



Group of Governments and Other Relevant Stakeholders for Social-Emotional and Digital Learning

TERMS OF REFERENCE

Preamble

Whereas the United Nations General Assembly adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its accompanying set of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) is responsible for coordinating the international community to achieve SDG 4-Education 2030 through partnerships, policy guidance, capacity development, monitoring and advocacy;

Whereas the UNESCO Mahatma Gandhi Institute of Education for Peace and Sustainable Development (MGIEP) is UNESCO's Category 1 Institute in Asia-Pacific that focuses on SDG Target 4.7 towards education for building peaceful, egalitarian and sustainable societies across the world;

Whereas UNESCO MGIEP's programmes are designed to mainstream social-emotional learning and critical thinking in education systems, innovate digital pedagogies and put young people as global citizens at the centre of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, in line with its vision of 'Transforming Education for Humanity';

Whereas the landscape of what we understand as learning environments is changing significantly with the exponential growth of digitally mediated communication, digital media and gaming;

Whereas the use of digital technology in education is attracting considerable public and policy attention as well as private investment; yet, there is insufficient articulation of the role of digital technology in contributing to SDG 4-Education 2030;

Therefore, the representatives of Governments listed hereunder and other relevant stakeholders, under the auspices of UNESCO MGIEP with the affixed signatures of Governments, pledge to network and work together to **promote the judicious, innovative and ethical use of digital technology as a new dimension to achieve SDG 4**, under the spirit and principles of cooperation in accordance with the following specific provisions:

Article 1 – Name and Purpose

- 1.1 The network shall be called "The Group of Governments and other Relevant Stakeholders for Social-Emotional and Digital Learning" (hereinafter called "The Group").
- 1.2 The Group is a voluntary network of committed representatives of Governments and other relevant stakeholders that pool ideas, experience and knowledge around the use of digital technology in education, including the role of Artificial Intelligence in supporting teaching and learning, to

increase the understanding about, and the promotion and implementation of its effective use to achieve inclusive and equitable quality education.

- 1.3 The Group will be active until the target year of SDG 4-Education 2030, with the ultimate purpose of impacting the post-2030 global education agenda through concrete activities in the broad area of social-emotional and digital learning.

Article 2 – Membership

- 2.1 The Group is comprised of representatives of the Governments **and other relevant stakeholders** that endorse the purpose of the Group as articulated in Article 1 and express their interest to UNESCO MGIEP in joining the Group.
- 2.2 There may be relevant stakeholders from the private sector and civil society, who would become affiliate Members of the Group and advance its purpose as articulated in Article 1.

Article 3 – Governance and Management

- 3.1 The governance of the Group shall be designed to enable flexibility and agility of operations.
- 3.2 UNESCO MGIEP shall serve as the Secretariat of the Group, and will oversee the governance and management functions.
- 3.3 The policies and procedures with regard to membership, governance, management and any other aspects required in the functioning of the Group shall be formulated by the Secretariat and communicated to the Members for their information and approval.
- 3.4 At the request of Members, the Secretariat may establish committees and task forces to undertake specific functions on a needs basis.

Article 4 – Activities

- 4.1 The Group may engage in joint activities in education, research, capacity development and outreach among its Members.
- 4.2 The specific activities of the Group shall be developed and implemented with the consent of its Members.

Article 5 – Duties and Responsibilities

- 5.1 Members shall aspire to uphold and promote the purpose and objectives of the Group.
- 5.2 Members may attend annual meetings of the Group on a voluntary basis.
- 5.3 Members will establish a task force to:
 - a. Produce a brief review of the digital learning landscape of the respective state; and
 - b. Support capacity development of teachers in social-emotional and digital learning in the respective state.
- 5.4 Members may actively participate in all joint activities of the Group.

Article 6 – Validity, Amendment and Interpretation

- 6.1 The Terms of Reference shall come into effect upon endorsement by the founding Members of the Group.
- 6.2 Amendments on specific provisions of the Terms of Reference shall be made at meetings of the Group specifically designated for this purpose after due notice has been given to the Secretariat.
- 6.3 The Group may be dissolved by the decision of at least two-thirds of its Members.
- 6.4 Any Member of the Group may withdraw from membership by a six-month advance notification in writing to the Secretariat.

