

4D

Dialogue #3: Education and skills development for demographic dividend(s)

Government–Government
Policy Dialogues on
Demographic Diversity
and Dividends



INTRODUCTION

“ We can capitalize on investing in young people and transform our continent with social and economic growth. We need to empower women and youth through education and skills development. They are the driving force for the future and sustainable growth across the continent.

Hambani Masheleni, Head of Department of Education,
African Union Commission

Universal access to a quality education is a prerequisite for countries to harness demographic dividends. Modern economies require modern skills, as well as full participation, free from discrimination, of all working-age members of society. This implies ensuring equitable access to quality education starting from primary level to lifelong learning opportunities. Digitalization can enable new economic growth and facilitate education and communication. The COVID-19 pandemic has revealed glaring disparities in education that are not only technological but also human, with teachers and students at the heart of systems straining to support online and offline options.

Over 120 participants from 51 countries reflected on education and skills development for demographic dividends during a digital event held on 29 June 2021. It was the third instalment of the **Government–Government Policy Dialogues on Demographic Diversity and Dividends**. #The4DSeries builds on discussions started at the Nairobi Summit on ICPD25 around policies and practices that countries can use in population and development planning. It is hosted by the African Union Commission (AUC), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and the government of Germany. A virtual **kick-off event** was held on 5 October 2020, the first dialogue **Data for Demographic Dividends** followed in November 2020 and the second dialogue **Food security and nutrition for demographic dividends** in March 2021. Additional support for the present event on education and skills development was provided by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).

Six breakout groups focused on lessons learned and current initiatives in policy planning for harnessing education's contribution to attaining the demographic dividend:

- Measuring the quality of education
- Promoting equality
- Mitigating secondary school dropout
- Managing school-to-work transitions
- Bridging the digital divide
- Promoting lifelong learning.

This booklet provides a brief account of the dialogue with the aim of inspiring further discussions on the issues raised. It summarizes the views of a diverse group of stakeholders and features some of the many country examples shared during the event. An input paper prepared to inform discussions is available at the following link: <https://bit.ly/3uMwPoa>.

“ Across much of global South there is a large and growing youth population that exceeds the dependent population. This cohort of youth offers tremendous productive potential, but only if they are offered the requisite education, skills and decent work opportunities so they can chart successful trajectories. Without these, we squander the demographic advantage that these youth offer.

Sabina Dewan, President and Executive Director, JustJobs Network, New Delhi, India

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A country's changing age structure combined with rising education levels can lead to a larger and more skilled workforce, which in turn can fuel a demographic dividend – a spurt of economic growth. However, reaping a demographic dividend depends largely on countries' making sound development plans, policies and timely investments that create an enabling environment for education, health, and economic opportunities.



The lively exchange on education's contribution to demographic dividends, punctuated by inputs from technical experts, fostered mutual learning with best practice examples from a variety of countries. Several key action points were identified:

- **Convince decision-makers that investments in education** are essential for any prospects of a demographic dividend, and that a large working-age population is only an asset if it has acquired the skills required to contribute to the economy.
- **Use education to foster social and economic equity** by empowering disadvantaged and marginalized populations – especially girls, women and people with disabilities – to develop their full potential.
- **It is crucial that learners pursue their education** until they can be integrated into the active economy with decent work opportunities.
- **Encourage learners' return to school after an interruption** such as pregnancy, e.g. with on-site baby care.
- **Reinforce learners' motivation to stay in school** by improving school-to-work transitions, including through partnerships with the private sector.
- **Enhance quality and equity of education**, e.g. by providing more equal access to digital tools and standardized educational opportunities.
- **Strengthen capacities to measure and monitor educational quality** in order to guide targeting of support where most needed.
- **Widely share the knowledge and experience on digital media** for communication and education gleaned from the response to COVID-19.
- **Address the multiple divides within the digital divide** – from access to electricity, internet and devices, to girls' freedom of access to information and communications technology (ICT).
- **Reinforce and celebrate the crucial role of teachers** as the mainstay of education.
- **Lifelong learning is essential for everyone**, not only to compensate for gaps in formal education, but also to keep pace with an evolving economy.

