

National Statement of Commitment¹

Germany

Introduction

In Germany, education primarily falls under the remit of the *Länder* (federal states). The *Länder* continuously launch education policy measures to implement SDG 4, aiming at ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education at all levels as well as promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all by 2030. Together with the Federal Government, which supports specific priorities, the *Länder* are responsible for universal quality education from school to higher education as well as technical and vocational training to lifelong learning.

Recovery from COVID-19 disruption

The COVID-19 pandemic has been a unique challenge for both children and adolescents as well as teaching staff. In 2021, in order to address learning gaps resulting from school closures and the social and emotional toll that the pandemic had on students, the Federal Government and the *Länder* agreed on a special post-pandemic catch-up programme (“*Aufholen nach Corona*”) with a total funding volume of €2 billion. Of this, €1 billion is earmarked for measures to reduce learning gaps amongst students. The pandemic also showed that teaching professionals need more support to pursue the task of teaching. Germany acknowledges the need to report on the implementation of the catch-up programme and to develop further measures to overcome learning gaps and educational disadvantages. In addition, Germany emphasizes the need to structure the school system in such a way that it meets the needs of every individual. Germany also sees the need to prepare and support teachers in crisis situations with multi-professional teams.

The COVID-19 pandemic also had a profound impact on German higher education institutions. Within a very short time, they succeeded in moving classes online, thus enabling students to continue their studies. Currently, the federal government and the *Länder* address the issue of integrating the lessons learned from the pandemic, such as the effective use of digital teaching and learning opportunities, into regular university operations and to absorb the consequences, such as the lack of academic exchange resulting from distance learning and teaching as well as working from home, for teachers, university staff and students.

Transforming education

The German education system faces many challenges ranging from digitalization to environmental transformation to teacher shortages. The *Länder* and the Federal Government have taken various measures to respond to these challenges and to ensure universal quality education across Germany.

In order to achieve the goal of empowering all learners to act sustainably by 2030, Germany has established a comprehensive national multi-stakeholder process which will ensure that **education for sustainable development** (ESD) is structurally embedded in all areas of education, including Vocational Education and Training for Sustainable Development. Stakeholders from politics, science, industry and society work closely together to implement a National Plan of Action on ESD, addressing both the formal and non-formal education sector and promoting a whole-institution approach to advancing the SDGs in all areas of society. Germany is committed to implementing the necessary actions put forward in the 2021 Berlin Declaration on ESD, successfully reaffirming the significance of ESD as a key enabler for a future-oriented education. Several programmes are being established that focus on strengthening technical and vocational education and training (TVET) as well as further education and training in non-formal education. They promote lifelong learning for ESD, thereby strengthening formal and non-formal education cooperation. Innovative ESD practices are highlighted with national ESD awards and a national ESD prize that specifically focusses on encouraging transfer activities.

¹ This National Statement of Commitment was drafted on the occasion of the 2022 Transforming Education Summit convened by the UN Secretary General. It was compiled in a joint process by the Secretariat of the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs of the *Länder* in the Federal Republic of Germany (KMK) and the Federal Ministry for Education and Research (BMBF) with the involvement of the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ). When drafting this Statement, BMBF and KMK took into account, as far as possible, the positions known from previous cooperation with German stakeholders in education policy and practice.

