

# Futures of Education: Learning to Become. How should what we learn, how we learn, and where we learn change in the future?

A SIETAR Switzerland Contribution to UNESCO'S Futures of Education Initiative.

Published April 12, 2021. Reprinted here by permission with minor edits, July 2021.

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*Abstract: Connecting minds and enhancing diversity are key to moving from mere awareness to fostering both inclusion and innovativeness in our futures of education. Inequalities around the globe are not new and neither are calls for more inclusiveness. Change needs to be educational, cultural, and political. Action is the responsibility of every one of us. This UNESCO Futures of Education: Learning to Become Stakeholder Focus Group, co-facilitated by Anne-Claude Lambelet, past president SIETAR Switzerland, and Jillaine Farrar, vice president SIETAR Switzerland, focused on how what we learn, how we learn, and where we learn will change in the future. Specialists contributed to the focus group from the fields of intercultural, inclusion, diversity, migration, human resources, international management, pedagogy, didactics, online training, and peace education. In two joint sessions in December 2020 and January 2021, the focus group met online to examine their views on the changing world, the broad purposes of education, and the implications for learning. Stephanie Magalage from UNESCO presented the parameters and overall goals of the UNESCO project to the focus group in the first session. With visions of the year 2050 and the exploration of the collective purposes of education, each of the focus group members listed co-authored this report. Special thanks to the reviewers who further synthesized the central points to consolidate the rich input for the international commission which will, in November 2021, provide an agenda for action and discussion by policymakers and practitioners.*

*Keywords: Intercultural, Inclusion, Diversity, Migration, Human Resources, International Management, Pedagogy, Didactics, Online Training, and Peace Education*

## What needs to change: Introductory remarks

Modern national cultures and educational institutions are transformed by the constant and loud presence of culturally different others as a process of vibrant cosmopolitanization (Beck, 2009). Culture, in this understanding appears to be a process of homogenization through standardized symbols, actions and products (e.g. in media communications, education, fashion icons, entertainment, etc.). At the same time however, culture is the lived experience of divergence, involving a myriad of styles, tastes, preferences as people actively express their values (Cope & Kalantzis, 1997). People thus develop senses of belonging that include their differences, experiences, and perspectives. When their differences are productively recognized and harnessed, people develop a more powerful sense of inclusion than they would if homogeneity was forced upon them (Kalantzis & Cope 2009). Arvanitis cautions that when differences are ignored, people feel less engaged and valued, which could have an impact on their productivity. However, our world remains full of antinomies. On one hand, there are grand narratives of belonging associated with ethnocentricity, accompanied with re-nationalization, populism involving radicalization and trends towards assimilation and suppression of (cultural/ethnic) differences to project a false sense of ‘normality’. On the other hand, new demands for legitimation and integration of plurality emerge as “natives (familiar others) and the alien (exotic) others unavoidably and involuntarily mix all over the world” (Arvanitis, 2018, p. 245).

Thinking about the futures of education is to envision prospectively the needs of contemporary young people and of those that have not even been born yet, globally. As D’Amato points out, education in the future will be challenged by different simultaneous evolutions: digitalization and fundamental issues such as climate change and social inequalities which have limited, since the birth of modern schooling, the promise of societal emancipation through education. A pessimistic anthropology perspective, in line with French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, argues that the education system has been mainly successful in reproducing the social stratification of middle-upper classes who benefit more than other groups from educational reforms. In this respect, demographic diversity by gender, origin, and religion will be the litmus test of any educational evolution. There is a competition between the liberal-minded openness

towards meritocratic competition, including a belief in the necessity to mobilize unused potentials, and the contrasting view to protect or restore the social reproduction of the status quo. The continuation of this societal challenge will be inevitable, and the solutions to be developed can be decisive for the future of education as much as – maybe still a promise too large – the evolution of our societies.

## Obstacles to Transformation and Change of the Education System

Despite diagnosis of and remedies to the education systems' key problem, equipping future generations to deal with the challenge of ensuring the sustainability of our global world, Ogay argues that we have not seen much change. On the contrary, new challenges have emerged and education seems to have been unable to make a difference. We need to direct our efforts to understanding the obstacles that impede change and focus on the means or strategies to overcome these obstacles. Concerns about global sustainability are still largely perceived as those of a marginal and privileged elite of naïve dreamers, and ensuring global sustainability is considered contrary to the interests of the economy. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2018; OECD, 2020) has tackled the idea that global sustainability is also an issue for the economy. While the OECD's proposal to assess the global competence of students in the PISA evaluations may seem somewhat simplistic, Ogay notes that experience shows that educational leaders adopt significant measures for change only when they score low in international comparisons.