1. BACK TO BASICS: MEASURING QUALITY AND PROMOTING EQUALITY

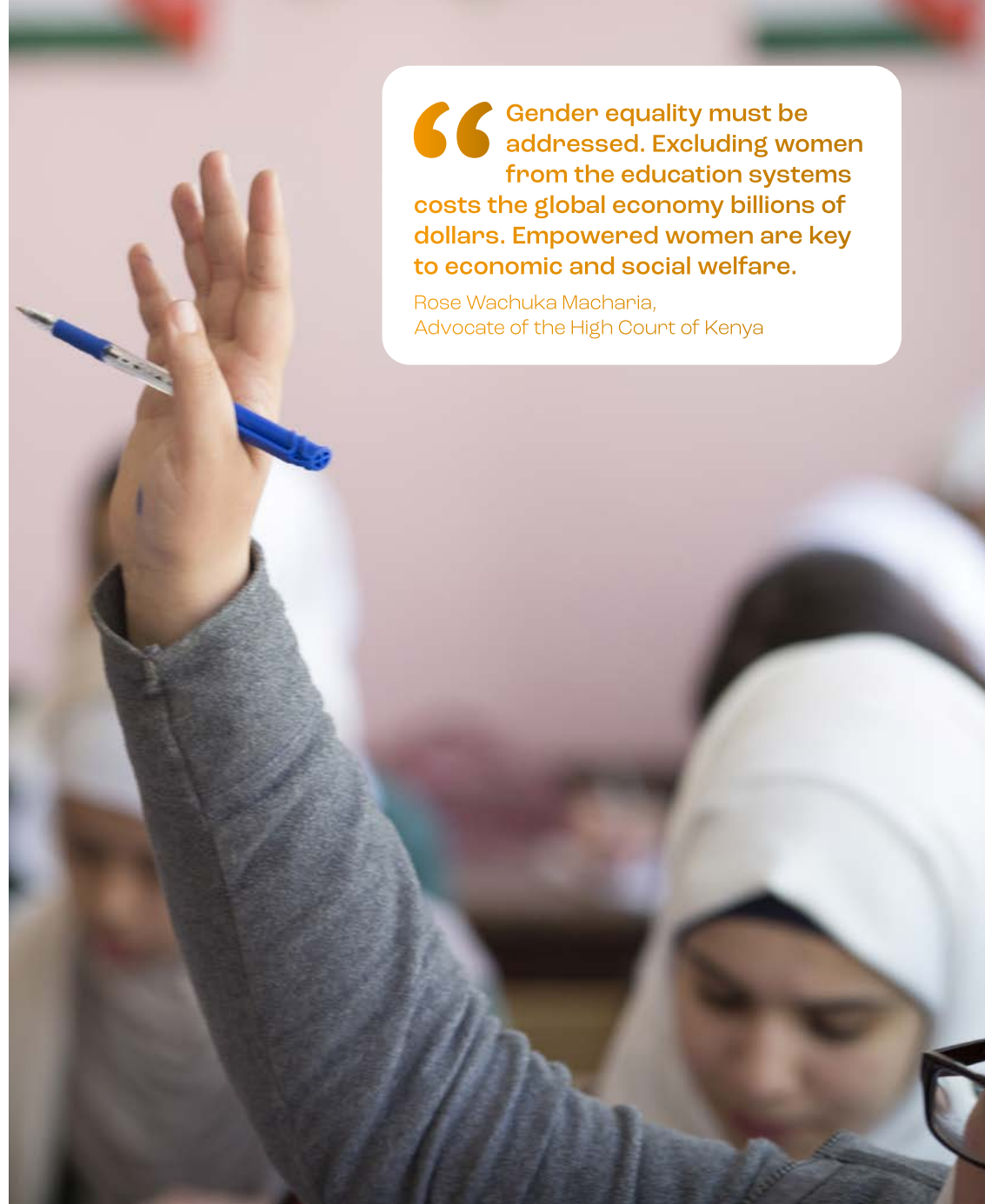
Quality and equality are closely linked in education. All too often, educational offers for disadvantaged segments of the population are of lesser quality – be it of teachers, materials or infrastructure, including access to ICT. This leads to less learning, less access to higher education and to good jobs, and less capacity to contribute to the demographic dividend. It is therefore crucial that countries keep a close watch on the quality of education provided in all schools.

