Change the World MUN
Paris 2026

Powered by
Associazione Diplomatici

BACKGROUND GUIDE

HLPF

UNITED NATIONS
HIGH LEVEL POLITICAL FORUM

ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

CHANGE THE WORLD ACADEMY

The Biggest Model United Nations in the World

Distinguished Delegates,

Welcome to the 2026 Change the World Model United Nations (CWMUN).

As your committee Dais, we are looking forward to meeting you and hearing your ideas about how to solve international problems.

The United Nations (UN) depends on the cooperation and goodwill of its 193 member States. Because each State has unique interests and concerns, it is challenging to write, negotiate and pass resolutions. Every stage of the process demands creativity and diplomacy.

By reading this Background Guide, you are taking the first step in a journey that goes far beyond preparing for a conference. Over the coming weeks, you will analyse one of the most pressing global challenges of our time, understand how governments and international organisations respond to it, and learn how diplomats transform ideas into international action.
This guide is not meant to provide all the answers. Its purpose is to help you ask better questions, because diplomacy is not about knowing everything. It is about making responsible decisions with the best information available.

Remember: every solution begins with informed leadership.

You will be discussing this topic:

SDG 4 in the Digital Era: Can Quality Education Be Achieved Without Leaving Entire Countries Behind?

While we may all lead different lives and face different struggles, we have to bear in mind that we all share the same world and the same resources. Whether it is environmental problems or political unrest, what is happening in the world concerns all of us. Only through mutual understanding, unity, and collaboration can we lay the foundations of a worthier world.

As your committee Dais, we will work to keep the committees running smoothly. We will do our best to help you understand the procedures and to ensure that the perspectives of all delegates are heard and respected.

Sincerely,

The CWMUN Staff Board



What is this activity about?

The Change the World Model United Nations is a role-playing game. Your task is to impersonate a diplomat of the assigned Country and present the perspective of this Country's current government.

What should you do now?

Before the Simulation, you should:

- ☐ Create your handbook, a collection of relevant UN resolutions, reports, academic studies, and news from reliable media.
- ☐ Write the Position Paper, describing the position of your country on the topic you have been assigned to.
- ☐ Prepare some topics for Moderated Caucus debates, i.e. short formal debates which cover narrow aspects of each topic. For example, within the topic "Violence against women"; delegates can hold a caucus with the subtopic "Ways of preventing genital mutilation".
- ☐ Think about some ideas for the Resolution, at least two or three clauses that your State would like to include in the main body of the Resolution.
- ☐ Learn and practice the Rules of Procedure.

Why does this Background Guide Matters?

The strongest delegates are not those who memorise the greatest number of facts, but those who understand the issue from different perspectives.

As you read this guide, challenge yourself to think critically: ask why different countries defend different positions, identify competing priorities, question assumptions, and begin developing your own strategic understanding of the topic.

Remember: You are not preparing to pass an exam; you are preparing to participate in an international negotiation.

Learning Objectives

By the end of this experience, you should be able to:

- Understand the international context surrounding the topic
- Explain your country's official position
- Develop evidence-based policy proposals
- Negotiate with other delegations
- Build consensus
- Translate ideas into diplomatic action
- Think like an analyst, not just a reader.

Tips (!)

Before attending the simulation, go beyond this Background Guide. Explore official UN documents, government statements, reports by international organisations, academic research, reliable news sources. Ask yourself: has the situation changed since this guide was written? Real diplomacy requires continuous learning. Learn about your Country from the official website of your State's permanent mission to the United Nations, and from other government websites (for example, the website and social media profiles of the Royal Family or President, Prime Minister, Ministry of Foreign Affairs...). Make sure to know as much as possible about the foreign relations of your Country! Consider that at the United Nations, Countries generally lean towards their own geopolitical blocs: Western, Former Soviet, African, Middle Eastern, Asian, Latin American... Consider also organisations such as the European Union (EU), the African Union, the Arab League, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), the Union of South American Nations (USAN)...

REMEMBER!

Your task is to present the official position of your assigned Country. Misrepresenting this position and/or representing your private views is against the rules, even if you do not agree with your Country's position. In any case, you must not hyperbolize nor satirise the position of your Country. Humour, and especially sarcasm, is generally not typical for formal writing nor formal debates. Although MUN welcomes wit and smart puns, please always be extremely considerate when using humour.

Think Like a Diplomat

As you prepare for the conference, do not ask only: “What does my country think?”, but also ask: “Why does my country think this?”. And even more importantly: “How can different countries move from disagreement to cooperation?”.