## The Role of Policy Makers and Practitioners in Implementing Global Learning

If, indeed, to paraphrase an old African proverb “it takes a village to raise a child”, today it takes the world to raise mindful and responsible global citizens for tomorrow. According to Stalder, a key aspect for re-imagining education, learning and knowledge in anticipation of the year 2050 is global learning for living together in respect of the planet and its inhabitants. This includes policy makers and practitioners alike.

**Policy makers:** private and public (inter-, trans-, supra-) national institutions must all benefit from the crucial prerequisites for global learning: diverse, transparent and safe technology services and search engines to cover the multiplicity of needs and perspectives that characterize our world. This is a significant step especially if this is to include so-called development countries.

**Practitioners:** There is a strong need for the promotion and implementation of education and learning in global and interdisciplinary networks - models, platforms, methods, best practices - for co-constructing ‘we-cultures’, an ethos which values collaboration, compassion, and innovation, across borders.

To achieve this, we need to raise our own consciousness on multiple levels: as individuals, as elements of multiple systems and as global citizens, since our reflections, decisions and actions have an impact far beyond the tangible, here and now. Moreover, we should consider the three principles put forward by Bendell (2018, p. 22): resilience, renouncement, and restoration.

## What we learn

### *Education for Generation Global*

Hassi states that education has not closely followed recent social, economic and technological developments and their implications. It seems to focus primarily on developing learners' hard skills despite the fact that scientific research and practical experience have shown that soft skills are crucial for success in our post-modern and postindustrial society. In fact, scholars have demonstrated that 75-85 % of professional success is contingent on soft skills and only 25-15 % on hard skills (Nelson-Jones, 2002).

Schaerli-Lim emphasizes that the priority is for educators to demonstrate to future generations the interconnectedness of our world and the dire consequences for the human race when this is ignored. To reduce further fragmentation, it is important to encourage contact across the globe. Education can be conducted online with fellow students from around the world. Education transforms students when they can work on real life projects together and this collaboration can instill the value of inclusiveness of different strengths and perspectives. It is essential for this to happen if students are to step away from monocultural communication models: generation global needs to learn early about intercultural relations and communication and how to apply these principles with people they encounter within their country as well as internationally.

To achieve this shift, the educational system needs to focus on an infrastructure where cooperation is more valued than competition. This needs to be reflected in a grading system that focuses on critical thinking and, according to Schaerli-Lim, also takes into account demonstrated skills in inclusion, community building and peace building. In such a learning environment, education is accessible and free for all and soft skills are the new hard skills.

### *Developing Global Citizens*

Spencer-Oatey addresses the topic of developing global citizens and notes that simply asserting this egalitarian and collaborative goal may not be successful without gaining a clear understanding and awareness of the issues that may hamper its achievement.

### *The Qualities of Global Citizens/Global Communities*

Individuals who

- o Care for others, not just members of their own national/social/cultural group
- o Appreciate the histories and current situations/plights of people in other parts of the world
- o Care for the planet – action to promote biodiversity and reduce the danger of climate change

Communities who

- o Collaborate with others to address common challenges
- o Care for the needs of other communities
- o Commit to reducing inequalities of wealth, healthcare, life opportunities etc., especially where these inequalities stem from prejudices based on race, religious belief, social class, gender, etc.

### *Dealing With the Challenges of Fostering Global Citizens*

Schwartz (2017) found that two societal-level values are associated with more inclusive care and concern: high cultural egalitarianism (i.e. transcendence of selfish interests in favor of voluntary commitment to the welfare of others) and low cultural embeddedness (i.e. low concern for tradition, security, and anything that might disrupt in-group solidarity). In other words, societal level values are of significant importance in influencing the values of individual members of societies.

