

## **EASG Report: HLPF 2020**

The UN High Level Political Forum (HLPF) 2020, held from 7 to 16 July 2020, is over, but the time for reflection and analysis lies ahead of us.

This year's HLPF was supposed to be different, because of the 'milestone moment' – 5 years passed since the adoption of the Agenda 2030 and SDGs, and the HLPF review was announced. Therefore, the expectations were high, and the preparations started early. The main theme was "Accelerated action and transformative pathways: realizing the decade of action and delivery for sustainable development" and 47 countries announced presentation of their Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs).

But ongoing COVID-19 pandemic forced ECOSOC Bureau to change the plan, so all meetings were held virtually, including the official session, presentations of VNRs and all side and special events.

As EASG, we did our best to adapt to the new situation and to make the best out of it. Since the beginning of 2020 we took part in all preparations, in the meetings and actions of the Steering Group and single Task Groups, we shared with the colleagues from other Major Groups and other Stakeholders (MGoS) and we faced the challenge of virtual HLPF as much as we could.

There were plenty of advantages: more people could follow the sessions (especially those that are not UN TV streamed), and although the number of registered participants were far smaller than in 2019, the only reason is that registration wasn't a precondition to be able to participate in most of the session. We didn't face travel restrictions, delayed approvals and visa constraints, and most of all – we didn't have to pay huge amounts for flights and stay in NYC. Unfortunately, this democratic potential wasn't used enough – the most important reason were not the technical difficulties (they were expected under the circumstances), but it was harder to make interaction, and embarrassing was the lack of interpretation which is mandatory at all official session in UN, and clearly goes against the spirit of understanding and collaboration that the UN Charter foresees. This year, translation was provided sporadically, by initiative of single countries and organisations. Another missing aspect was lack of non-formal communication and exchange, various meetings and session, as opportunity for our advocacy work for education. But this is understandable and we can only hope that we will have an opportunity to make it up.

Summarizing our achievements, we could list several sessions the members of EASG spoke, our own side event which attracted more than 100 participants, several other events (both formal and side-events) where we spoke, numerous sessions we attended, interventions we made, submission of our sectoral paper and contributions/suggestions to various documents, including Ministerial Declaration and Global Debate. We played the main role in coordinating civil society around the globe to submit questions and comments to the VNRs, and this role was highly appreciated by all our colleagues.

But we were not so much focused on ‘ticking the box’ and counting the interventions we made, but more on the strategic and systemic issues. Namely, HLPF has a specific format, underlying the strict and extremely formalised rules of UN procedures, especially when it comes to the civil society. Although our right to participate, speak and intervene is guaranteed by the UN General Assembly Resolution 67/290, in the reality we are facing difficulties in assuming this role. This year it was more difficult than ever – we were excluded from some processes where we were supposed to be invited, many of our interventions were very limited, and some Member States were again questioning our representatives.

Since HLPF deals with a broad range of issues, education has the difficulty to ‘compete’ with ‘heavy’ topics of war and peace, climate change, trade etc, as if education has any links to those issues. So, couldn’t go for advocacy for detailed and specific subtopics within the education sector and couldn’t represent the variety of all issues that are important for our constituencies. The efforts had to be focused on:

- keep education high on the agenda,
- fight for the most important aspects and messages related to education, that are common for all EASG constituencies
- secure the position of EASG within the UN DESA system and actively engage in the MGoS structure.

Therefore we have exchanged with civil society and other colleagues about the problems we observed in the whole process of monitoring the implementation of Agenda 2030, and in the shrinking role of strategic partnership.

## **Here are some of the most important issues we were dealing with**

This year, no SDGs have been selected for in-depth review, instead, the Global Sustainable Development Report’s (GSDR) provided six “entry points” as a framework for thematic review. GSDR doesn’t recognize single SDGs as such, but rather group them. Although this might be a good approach to overcome ‘silos’ way of thinking, there is a danger of losing education from the radar.

We are concerned about the HLPF format and its potential to fulfil the task to ‘monitor the progress, gives recommendations and guidance.’ We are off track in advancing 2030 Agenda and confronted the pandemic crisis, so the HLPF wasn’t fully able to analyse situation and provide guidance to resolve systemic barriers. Therefore, coming HLPF review (now moved to 2021) is crucial.

Further concern is the fact that HLPF doesn’t have much impact and seems to be disconnected from other multilateral fora, since even by design it is not binding, and no action-oriented outcomes could be expected. The Ministerial Declaration (MD) belongs to the highly discussed issues every year, and this year it even had to be adopted by consensus (since no virtual voting was foreseen), so in order to come to an agreement, the

ambitions had to be very much reduced and the language of MD made very mild. Still – MD wasn't adopted, and we took part in the preparation of Press Release.

The President of ECOSOC will prepare a summary to capture the key messages of the discussions, but it's not ready yet. There is also a resolution about the review process of the ECOSOC and the High-level Political Forum, which has just been adopted.

So, we made our best to ensure broad participation of our members and constituencies, as much as possible, but we were also strategizing around systemic issues and perspectives for the future. We are members of the HLPF review task group, which has done quite a bit of work so far, but we need to consolidate, put together and prepare for the General Assembly 2020 and for the HLPF 2021.

At the moment there are no immediate actions and activities that we are supposed to organize, but we will inform you about the next steps. Very soon some Task groups will continue their work (MGoS ToRs, HLPF Review, Advocacy...)

We also have a pending task to make our network awake, and to review the way we work. Since we have our own web page (MGoS) now – although it is at the very beginning – we would need to invest some energy in feeding the EASG section and to talk about our further contribution to MGoS work and HLPF in general.

- International Council for Adult Education
- Global Campaign for Education
- European Students' Union