Done in two original copies
with English as the language of the official text

on

9 December 2019

in

Vishakhapatnam, Andhra Pradesh, India

TECH 2019 Policy Forum on Digital Learning adopted the Terms of Reference of a Group of Governments and Other Relevant Stakeholders for Social-Emotional and Digital Learning, which will be examined by Governments and relevant stakeholders and will formally come into effect upon receipt of the requisite number (one third) of signatures from the Governments.

I hereby acknowledge that I have read, understand and agree to the terms of this document.

Signature: _____

Signed by: _____

Date: _____

**Renewing Commitment to Digital Learning and Social and Emotional Learning (SEL)
in the face of COVID-19**

15 June 2020

The mission of the **Group of Governments and Other Relevant Stakeholders for Social-Emotional and Digital Learning** (hereafter the Group), under the auspices of UNESCO Mahatma Gandhi Institute of Education for Peace and Sustainable Development (MGIEP), has acquired a renewed relevance and urgency in the face of the COVID-19 crisis, which has disrupted education across the world. As of the beginning of April 2020 at the peak of the pandemic, close to 1.6 billion students—more than 90 per cent of total enrolled learners—were affected as school and university closures expanded across 195 countries.¹

While many countries in recent years identified creating an ecosystem conducive to digital learning and building digital competencies of students and teachers as key priority areas, this current crisis has highlighted the need for digital learning solutions and accelerated the pace of digitalization of education. Some schools and universities were able to shift to online learning systems, but a large number were left struggling due to inadequate infrastructure, hardware and software, and a relative dearth of technical and pedagogical expertise. The under-resourced public school systems were left with little choice—either to have their students at home without lessons or to deliver lessons in a suboptimal way. The challenge of school closures extended far beyond interrupted learning, potentially compromising nutrition and safety for many children and youth from disadvantaged families, and overburdening parents, especially those who are ill-equipped to facilitate their children's learning at home.

Moreover, stress triggered by fears, isolation, and uncertainty has added to the difficulty of ensuring continued learning. Fears and uncertainty about COVID-19 can take an emotional toll. In the face of misinformation and sensational coverage that feeds into fear, it is all the more important to cultivate emotional resilience. Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) refers to well established, evidence-based practices that can be adapted to help equip children, young people, parents and teachers with the knowledge, skills, attitudes and behaviours they need to stay healthy and positive, navigate emotions, practice mindful engagement, exhibit pro-social behaviour and cope with daily challenges.² Not only can well-designed SEL interventions help prevent and mitigate people from falling into negativity or a state of panic, SEL can also be critical in terms of ensuring the continuity of learning. Children and youth need to be emotionally aware and connected before they can learn. Even if distance learning solutions are adequately provided, learners who feel drained, anxious, and overwhelmed will not be able to learn much. SEL is also helpful for the well-being of caregivers and teachers who are themselves coping with the crisis.

The convergent nature of the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on equity, learning, and learner and teacher well-being makes it imperative for governments and other relevant organizations to join forces to address the scaling of access to and impact of digital learning and SEL. Significantly, SEL during and immediately following the crisis period can help people cope with stress, thereby constituting a viable short-term solution. However, SEL should be regarded not only as a remedial or preventive measure for those who are particularly vulnerable to stress but also as a long-term solution to quality education. Mainstreaming SEL into education can contribute to achieving the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4 by allowing all learners to be better prepared to learn (SDG Target 4.1-4.6) and to help develop empathy, compassion and a sense of solidarity with humanity (Target 4.7).

SEL is crucial for ensuring the continuity of learning, health and well-being of learners, parents/caregivers and teachers, as well as for social justice. In light of the challenges and opportunities brought about by systemic disruptions accompanying COVID-19, members of the Group hereby renew commitments to SEL and pledge to explore innovative pedagogies and learning solutions that are meaningful and contextual, and are mindful of the social and emotional needs of the learning community.

¹ <https://en.unesco.org/covid19/educationresponse>

² <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000373271>