The breakout group **Measuring the quality of education** agreed that monitoring needs to go well beyond learning outcomes to consider aspects such as infrastructure, student-teacher ratios, teachers' qualification, school feeding programmes and labour market relevance. Qualitative data can help capture key dimensions such as commitment, motivation, life skills and psychosocial development of students.

Quality monitoring is the basis for decision-making and targeting support where it is needed. Adequate funding is critical to strengthen education systems and make them more equitable. The breakout group **Promoting equality** identified different types of inequality in education, e.g. between girls and boys, persons with and without disabilities, or from different socio-economic backgrounds. Such inequalities have widened further as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

“Gender equality must be addressed. Excluding women from the education systems costs the global economy billions of dollars. Empowered women are key to economic and social welfare.”

Rose Wachuka Macharia,
Advocate of the High Court of Kenya



► The African Union's **Continental Education Strategy for Africa (CESA 16-25)** provides a comprehensive framework for guiding countries in preparing coherent and effective education sector plans. The strategy's ambition is to catalyze countries' development of human resources "adapted to African core values" that can help Africa fulfil its destiny as the "continent of the future". By using the same framework, the different countries can facilitate and standardize their sector planning, ensuring comparable quality standards as well as comparability across the continent.

“Quality in education encompasses everything around education. Learning outcomes, methodologies, and teaching practices are paramount, but I would extend that to infrastructure, sanitary facilities, school meals, drinking water and others. Having a global education quality index that takes into account the multiple dimensions of quality would be great for common understanding and for regional (West and Central Africa) work, it would be critical. Often, quality is only measured by learning outcomes.

Haritz Goya Lujambio, Education Specialist,
UNICEF Western Central Africa



Social norms that contribute to exclusion based on disability (ableism) or gender must be challenged. Disability policies and research are needed to kickstart changes towards inclusive learning environments with barrier-free schools, ramps for wheelchairs and inclusive curricula, including adapting Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) contents to students with special needs. Approaches aiming to remove disparities among boys and girls include gender-sensitive teacher training, empowering girls to pick the same subjects as boys, including comprehensive sexuality education (CSE) in the curriculum and providing girls with care during and opportunities after pregnancy to support them in returning to school.

The group agreed that education can be an important driver in combating inequality and realizing the promise to leave no one behind. Equitable inclusion of girls, women, people with disabilities and other vulnerable and marginalized groups in education systems and later in the economy is key for reaching economic and social well-being.

▶ In **Southern and Eastern Africa**, initiatives linking education with SRHR aim for better quality and inclusiveness. The **"School's Out"** project has gathered evidence on how best to implement school-based programmes to foster sexual and reproductive health in culturally appropriate and sensitive ways. The aim is to bring Ministries of Education and Health together to discuss how to translate this evidence into action and act on young people's needs. The **"Breaking the Silence"** project of the South African Medical Research Council specifically targets learners with disabilities for provision of CSE and SRHR services.

▶ To promote equitable access to education, **Mauritius** has made school attendance mandatory up to age 16. To enable barrier-free access to learners with disabilities, schools are being retrofitted with ramps. All new secondary schools have been equipped with disabled-friendly toilets, while facilities such as music and computer rooms, library, and science laboratory are installed on the ground floor.



2. KEEPING LEARNERS IN SCHOOL AND MANAGING SCHOOL-TO-WORK TRANSITIONS

“Lack of incentives for learning is a big challenge because there are few opportunities for jobs. Unless we link investments in education to broader human capital and economic development, then young people will continue to be disinterested in learning.

