

UNICEF Executive Board Special Focus Session

Innovation in Education: “EdTech, Artificial Intelligence and the Learning Revolution: From Promise to Proof”

Date and time: Thursday, 3 September 2026, 10 to 11.30 a.m.

Venue: Conference Room 1, Conference Building, United Nations Headquarters, New York

CONCEPT NOTE

Background and Rationale

The new UNICEF Strategic Plan, 2026–2029, together with the organization’s growing work on digital learning, educational technology (EdTech), innovation and artificial intelligence, comes at a critical time as the world faces a deepening learning crisis, with millions of children lacking access to quality education and foundational learning. Rapid advances in digital technologies, particularly artificial intelligence, offer a significant opportunity to address these challenges, but only if they are deployed in ways that are equitable, evidence-based and aligned with children’s rights.

This special focus session will provide an important opportunity to connect the strategic direction of UNICEF with practical pathways for impact and to bring together global ambition and country-level experience. In this context, the internationally recognized success of Estonia in education, particularly its top-ranking results in the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) and its leadership in digital learning, offers a valuable example of how innovation and digital transformation can support education systems. Important pillars of education in Estonia include a strong commitment to innovation, investment in e-learning and teacher capacity, as well as forward-looking initiatives such as the AI Leap programme and broader outreach efforts in science, technology, engineering and mathematics.

Spearheaded by President H.E. Mr. Alar Karis and the Ministry of Education and Research, Estonia has launched AI Leap, a national innovation programme to integrate artificial intelligence into education. The programme aims to enhance personalized learning and improve efficiency in education management. The pilot phase began on 1 September 2025, providing 20,000 students in Grades 10 to 11 and 3,000 teachers with access to artificial intelligence-powered learning tools. The [report](#) on the results of the 2025/26 academic year were published in early August 2026. In 2026, the programme will be expanded to vocational schools and additional student cohorts, reaching a further 38,000 students and 2,000 teachers. AI Leap builds on the country’s earlier Tiger Leap initiative, which laid the foundations for digital transformation in Estonia.

This special focus session aligns closely with the evolving agenda of UNICEF and its on-the-ground reach, particularly in low-resource and humanitarian contexts. It will offer the

possibility to bridge national experience with global implementation, and to connect emerging technological solutions with the work of UNICEF to improve learning and skills for every child. In this regard, leadership by Estonia can help to advance a discussion that is not only about innovation, but is also about how Governments, development partners, the private sector, civil society and the wider education community can join forces to accelerate progress on the education priorities of UNICEF.

The exchanges will also respond to broader international discussions on the ethical use of artificial intelligence in education, digital inclusion and safeguarding children in the digital environment – areas where the experience of Estonia can contribute meaningfully while supporting the evolving agenda of UNICEF and the implementation of its Strategic Plan. More importantly, it is a call to collective action: to bring together stakeholders across sectors and geographic locations to strengthen the UNICEF education agenda on learning and skills, and to work together to ensure that artificial intelligence and EdTech are used responsibly, equitably and at scale in support of better outcomes for all children.

Strategic Framing

The session will follow a clear narrative arc, and has been designed to move seamlessly from problem recognition to practical action:

- **WE MUST** – Frame the urgency of the global learning crisis and the cost of inaction;
- **WE CAN** – Demonstrate evidence and real-world examples of innovation delivering results;
- **WE WILL** – Identify pathways to scale up solutions through partnerships and collective action.

This structure will ensure a focused and outcome-oriented discussion, which will move beyond general reflections towards concrete next steps.

Programme

Total duration: approximately 1.5 hours

1. Opening – WE MUST (6 mins.)

Opening remarks by UNICEF leadership setting out the scale of the global learning crisis, its human impact and the opportunities presented by technological innovation.

2. National perspective – WE CAN (15 mins.)

Intervention by Estonia, presented by the **Deputy Minister for Economic and Development Affairs, H.E. Ms. Mariin Ratnik**, highlighting the country's education transformation, including PISA performance, digitalization and broader approaches to innovation in education. The session will also feature a presentation by **Mr. Ivo Visak, Chief Executive Officer of the AI Leap Foundation**, who will introduce the AI Leap initiative and its approach to integrating artificial intelligence into education.

3. Youth voices on artificial intelligence – Video (4 mins.)

A short film showcasing how young people perceive the impact of artificial intelligence on their lives and their learning.

4. Moderated panel discussion – WE CAN (30 mins.)

The panel discussion has been conceived as an **interactive high-level conversation**, rather than a sequence of prepared statements. The moderator will be encouraged to draw out concrete insights, challenge assumptions and connect different perspectives.

Moderator: Ms. Isabelle Hau, Executive Director, Stanford Accelerator for Learning

Panellists:

H.E. Mr. Mohamed Abdel Latif, Minister of Education and Technical Education, Egypt

Dr. David Edwards, General Secretary, Education International

Mr. Christopher (“Cris”) Turner, Vice President, Google Government Affairs and Public Policy, Knowledge and Information Products

Abril Perazzini, UNICEF Youth Advocate, Argentina

Cevor Tikerpuu, UN Youth Advocate, Finland

Core discussion themes

- Leveraging artificial intelligence and digital innovation to improve learning outcomes and support personalized learning at scale;
- Ensuring education systems, teachers and learners are prepared to adapt to emerging technologies;
- Promoting equitable and inclusive access to digital learning, including in low-resource and humanitarian settings;
- Safeguarding children’s rights and ensuring the safe and ethical use of emerging technologies in education.

The discussion will connect:

- National policy and system-level reform
- Technological innovation and scalability
- Classroom-level implementation
- Equity, inclusion and humanitarian contexts
- Child rights and digital safety

5. UNICEF strategic outlook – WE WILL (5 mins.)

Presentation by UNICEF outlining its strategic approach to innovation in education, including partnerships, priorities and pathways for scaling up impact.

6. Forward-looking engagement – WE WILL (25 mins.)

Floor open to regional groups of Member States. Discussion of the next steps, including the potential launch or advancement of collaborative initiatives or alliances aimed at scaling up artificial intelligence and EdTech solutions for the most underserved children.

7. Closing (5 mins.)

For more information, please contact: Ms. Wongani Grace Nkhoma-Sankofa
wgsankofa@unicef.org