Spencer-Oatey advises us to give careful thought, therefore, to both societal level values and how they can be fostered, as well as to the values of individual members of societies (e.g. the children/young people in our classrooms). Without this, there is a serious risk that beliefs about global citizens and global communities will be regarded as ‘the idealistic values of the elite’ and will not permeate society. One way of addressing the fundamental tendency to look after our own interests at the expense of others is to demonstrate and illustrate our close interconnectedness with people across the world and how collaboration across borders is the best way of addressing our mutual needs and concerns. This is particularly evident with regard to world health – of people and of the planet. Covid-19 has demonstrated this especially clearly, in relation to the spread of the pandemic, the monitoring of spread and mutation of the virus, and the development of vaccines. In other words, if we don’t collaborate with others and don’t help others, we will all suffer. Educational projects that reveal this clearly to children/young people are therefore extremely important.

### *Global Learning as the Universal Core Value of Humanity*

In anticipation of the year 2050, Stalder emphasizes the importance of acquiring knowledge to enable global learning to live together in respect of the planet and its inhabitants. Global learning means sharing knowledge, educating, and learning in multifaceted networks, beyond physical and mental boundaries.

**Challenges:** Performance and competition have become the dominant ideologies, to the detriment of deeper human values, such as collaboration. By its irresponsible consumption behavior, its ego- and ethnocentric views, decisions and actions, humankind destroys the planet and itself. It is crucial to re-balance individualism and collectivism.

**Essentials:** Learning means raising the consciousness of multiple identities, needs and perspectives. We have to learn to become together. Due to Covid-19 (or even thanks to it), we are more prepared for this than ever.

Touhami concurs with Sheikh Khaled Bentounès (Parole aux Femmes, 2015) that our society is the heiress of the past and has to cope with a spectacular cultural mix (p. 342). East and west are merging more and more. Globalization is widening its network without taking into account everyone’s values and the family structures that bears everyone’s own cultural identity. Rather than leading us towards unity, this dynamic is leading us into a binary, dualistic, increasingly atomized world, creating the problem of a world based on opposites, on antagonisms.

## How We Learn

### *Deconstructing Identity Dynamics*

According to Frame, one of the major challenges for the education system of tomorrow is how to deal with the essentializing discourse about Us and Them. How can we combat inequalities (which legitimately call for minorities to be protected), without reinforcing the idea that ‘cultures’ are inalienable boundaries which separate people who are somehow different in ‘essence’? One solution would be to try and promote understanding of, and thus deconstruct, the identity dynamics of everyday interactions, which lead to ethnic differentiation, on the grounds of geographical origin, religion, skin colour, or whatever traits are considered salient. We need to combat the ideas that cultures belong to certain people only, that groups can only be defined by their values.

It is important that the education of the future sees culture not as a source of difference, but as a way of bridging it; that while we need and are proud of our identities, while we use them to define who we are, these do not separate us unconditionally and inevitably from one another. We are not all the same – living in society, we need to cultivate differences symbolically, but, beyond this, Frame reminds us that it is our cultures which allow us to connect.

### *Knowledge for Its Own Sake?*

Davoine, noting that digitalization has transformed relationships to knowledge, memory, learning techniques and social contacts, states that it is very important for the futures of education to identify three challenges of digitalization associated to three distinct missions of school education: training employability; accompanying learning processes; and developing world citizens.

According to French philosopher Michel Serres, among others, digitalization is a revolution for the cognitive structures of human beings because it changes our relationship to memory, to data storage, and transforms deeply our relationship to data processing. Defining the limits of digitized education will be essential to secure the development of children’s cognition, learning and creative ability. Children should learn to process data, think, focus attention and reflect, with and without digital tools. A similar reflection should be made regarding the development of social contacts with and without digital tools.

Davoine calls for history to remain an important part of school education, but not as a stable knowledge of world facts, not as homogeneous standardized and flat ideology-driven narrative, but history as a debate and as a reconstruction of a dynamic narrative by integrating the plurality of voices and perspectives coming from the different social, regional and national groups. Likewise, philosophy and literature must remain an important part of school education. Reading classical world literature remains a gateway to understand deeply and comprehensively different contexts and perspectives of human experience.

### *Knowledge for Living*

The content that we learn or teach has expanded over the centuries and has oscillated between massive information blocks and silos of specialization. Grünenfelder and Pechr recommend that

education be more tailored to students' specific needs and circumstances. Understanding why something is being taught and why it is necessary knowledge is essential and helps to maintain motivation.