Bob Muchabaiwa, Social Policy Specialist, UNICEF

A school career ideally takes young people from a position of dependency to a situation where they can gainfully enter their country's economy and play their part in achieving its demographic dividend. School drop-out is destructive to the future of both the young person and the country's economy. In least developed countries, many children drop out even before reaching secondary school, and only one in five secondary school enrollees makes it to tertiary education. It is crucial to assess the drivers of dropout and “what works” to address them.

The breakout group **Mitigating secondary school dropout** noted that drop-out is not uniform across and within countries, but can be a consequence of numerous, multidimensional issues, including factors of educational quality and household socioeconomic status, the overall success level of the education system, limited access to schools, or infrastructural challenges. The gender dimension is significant: Issues such as unintended pregnancy, early marriage or gender-based violence can interrupt girls' education, while boys may be lured away from school to earn quick and easy money. Inequitable investments in educational facilities, societal practices of investing in boys over girls, as well as unfavourable political frameworks, are underpinning drivers of a lack of opportunities and incentives to continue education.



► In **South Africa**, the project “**Education: My Right! My Future**”, implemented by the NGO MIET Africa in partnership with the Government's Department of Basic Education, aims to ensure that 30,000 out-of-school girls, in 517 mostly rural schools, access, attend and complete schooling, especially supporting at-risk learners. Teachers receive training in “Screening, Identification Assessment and Support” for learners facing barriers.

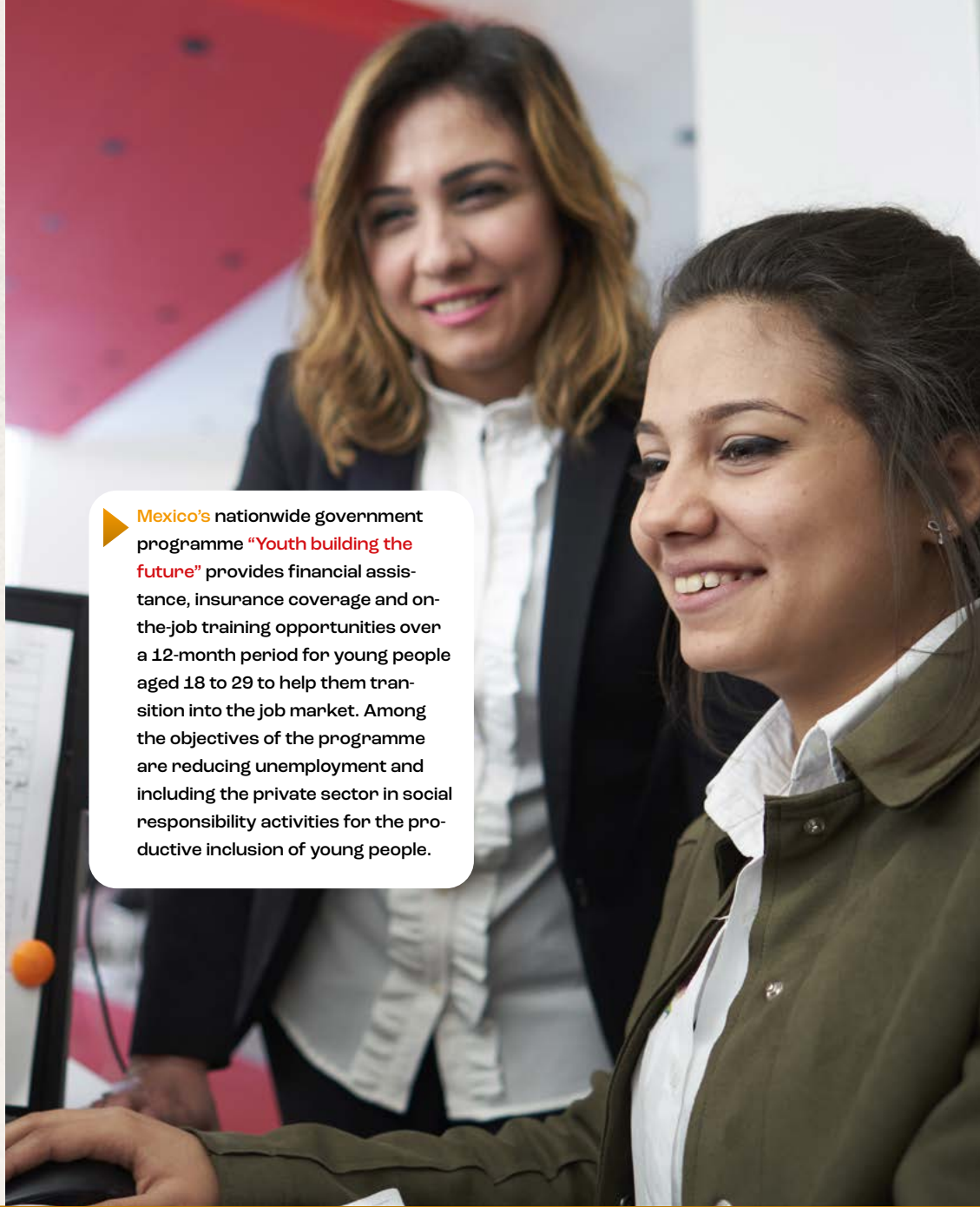
► In **Arusha, Tanzania**, girls are supported to return to school after pregnancy through establishment of a day-care centre for the girls' children, run by the community-based **Faraja Young Women Development Organization**. The centre also provides psychological and legal counselling as well as vocational and skills development to enable the young women to become self-supporting.

