The increasing uncertainty, complexity and precariousness of our contemporary world must make us ask whether education can continue in a business-as-usual manner. Inequalities, violence and exclusion are bringing many societies to a point of crisis. The fragility of our planet and its ecosystems is becoming more and more apparent. Sadly, these varied forms of insecurity are exploited by some, thus straining social cohesion and weakening trust in established institutions. With rapidly changing contexts and multiple possible futures, we must reexamine and reimagine how education can contribute to the common good of humanity.

The urgency of the challenges before us potentially requires a radical transformation of mindsets and of our conceptions of human well-being, development, and how to share the planet. Knowledge, learning and education broadly considered are at the heart of this transformation. The rise of new technologies, including artificial intelligence, big data and machine learning also raise major ethical and governance concerns, especially as the promises of innovation and technological change have an uneven record of contributing to human flourishing. Despite the promise and many successes we can expect from the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, there is still an urgent need to look beyond this horizon. Even with great advances in participation in education at all levels, we still must ask what education might yet become.

In response to this, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) is launching the Futures of Education project in an ambitious attempt to mobilize the many rich ways of being and knowing worldwide to reflect on and generate debate on how education might need to be re-thought in a world of increasing complexity, uncertainty, and precarity. UNESCO is establishing a high-level International Commission of eminent thought leaders of diverse expertise and perspectives from the worlds of politics, academia, the arts, science and business. Through a consultative process involving governments, policy-makers, civil society, youth, educators and other stakeholders – the International Commission will prepare a report for 2021 that will provide an agenda for policy debate and action at multiple levels.
Objectives

1. To initiate a debate on the Futures of Education with Heads of State and Government to present their vision of the policy challenges and opportunities for the way in which learning systems are being, and will need to be, transformed for the future;

2. To officially announce the launch of UNESCO’s Futures of Education initiative, presenting the International Commission and its mandate.

Format

Time and venue: 1:15 pm to 2:30 pm, Conference Room I, United Nations Headquarters, New York
Duration: 75 min

The Futures of Education side event, co-organized with the Portuguese Republic, will provide an opportunity for Heads of State and Government to share their perspectives on education and learning in light of climate change, technological development and the changing nature of work. The results of this first debate will help frame the issues to be examined by the International Commission on the Futures of Education, in particular at their first plenary session in January 2020.

High-Level opening

- Video message from Mr António Guterres, United Nations Secretary-General
- Ms Audrey Azoulay, Director-General of UNESCO
- H. E. Ms Sahle-Work Zewde, President of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, chair of International Commission on the Futures of Education
- H. E. Mr Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa, President of the Portuguese Republic

Keynote address

- Prof. Arjun Appadurai, New York University and Hertie School, Berlin

Followed by

Panel debate

Diverse perspectives on knowledge and learning for the future of humanity and the planet

- Heads of State and Government
- Principals of UN entities and other intergovernmental organizations
- Educators
- Youth representatives
- Civil society and private sector representatives