Lambelet notes that learning how to learn or why we learn specific subjects has dangerously taken a back seat, leaving many students puzzled at best. In some cases, the frustration has simply led to ruptures with the educational system, leaving a youth ill-prepared to deal with their life needs and the ability to exercise critical thought when confronted with alternate facts, conspiracy theories, and radicalism.

### ***The Dangers of Transposing Educational Models***

Lezou Koffi states that the quest for professional performance has developed the paradigms of efficiency and profitability. In this context, humans, like machines, are only as good as their productivity and competitiveness. Added to this is the development of both national information and communication technologies (NICT) and social networks. Competition has thus increased with the paradigms of visibility, speed, and transience. Screens now isolate individuals from each other.

In the specific case of Africa, especially French-speaking Africa, Lezou Koffi adds that there is the transposition of educational models from the west, which are often unsuited to national contexts. Here again, school generates social inequalities. And communities are weakened as a result. The overall goals for education are to raise awareness about the preservation of the environment and to respect differences (sexuality, skin color, religion).

### ***Catering to Diverse Learning Styles***

To satisfy different learning styles, teachers must have the tools to optimize their education. Covarrugias Vengas emphasizes that without inclusion there is no real impact in virtual learning. She says this is true in every classroom and is even more true of the virtual classroom. The Covid-19 pandemic has only accelerated a process that had already begun as organizations, schools and universities continue to transition learning and event operations to the virtual space, but Covarrugias Vengas notes that inclusion is often not considered when planning virtual activities. It is essential to design for different learning styles, consider accessibility, diversify the voices of content, and curate representative imagery.

## **Where We Learn**

### ***Alternative and New Educational Models***

Specific needs and circumstances in different parts of the world must be addressed. Arvanitis urges us to rethink how we deal with the massive quantities of information that our educational systems instill in our youth. What is important and useful may depend on the context. Education must consider learners' 'lifeworld', namely their everyday life experiences and learning gained in their respective family, community, and cultural context.

### *More Transformative Vectors for Creativity*

According to Glaveanu, we should not ignore the fact that the experience of not knowing is transformative for learners of all ages. It is because of not knowing that we are surprised, curious, made to think and feel things that are new, exciting, or sometimes scary. And it is this experience that puts us on a path of interacting with others, experimenting, tinkering with things and imagining worlds different from our own.

We should reintroduce wonder as a learning stance but recognize that the role of not knowing does not end here. It is not merely a precursor to knowledge, but a state in its own right. One in which things seem unsettled and, because of this, more flexible. There is no one answer and, as such, multiple solutions can be envisioned. Finally, one where the actual (what is) sits side by side with the possible (what could be). Glaveanu emphasizes that not knowing is not shameful in education, but a real opportunity to encourage Socratic inquiry, deep thinking, and intellectual humility. The future will need all of these, and more.

### *Interdisciplinarity and Dichotomies*

In the future, according to Saudelli, education needs to be much more interdisciplinary in its approach than it has been in the past. We need to focus on Big Questions (and associated little questions) and bring the disciplines together to learn how to value and recognize the contributions that all disciplines, and their associated modes of thought, bring to these questions.

Saudelli states that we need to value the integration of disciplines – not dismiss them because they may present information one does not wish to consider, or towards which one already has a predisposed position. The days of the disciplinary silos need to be over and the disciplines need to learn how to work together, value evidence and truth, value different perspectives, opinions, beliefs and perceptions, and how people understand their lived experience. Moreover, Saudelli notes that for far too long, there have been too many dichotomies of thinking, dismissal of one perspective over another, this or that positionings. We now need to think about bringing everyone together cooperatively, embracing the Big and little questions of our time and moving forward. For her, this is the future of education: bringing together a global community to address these questions as a balanced community of learners.

### *Ethical Commitment to Service*

Shaules explains that in our world, the role of education is to help

1. increase social trust through greater economic/political equality and engaged citizenry;
2. leverage the networked power of knowledge-based technology to solve real world problems; and
3. create collaboration between diverse individuals and across diverse communities. This implies providing people of all ages with both foundational academic skills (reading, mathematics, science and technology), complemented by the critical thinking and problem-solving skills that will enable them to tackle real-world challenges, which is motivated by a strong ethical commitment to equal opportunity, sustainable development, respect for diversity, and global citizenship.