Because diplomacy is not about defending positions. It is about building solutions.

HIGH LEVEL POLITICAL FORUM

Historical background and establishment of the HLPF:

The United Nations High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF), has its origin in the Commission on Sustainable Development that was created in 1992 to continue the work done by the Conference on Environment and Development.

During the session of 2012 of the Conference on Sustainable Development, also known as Rio+20 it was decided that the Commission would be substituted by the HLPF on Sustainable Development, that would start to meet under the auspices of both the ECOSOC and GA. This decision was established with the Resolution 66/288 on 27 July 2012[1] and formally regulated by Resolution 67/290 on 9 July 2013[2]. The Resolution adopted 66/288 provides an overview on the objectives of the HLPF taken under the initiative titled ‘’the future we want’’. In its constituting document, some issues to target are identified, namely advancing integration, implementation and coherence by assessing the progress to date and the remaining gaps in the implementation of

[1] UN General Assembly resolution 66/288 (2012), 27/07/2012, A/RES/66/288 (2012) available at: https://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/migration/generalassembly/docs/globalcompact/A_RES_66_288.pdf

[2] UN General Assembly resolution 67/290 (2013), 9/07/2013, A/RES/67/290 (2013) available at: https://docs.un.org/en/A/RES/67/290

the outcomes of the major summits on sustainable development. As well as addressing new and emerging challenges, reaffirming the Rio Principles and past action plans together with the strengthening of intergovernmental arrangements for sustainable development. The focus then switches from the ‘’problem’’ to the ‘’tool to overcome it’’ by directly mentioning the role of the HLPF in building based on the experiences, resources and inclusive participation modalities of the Commission on Sustainable Development.

The action guaranteed to be persecuted by the HLPF are, by way of example:

- The provision of a political leadership guidance and recommendations for sustainable development;
- Enhanced integration of three dimensions of sustainable development
- Provision of a dynamic platform for regular dialogue and agenda-setting to advance sustainable development ;
- Encouragement of high-level system-wide participation of United Nations agencies, funds and programmes and invite to participate;
- Promotion of the science-policy interface through review of documentation, bringing together dispersed information and assessments

While the resolution just explained above gives an overview on the role of the HLPF, Resolution 67/290 explains in detail all the organizational aspects of the Forum; as an example mentioning that:

- the high-level political forum, consistent with its universal intergovernmental character, shall provide political leadership, guidance and recommendations for sustainable development, follow up and review progress in the implementation of sustainable development commitments;
- the meetings of the forum shall be convened under the auspices of the General Assembly and of the Economic and Social Council;

- the forum, under the auspices of the Economic and Social Council, shall conduct regular reviews, starting in 2016, on the follow-up and implementation of sustainable development commitments and objectives, including those related to the means of implementation, within the context of the post-2015 development agenda,
- The relationships between HLPF and ECOSOC as well as economical aspects regarding funds usage.

Functions and objectives of the HLPF:

The HLPF serves as a primary UN platform for sustainable development, specifically playing a key role in monitoring and reviewing the 2030 agenda for sustainable development and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)[3]The HLPF ensures full participation of all UN Member States, UN Specialized Agencies, and civil society through the Major Groups and other Stakeholders' Coordination Mechanism. The forum's main objective is to facilitate the sharing of experiences, including successes and challenges, lessons learned and offering political guidance, leadership as well as recommendations for follow-up actions; ensuring that the 2030 agenda remains ambitious and relevant. The HLPF meets annually under ECOSOC for eight days in July, with a three-day ministerial segment, and every four years under the General Assembly at the level of Heads of State and Government for two days in September.

Major actions and Historical Impact:

The HLPF has met every year starting from its foundation, by retracing all the steps done by the forum in the past it is possible to highlight some pivotal moments and decisions that enhanced

[3] *Introduction to the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development Introduction to the HLPF*. (n.d.). https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/25372A_Introduction_to_the_HLPF.pdf

the success of the subsequent meetings. In 2016 the Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) were introduced, establishing for the very first time a mechanism for countries to present their progress on implementing the SDGs, share experiences and highlight challenges as well as promote peer learning, the aim of the VNRs is to ensure accountability and transparency along with the exchange of best practices between member states[4]. In 2020 the HLPF had great impact on discussing the emerging global challenges such as COVID-19 pandemic specifically by addressing all the difficulties related to the progression of the SDGs after the arrival of the pandemic, some countries included COVID-19 related impacts and recovery strategies in their VNRs.

