship education through subject areas (e.g., social studies, science, and information and communications technology). Can examinations and other "tests" actually measure abstract areas such as creativity or collaboration in ways that are valid and reliable? How can a teacher, for example, evaluate the degree to which a student is empathetic or compassionate, and has skills for taking initiative?

NEW REPORT ON EDUCATION SYSTEM ALIGNMENT FOR 21ST CENTURY SKILLS

In many countries in Asia and the Pacific, assessment still follows the traditional path of measuring students' literacy, numeracy, and knowledge. A newly published report by the Brookings Institution, "Education system alignment for 21st century skills: Focus on assessment," describes the challenges to measurement of new learning goals, which include collaboration and communication, as well as complex cognitive skills like creative problem-solving. The report says "local contexts matter more than cross-national comparability in educational assessments." Indeed, our member states' education officials highlight that guidelines developed at the global/regional level are useful for reviewing their policies and practices, but emphasize the need for flexibility for each country to define their own understanding of SDG 4.7. Reviews have shown that existing curricula already include many 21st century competencies, but the challenge lies in the need for systematic implementation of these curricula through alignment with appropriate pedagogy and assessment. In many cases there is also a need to refresh curricula to reflect the skills more explicitly—the Philippines is one example of a country that has reformed to reflect a new vision of education. Another major challenge described in the report is the lack of understanding of "a learning domain, or 'construct,'" as well as "what increasing levels of competency in a skill look like... without [which] designing assessment frameworks and tasks are impossible." It is an extremely complex process that requires in-depth discussions among education stakeholders for them

to arrive at consensus, to be followed by intensive capacity development for implementation.