According to Shaules, to accomplish these broad-based goals, there is a need for the following:

- Increased networking among educational institutions. Collaborative agreements between schools and educational institutions will provide learners with diverse learning communities centered on a global vision of problem solving and sustainability.
- Educational institutions with different levels of resourcing and different forms of human and cultural capital should be encouraged to form resource networks that encourage networked learning and education that goes beyond local and national concerns.
- In elementary and secondary education, there should be continued emphasis on basic literacy and numeracy, but with increased emphasis on critical thinking, applied technology, civics education and environmental education.
- For secondary and post-secondary education, there should be a reduced emphasis on narrowly defined academic fields and increased emphasis on academic specialties that cut across disciplines.
- Research initiatives increasingly focused on interdisciplinary approaches to solving complex problems and meeting social needs in addition to economic goals.

### *Education Away From Competition*

Through dialogue, education can aim at expanding students' worldviews, towards others, and towards what-could-be. According to Zittoun, this implies two complementary axes.

Dialogue with others and the world – peers, distant others, older people, and the environment - by:

- Fostering the capacity to collaborate and cooperate (through dialogical skills, exploratory talk, etc.) and critically engage with others' ideas in respectful ways (argumentation, etc.);
- Developing relationships to people living in different conditions, with various forms of knowledge, skills and experiences (locally, such as older citizens, people living diverse paths of life; transnationally, through online, intercontinental dialogue, etc.);
- Opening the classroom to a variety of everyday situations in the community, region, etc.
- Dialogue between what is, and what-could-be (imagination), by:
- Cultivating children and people's curiosity about everyday issues (observation, exploration, discovery...) and by encouraging project-based learning and skill development;
- Preserving spaces for playing, and creative engagements through the arts and fiction;
- Providing children and people with a great diversity of resources for imagining;
- Recognizing that children and youth (in general, learners) can, alone or as a collective, imagine solutions not yet thought of by adults (or experts).

Zittoun notes that developing dialogues with close and distant others, and with what-could-be, may thus be a way to expand worldviews, develop new, more inclusive perspectives, and

thanks to individual and collective imagination, foster complex and innovative solutions for the future.

### ***Implications For Out-of-Classroom Experts***

Lambelet puts forward that inclusive education should not be limited to teachers only but also involve out-of-classroom experts who will convey the values of inclusion and a shared sense of being part of humanity. Beyond classroom exchanges and projects with children from other cultures/religions, cross- generational exchanges, this should involve connecting children across generational divides by calling on both active and retired experts and parents from different social and cultural backgrounds in the classroom sessions with the teacher in a facilitation role.

### **Skills**

#### ***Multilingualism and new pedagogical patterns***

Connecting learning with out-of-class experiences and authentic/collaborative learning is, according to Bauer, a way of humanizing the language learning process and will hopefully increase students' curiosity about the world around them while creating ripple effects by assigning a name to a specific face.

Arvanitis proposes that plurilingual and interculturally competent citizens will have the ability to sustain personal/professional growth and inclusive participation in local/global democratic processes. Therefore, according to Arvanitis, a fundamental challenge for 21st century education is to build upon life-embedded learning so to extend and transform learners' lifeworld experiences. This implies a systematic reform with the aim of including language and cultural diversity as a social/learning resource of cohesion, solidarity, and economic development. But how can formal school learning connect to and engage with such a vastly diverse student body? Some pedagogues have long argued for the adoption of a 'pedagogy of productive diversity' (Cope & Kalantzis, 2009), which advocates for education that is equitable and transformative in nature and allows for multiple representations of culture with the goal of building concepts of a new robust, inclusive mainstream sociality. This pedagogy occurs through engaging with (heritage) language teaching, intercultural competence assessment, collaborative praxis, responsive feedback, and scaffolded/differentiated/ life-embedded learning.

To this end, new patterns of pedagogy can also include online forms that produce e-learning ecologies which harness the seven digital affordances as proposed by Cope and Kalantzis - (ubiquitous and differentiated learning, active knowledge making, multimodal meaning, recursive feedback, collaborative intelligence, and metacognition).

Stalder adds that fostering multilingualism is not only essential to learn about different cultures, but also to facilitating the consultation, comparison, analysis, discussion, and synthesis processes of diverse knowledge (re)sources.