Approaches to prevent dropout can include grants to overcome poverty or alliances with NGOs that support girls to continue their education despite early marriage or pregnancy. Other recommendations are: linking schools with healthcare facilities for SRHR services; ensuring enabling policies and structured programmes for reintegrating girls who fall pregnant; supporting remote access; and engaging traditional leaders and communities to integrate support for the most marginalized, particularly by addressing social norms and issues related to SRHR.

To provide better incentives for learning, education also needs to be linked to employment and broader economic and human capital development, for instance by aligning curricula to learner demands and emphasizing life-long learning. Many countries struggle with mass youth unemployment, and unemployed graduates, rather than contributing to the demographic dividend, become a burden on the economy. The breakout group **Managing school-to-work transitions** reflected on how to strengthen the fragile but crucial bridge from schooling to active participation in a robust economy. The widespread problem of the mismatch between skills training and employment needs is further complicated by the increasingly rapid evolution of the economy, which requires new jobs never dreamed of just a few years previously. Including at later stages of life, innovations in industry and business may demand rapid adoption of new knowledge and re-training. Therefore, while still requiring a solid foundation in basics such as literacy and numeracy, youth must above all be trained in skills, attitudes and behaviours enabling them to quickly adapt to changing work environments.

Participants noted that the option of empowering graduates to start their own business – thereby creating new jobs – is not a panacea: It can be as challenging to find customers as it would have been to find employment. Starting and maintaining a business is expensive, difficult, and requires a particular cultural, economic, and personal context.

Education systems and programmes require urgent and profound transformations to prepare learners for tomorrow's jobs. Educational institutions must break out of their silos and maintain dynamic exchanges with economic actors. Comprehensive research on both the young population and the job market is indispensable, to know not only what current needs are, but also which skills will be needed in ten years. Future needs must be anticipated rather than endlessly trying to catch up with current needs.



▶ Mexico's nationwide government programme “Youth building the future” provides financial assistance, insurance coverage and on-the-job training opportunities over a 12-month period for young people aged 18 to 29 to help them transition into the job market. Among the objectives of the programme are reducing unemployment and including the private sector in social responsibility activities for the productive inclusion of young people.