Current relevance and ongoing challenges:

Challenges are ahead for HLPF in an era where SDGs are facing huge implementation gaps due to disparities between developed and developing countries and within countries themselves, ongoing effects of COVID-19, geopolitical conflicts, economic shocks, and natural disasters that threaten SDG progress. Important future projects might include partnership and financing mechanisms such as discussion focused on enhancing policy coherence, leveraging innovative finance, and strengthening partnerships, especially at the city level, to support the achievement of SDGs, as well as the need for science-driven strategies to address the implementation gaps and accelerate the process on SDGs.

Future Outlook and Questions for Delegates:

As the 2030 deadline approaches, the role of the HLPF is becoming increasingly important. The HLPF is not only a space where Member States report on their progress, but also the central United Nations platform for reviewing the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and for

[4] UN General Assembly resolution 70/299 (2016), 29/07/2013, A/RES/70/299 (2016) available at: https://docs.un.org/en/A/res/70/299

encouraging international cooperation. Its future relevance will depend on its capacity to move beyond general commitments and support concrete and measurable actions.[5]

One of the main challenges for the HLPF is the gap existing between theory related to Sustainable Development Goals and actual implementation at a national and local level. Many countries are still facing structural obstacles, including limited financial resources, weak institutional capacity, lack of reliable data and general instability. For this reason, the Forum should strengthen policy coherence and encourage Member States to address the SDGs as interconnected objectives rather than isolated goals.

A second key issue is accountability. Voluntary National Reviews remain one of the most important tools through which States present their progress, challenges and lessons learned. However the voluntary and state-led characterization of this instrument deeply affects its effectiveness; specifically it depends on transparency, inclusiveness and involvement of civil society, local authorities, youth, the private sector and other stakeholders [6].

Looking ahead, delegates should consider how the HLPF can become a more effective platform for accelerating the 2030 Agenda. The Forum's future will depend on its ability to promote evidence-based policies, strengthen partnerships, mobilize financing and ensure that no country or community is left behind.

- How can the HLPF support countries facing financial and institutional barriers to SDG implementation?
- How can the HLPF help developing countries in mobilizing financing, strengthening partnerships and translating global commitments into national and local policies?
- How can the Forum respond to new and emerging challenges, including climate change, conflicts, technological transformation, economic instability and humanitarian crises, while ensuring that no country or community is left behind?

[5] HLPF on Sustainable Developement, Mandate and Functions, available at: https://hlpf.un.org/mandate-and-functions

[6] HLPF on Sustainable Development, *Voluntary National Reviews,* available at: https://hlpf.un.org/2025/programme/voluntary-national-reviews

SDG 4 in the Digital Era: Can Quality Education Be Achieved Without Leaving Entire Countries Behind?

Introduction and context of the topic

Sustainable Development Goal 4 aims to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and to promote lifelong learning opportunities for all. In the modern world, this commitment no longer concerns only access to primary education - like it was stated in Millennium Development Goal n.2 - but it concerns a complete access to all the instruments providing lifelong education, thus meaning that it also requires access to electricity, reliable internet, appropriate devices, digital skills, safe platforms, accessible content and teachers who are able to integrate technology into learning.[7]

The urgency of the topic under discussion lies in the fact that SDG 4 nowadays remains off track. Recent UN data show that 272 million children and youth were still out of school in 2023, while completion rates, learning outcomes and basic school infrastructure remain deeply unequal across income groups, regions and communities. Digitalization can therefore become either an accelerator of SDG 4 or a new source of exclusion, depending on whether countries are able to close infrastructure, skills and governance gaps[8].

Technology can support education in several ways: it can deliver learning materials, expand access to remote or blended learning, strengthen teacher training, help education systems collect data and

[7] United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, S*ustainable Development, Goal 4: Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all*, available at: https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal4

[8] United Nations Statistics Division, *The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2025, Goal 4: Quality Education*, https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2025/Goal-04/

provide learners with skills needed for employment and participation in society. However, technology is not neutral.

Root causes and historical development

The digital divide in education is rooted in inequalities that existed long before online learning became pivotal in education policy. Poverty, rural isolation, conflict, displacement, gender inequality, language barriers and weak public infrastructures all affect whether a person can enter school, remain in school and actually learn. . Digital exclusion often reproduces these same patterns: students who lack books, safe schools or trained teachers are also more likely to lack electricity, devices, connectivity and digital support at home. The COVID-19 pandemic has deepened these structural inequalities and transformed them into an immediate global emergency. When schools closed, many education systems moved to remote learning, but this transition assumed that students had internet access, devices, quiet learning spaces and adults to support them. In many countries, instead, learning poverty increased sharply: a joint report by the World Bank, UNESCO, UNICEF and other partners estimated that 70% of 10-year-olds were unable to read and understand a simple written text after the pandemic shock, compared with 57% before it.[9]

Academic research confirms that school closures and emergency remote learning had unequal effects, evidence was found regarding learning loss; specifically learning deficits appeared early in the pandemic, persisted over time and were particularly large among children from low socio-economic backgrounds [10].