### *The Strategic Role of Internationalization*

According to Cramer this involves not only committing to the internationalization of the curriculum but undertaking internationalization at home (IaH) by engaging in international cooperation projects and partnerships. This can be achieved by embracing the opportunities of online technologies and pedagogies: using Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL) for curriculum internationalization and fostering virtual experiences in addition to physical mobility to increase the number of students and staff benefiting from an international perspective.

Cramer and Farrar concur that focusing on the exchange of knowledge rather than just mobility to facilitate equality and mutual benefit in international partnerships as well as hosting virtual events in addition to physical events will promote more inclusive participation of previously underrepresented individuals and institutions. It is vital that it is not a case of one or the other.

Farrar, on how to move current educational experiences to include more realized intercultural learning experiences to trigger deep, cultural learning, states that an increase in international study-abroad experiences, collaborative cross-border research projects, as well as internationalization at home are essential. Digital, online, and virtual study and work experiences have become increasingly important and will become even more important in the future as we reshape international learning in higher education. But so are extended, face-to-face experiences in other countries and with other cultures. Deep cultural learning needs realized intercultural learning experiences to lead to change.

### *Collaborative Skills in a VUCA World*

The mission of education systems in many countries is focused on preparing individuals to contribute within the existing system. To meet the societal, economic, and climatic challenges of today/tomorrow, our future generations need specific skill sets and the ability to revisit the values that have led our society to where it is, and sort which values should guide our societies in the future. It is crucial that these abilities be taught from an early age. Lambelet notes that the current crises in our world will require multiple perspectives and the ability to work together, integrating local solutions and being able to learn from ancient cultures which found ways to live in harmony with nature. Collaborative skills development versus the constant urge to compete is essential to ensure that the fear to fail does not inhibit creativity, another skill very much needed to meet the challenges of the future.

Cramer emphasizes that in a post Covid-19 future, additional competences such as resilience, stress tolerance and flexibility will play a major role. Further, Lambelet adds that to face our VUCA (volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity) world, future generations will need to learn resilience and be able to practice that skill which is essential to deep adaptation.

### *21st Century skills*

Hassi argues that education ought to value and teach the 21st century skills that learners need to perform tasks in a broad range of occupations, live successful lives, and continue their lifelong learning. These skills include autonomy and individual initiative, familiarity with tools and technology, the ability to function within diverse groups, developing a critical attitude to

information, thinking in a creative and multidisciplinary way, being agile in responding to crises and unexpected events (e.g., Covid-19 pandemic), and becoming a lifelong learner.

### *Cultural Learning for Change*

At the heart of the intercultural mindset is being able to shift cultural perspective and change behavior in culturally appropriate and authentic ways. Studying theories is interesting. Implementing these in an inclusive manner, however, takes time and conscious effort. “Cultural learning can be surface (conceptual, analytic) or deep (intuitive, insight-based)” (Shaules, 2019, p.167). Educators can be the living examples for the leaders of tomorrow, thereby positively influencing deep learning, intercultural mindfulness and inclusion in education, business, politics, government, and society. Farrar is convinced that through education, the scaffolding of intercultural mindfulness and inclusion required for peace and prosperity – and to save our planet – can be formed already during childhood years. She proposes three significant actions needed for our Futures of Education to become reality by 2050:

Actively align intercultural mindfulness with organizational inclusion policies.

Embed intercultural training into workplace diversity and inclusion transformation.

Be the living examples for the leaders of tomorrow, thereby positively influencing intercultural mindfulness and inclusion in education, business, politics, government, and society.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, education has the potential to be a transformative power if innovation and interrelation of diverse cultural mindsets become the norm in teaching and learning. Overall, education in the 21st century will need to recognize differences as a productive resource/asset in building the new local/global civility. It will give prominence to various manifestations of lifeworlds and construct a new local/national/global identity through reciprocal cultural exchange, intercultural dialogue, risk taking, problem solving, negotiation and collaborations. Arvanitis states that the future demands a more comprehensive effort to empower the entire social fabric to foster stronger intercultural awareness of and responsiveness to the issues arising from the co-existence of citizens and non-citizens in modern societies.

### **Acknowledgement**

This is a collective work following the focus group sessions. Every effort has been made to identify additional sources used. UNESCO’s and SIETAR Switzerland’s support for the production of this publication does not constitute an endorsement of the contents, which reflect the views of the individual authors, and the organizations cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.

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