3. BRIDGING THE DIGITAL DIVIDE AND LIFELONG LEARNING: CROSS-CUTTING ISSUES FOR EDUCATION AND THE DEMOGRAPHIC DIVIDEND

“ The pandemic has also helped us reimagine the role of teachers: to coach, to facilitate, and to inspire. Also, it has shown us that technology is not a silver bullet. Technology can be impactful as long as it facilitates human connections.

Maria Barron, World Bank EdTech Team

Access to and mastery of ICT have emerged as yet another factor of inequality in education, as well as in all other aspects of life. Many countries are still in the process of “graduating” from cumbersome, paper-based administration, and the COVID-19 pandemic, in obliging the entire planet to replace face-to-face communication with virtual exchange, has laid painfully bare the “digital divides” that many countries are scrambling to overcome.

The breakout group on **Bridging the digital divide** noted that there is actually a bundle of “divides”, both technical and social. Difficult access to energy, internet connectivity, computers, mobile phones, tablets and other devices creates barriers to electronic learning, especially for poor and marginalized groups. Educators themselves need to be capacitated for virtual teaching. Some parents are reticent to allow learners, particularly girls, access to the internet. Girls thus tend to be doubly marginalized: by gender stereotypes as well as a digital divide. When girls have greater access to digital education tools, they are more likely to gain the skills required for future-oriented jobs and boost their own financial autonomy while contributing to a demographic dividend for their country.



“ We are all held captive by this idea that education is only for children. But learning takes place from birth to death.

Shirley Walters, University of Western Cape, South Africa

However, the pandemic has also created opportunities to learn and make progress through enhanced use of digital communication. Educators say that communication between countries has improved significantly in recent months as success stories, resources and strategic approaches are shared. Teachers are receiving instruction on how to use new tools and technologies, for example enabling them to record videos for classes broadcast on TV and radio as well as computers. Tablets packed with resources are distributed among students. Messaging apps have become an important tool enabling teachers and students to stay in touch. The pandemic has also revealed that technology is most successful when it facilitates human connections – especially the role of teachers to lead, motivate and inspire.

A domain in which digital technology holds great promise is that of lifelong learning. The fact that currently a considerable proportion of the world's population, rich or poor, have access to mobile devices represents a tremendous potential for learning and communication. The breakout group **Promoting lifelong learning** underlined that as an investment in human capital after school, lifelong learning contributes both to the demographic dividend driven by working-age people as well as to a potential second dividend powered by the savings of retired workers.

Educational attainment at all ages is among the strongest predictors of overall economic growth, and therefore creating a holistic, contextual perspective on education is key. Formal, non-formal and informal types of education need to be considered together as part of a whole. Lifelong learning requires investments not only in primary, secondary and tertiary education, but also in community colleges, industrial training and night schools, to give adults of all ages opportunities for vocational training and learning to recover lost education, and re-tool themselves for the future. Online education and long-distance learning allow students of all ages to learn at their own pace and when convenient to them, thereby helping to reach individuals who would otherwise not have access to furthering their education. This increases skill diffusion and employability in different sectors.

▶ The **Learning Passport** is a new solution designed to close the learning poverty gap. Delivered by UNICEF and powered by Microsoft, it is an online, mobile, and offline tech platform enabling high quality, flexible learning. Its mission is to enable continuous access to education for children, youth, and teachers around the world and to drive improved learning outcomes to support their entry into other education or opportunity pathways, including formal education.

Issues discussed included the need for more flexible systems of recognition of prior forms of learning, particularly in the case of migrants and refugees: Making the most of their skills is beneficial for both the migrants themselves as well as for reaping a demographic dividend in the receiving country. The informal sector also plays a significant role in lifelong learning, for instance through informal apprenticeships. Here, too, gender inequality needs to be addressed to provide women fairer access to learning and employment opportunities, e.g. through transportation to education programmes, secure learning environments, school meals, accommodation and flexible hours. While digital learning offers have boomed in the context of COVID-19, people need to be capacitated to understand and use them so as to select relevant training to make long-term career decisions.