Ultimately, the COVID-19 crisis did not create the digital divide but revealed the extent to which educational systems remained vulnerable to existing structural inequalities. The historical development of digital education therefore demonstrates that achieving SDG 4 requires not only

[9] "70% of 10-Year-Olds Now in Learning Poverty, Unable to Read and Understand a Simple Text," *WTO*, July 3, 2026, https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2022/06/23/70-of-10-year-olds-now-in-learning-poverty-unable-to-read-and-understand-a-simple-text.

[10] R. DONNELLY and H. A. PATRINOS, *Learning loss during Covid-19: An early systematic review, Prospects*, vol. 51, pp. 601-609, 2022

expanding access to technology, but also addressing the broader socio-economic conditions that determine whether digital tools can effectively support inclusive and equitable learning.

Current Situation and Actors

The current situation is characterized by a complex digital divide. It is not enough to ask whether a student is connected or unconnected. Quality digital education also depends on the affordability and reliability of internet access, the availability of electricity, the presence of safe learning platforms, the accessibility of content for learners with disabilities, the use of local languages and the ability of teachers and students to use digital tools effectively. Schools themselves often lack the basic infrastructure needed for digital learning. The 2025 SDG report notes that more than one fifth of primary schools globally still lack access to basic services such as electricity, safe drinking water or sanitation, while fewer than half have computers, internet access for educational use or disability-adapted facilities. In least developed countries, the gap is even more severe, making the promise of digital education difficult to realize without major investment in basic infrastructure[11].

Addressing the digital transformation of education requires the coordinated engagement of a wide range of stakeholders. While Member States retain the primary responsibility for financing, regulating and delivering national education systems, international organizations such as UNESCO, UNICEF, the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) and the World Bank play a crucial role in supporting policy development, providing technical assistance, collecting data and promoting international cooperation. At the local level, teachers and school leaders remain indispensable actors, as digital technologies can only enhance educational outcomes when they are effectively integrated into sound pedagogical practices. Likewise, families, youth organizations, civil society and local authorities contribute to identifying the specific needs of vulnerable communities and ensuring that digital education policies are inclusive and responsive to local realities. The private sector—including technology companies, software developers and

[11] United Nations Statistics Division, *The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2025: Goal 4*, https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2025/Goal-04/

telecommunication providers—has also become an increasingly influential partner in expanding digital infrastructure and educational innovation. However, its growing involvement raises important policy questions concerning affordability, public oversight, data privacy, market concentration and the equitable distribution of digital resources.

Beyond infrastructure, the development of digital skills has emerged as one of the defining challenges of contemporary education systems. According to United Nations agencies, digital literacy has become an essential prerequisite for meaningful participation in education, employment and civic life. Nevertheless, internet access alone does not guarantee that learners can use digital technologies safely, critically or effectively. As a result, successful digital education strategies must extend beyond improving connectivity to strengthening digital competencies. Students must be equipped not only to access information, but also to critically evaluate, create and responsibly share digital content, while teachers require continuous professional development to integrate technology into teaching in ways that enhance learning rather than simply digitise traditional classroom practices.

International Response and Committee Action

In the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, the international response has gradually shifted from ensuring educational continuity during emergencies to promoting the long-term digital transformation of education systems. Rather than focusing exclusively on expanding access to technology, recent initiatives increasingly recognise that digital education requires comprehensive public policies capable of integrating infrastructure, governance, teacher training and inclusive learning resources. This broader approach reflects the understanding that technology can only contribute to quality education when embedded within resilient and equitable public education systems.[12]

A notable example is the Gateways to Public Digital Learning initiative, jointly developed by UNESCO and UNICEF. The programme supports governments in strengthening national digital

[12] UNESCO, *Global Education Monitoring Report 2023 Technology in Education: A Tool on Whose Terms?,* pp. 8-10, 2023

learning ecosystems through the development of publicly governed digital platforms, high-quality educational content and policies aligned with national curricula. Unlike models that rely primarily on commercial providers, Gateways promotes digital learning as a public good, encouraging Member States to retain ownership of educational data, ensure equal access to learning resources and safeguard the public interest in the governance of digital education.[13]

Expanding digital infrastructure has also become a key international priority. Through the Giga initiative[14]UNICEF and the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) work with governments to connect every school to the internet while strengthening national capacity for planning and investment. By combining school mapping, geospatial data, infrastructure assessments and innovative financing mechanisms, Giga demonstrates that improving school connectivity extends well beyond the installation of internet infrastructure. Sustainable digital inclusion depends on reliable data, long-term financing strategies, institutional coordination and effective public governance.