With regard to **digitalization**, the *Länder* have developed a strategy on Education in the Digital World that sets out clear goals for digital education at all levels. They have also adopted a recommendation on teaching and learning in the digital world in schools (*“Lehren und Lernen in der digitalen Welt”*) which factors in experiences to date – including the increased use of digital media during the COVID-19 pandemic – and stipulates that the concept of digitalization needs to be incorporated in teaching strategies as well. Within the framework of the BMBWF’s Digital Strategy, the Federal Government and the *Länder* agreed on programmes (in the framework of the *“DigitalPakt Schule”*) to improve digital infrastructure within schools, to equip students and teachers with their own devices and fund technical support administrators. Germany emphasizes the need to continue implementing and further developing these programmes to ensure the use of sustainable and up-to-date technology. These measures are aimed at reducing the social divide. Germany recognizes the importance of working in close cooperation with stakeholders in the private sector to improve the procurement of digital technologies. In the higher education sector, programmes have also been launched, particularly by the *Länder*, to support universities in accessing digital equipment, the further didactic qualification of teaching staff or the provision of support structures. In addition, the German Forum for Higher Education in the Digital Age - HFD (*“Hochschulforum Digitalisierung”*), a nationwide German think tank, engages in the digitalization of university teaching. With the program "Artificial Intelligence in Higher Education", the Federal Government and the *Länder* support universities in developing study courses and modules in the field of AI and in designing AI-supported learning and examination environments.

Recognizing the great need for highly qualified **teachers** due to the significant role that they play in the education system, teacher training in Germany is divided into three phases with the first two phases covering initial training and the third providing continuous education. The *Länder* set common standards for teacher’s initial training and have amended these to ensure that teachers are equipped with the skills needed for teaching in a diverse, inclusive and digital environment. They have also agreed on shared cornerstones for teachers’ professional development, which define continuous learning as a key element of teaching and require the provision of formal training opportunities. Germany acknowledges the need to further develop teacher training by fostering cooperation with stakeholders and further interlinking the three phases of teacher training. To address teacher shortages, Germany is committed to making the teaching profession more attractive by supporting teachers with multi-professional teams, effective continuous learning and professional development as well as by offering alternative ways of getting into the teaching profession. Germany will also consider the international dimension when developing measures on teacher education and recruitment.

It is key to ensure **universal quality education for everyone** and to leave no one behind, especially marginalized and vulnerable groups. The Federal Government and the *Länder* have agreed on the *Schule macht stark* initiative (*School makes you strong*) in order to address educational inequalities. This ten-year initiative aims at supporting all types of primary and lower secondary schools in socially difficult locations in rural and urban areas to improve learning opportunities for socially disadvantaged students. The *Länder* have also taken several measures to support refugee education, declaring the integration of refugees from Ukraine to schools, universities and work a political commitment, employing teachers from Ukraine and facilitating access to third level education. The Federal Government supports the *Länder* and local governments in providing funding for expenditures for refugees from Ukraine. For 2022, the Federal Government will contribute €1 billion to cover the costs for childcare and schooling, among other things, by means of an increased share of VAT revenues. Germany emphasizes the need to support lower-performing students and those transitioning from school to the labour market through various measures. In the higher education sector, an agreement between the Federal Government and the *Länder* to strengthen studies and teaching (*“Zukunftsvertrag Studium und Lehre stärken”*) provides considerable funding for higher education institutions. This, for example, serves to improve the quality of studies and teaching as well as student support at higher education institutions, thus helping them to increase the permeability of the education system. To foster innovation in higher education, the Federal Government and the *Länder* also set up the trust foundation *“Stiftung Innovation in der Hochschullehre”*, which funds innovative projects, facilitates knowledge transfer and strengthens exchange and networking between relevant actors in higher education teaching.

Review of national education targets and benchmarks

Within the framework of the UNESCO initiative Education for All, the BMBF, the *Länder* and further experts have set three national benchmarks regarding SDG4. These cover early leavers from education and training aged 18-24, take-up rates in early childhood education for children between the age of 3 and the start of compulsory primary education, and low-achieving 15-year-olds in reading, mathematics, and science. In addition, Germany is currently assessing the possibility to set a benchmark for gender equity in upper secondary completion.

Ensuring sustainable public financing

The *Länder* and the Federal Government have continuously increased expenditure at all levels of education since 2010. This was particularly true for the past three years, when Germany launched major programmes to address digitalization and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the education sector. Germany recognizes the need to continually provide appropriate levels of funding for education and training.