The objective is a comprehensive learning environment that is motivating for the individual. Along the pathways in life, it is important to consider what is happening to young adults in the labour market as well as to older workers. Policy should be coordinated for all stakeholders. Lifelong learning is about starting early, and never stopping.



- ▶ The Government of Colombia has taken important steps towards eliminating barriers faced by the migrant population when attempting to validate higher education degrees granted abroad by creating an alternative mechanism that makes ordinary requirements more flexible. In addition, the Special Permit of Permanence (PEP) for Training and Recognition of Prior Learning is aimed at regularizing the situation of immigrants who do not have a valid identification document in Colombia and have been selected to participate in technical labour training programmes, or want to receive recognition for prior training and skills.

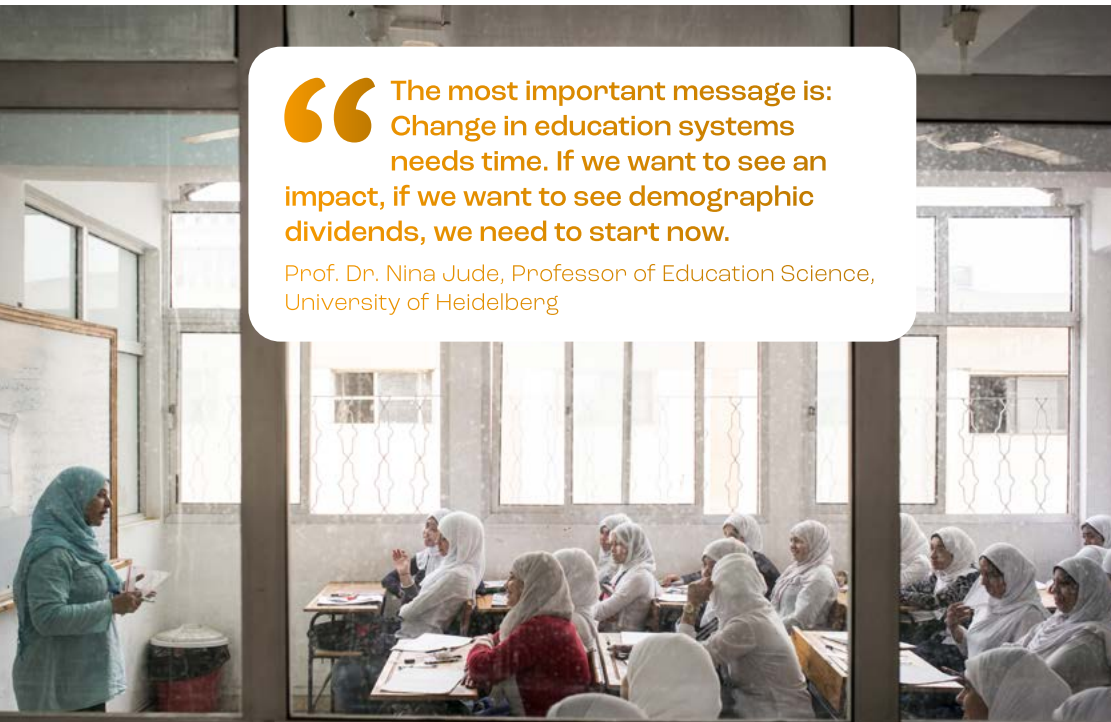
CONCLUSION

By supporting education for all, governments and partners are investing in a key area to harness demographic dividends and fulfil the Sustainable Development Goals. Improving quality and equitable access to educational opportunities, taking measures to keep learners in school and facilitate their transition into the active economy, and promoting life-long learning and widespread digital solutions and literacy, are essential contributions to developing human capital.



**“ The most important message is:
Change in education systems
needs time. If we want to see an
impact, if we want to see demographic
dividends, we need to start now.**

Prof. Dr. Nina Jude, Professor of Education Science,
University of Heidelberg



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