The rapid development of generative artificial intelligence (AI) has introduced a further dimension to international cooperation in education. Recognising both the opportunities and the risks associated with these technologies, UNESCO published the Guidance for Generative AI in Education and Research, encouraging Member States to adopt human-centred regulatory frameworks that place ethics, transparency and inclusion at the core of AI governance. The Guidance highlights that technological innovation is progressing considerably faster than national regulatory systems, creating urgent challenges related to data protection, algorithmic bias, academic integrity, age-appropriate use and institutional preparedness. Rather than promoting unrestricted technological adoption, UNESCO emphasises that AI should complement—rather than replace—teachers and should always serve pedagogical objectives.[15]

Within the framework of the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF), international action is primarily directed towards policy coordination, peer learning and monitoring progress in implementing the 2030 Agenda. Through the Voluntary National Reviews

[13] UNESCO, *Gateways to Public Digital Learning*, available at https://www.unesco.org/en/digital-education/learning-platforms-gateway

[14] UNICEF, connecting every school to the internet, available at https://www.unicef.org/innovation/giga

[15] UNESCO, *Guidance for generative AI in education and research,* pp.26 *et seq,* 2023

(VNRs) already mentioned before, Member States are encouraged to exchange experiences, identify persistent challenges and promote innovative practices that accelerate progress towards SDG 4. In this context, delegates may consider how the HLPF can further strengthen international cooperation by encouraging the integration of digital education indicators into national reporting processes, supporting partnerships that expand school connectivity, promoting investment in teacher professional development and reinforcing safeguards for children's data privacy and digital rights. Such priorities are consistent with the 2026 HLPF theme, which calls for transformative, equitable and coordinated action to advance the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals before 2030.

Future challenges and possible approaches

Future challenges will require delegates to avoid treating digitalization as a shortcut to quality education. Technology can expand access, but it cannot compensate for weak education systems, insufficient financing, untrained teachers or social exclusion. The most immediate challenge is meaningful connectivity: schools need reliable and affordable internet, electricity, devices, maintenance, technical support and content that can function also in low-bandwidth or offline settings. Generative AI will also shape the future of education. Large language models may support content creation, personalized learning, feedback, translation and teacher preparation. At the same time, they raise concerns related to bias, misinformation, academic integrity, over-reliance, unequal access and the need for human oversight. Kasneci and co-authors argue that educational systems need clear pedagogical strategies, critical thinking, fact-checking skills and digital literacies in order to use such tools responsibly.

Possible approaches should therefore combine innovation with equity. Member States could prioritize universal school connectivity, public digital learning platforms, open and curriculum-aligned resources, local-language content, accessible materials for learners with disabilities, teacher professional development, child online protection, data privacy rules and AI literacy. They should also measure not only the number of devices or platforms available, but whether digital tools actually improve attendance, completion, foundational learning and inclusion.

Annotated Bibliography

Hereafter you can find some links that we think could be helpful to deepen your knowledge on both the committee and the topic you will be discussing.

- The more inspiring and complete website when talking about the UN is their own: https://www.un.org/. Especially useful is their Official Document System (ODS) https://documents.un.org/prod/ods.nsf/home.xsp.

- The website of your committee is always a good place where to start, in the case of the HLPF, it is the following: https://hlpf.un.org/2026

- Website with inputs to the HLPF from countries participating in voluntary reviews as well as other voluntary governmental inputs: https://hlpf.un.org/inputs

- The Digital Education Action Plan outlines the European Union's long-term strategy for supporting the digital transformation of education and training. The document focuses on improving digital infrastructure, strengthening digital skills, promoting high-quality digital content and enhancing teachers' professional development: https://education.ec.europa.eu/focus-topics/digital-education/actions

- Developed under the Giga initiative, this report argues that connecting schools to the internet is only the first step towards achieving inclusive digital education. https://www.itu.int/hub/publication/s-wp-dpi-education-2025/

- WTO. “70% of 10-Year-Olds Now in Learning Poverty, Unable to Read and Understand a Simple Text,” July 3, 2026. https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2022/06/23/70-of-10-year-olds-now-in-learning-poverty-unable-to-read-and-understand-a-simple-text.