

Higher Education at the UN HLPF 2025 – Insights from the IAU



This is a working document prepared by Isabel Toman, Senior Programme Officer, International Association of Universities, summarising the participation of the IAU and partners at the UN HLPF 2025 (V1 18/08/2025).

14 - 23 July [HLPF 2025](#) New York/online. Theme: “Advancing sustainable, inclusive, science- and evidence-based solutions for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its Sustainable Development Goals for leaving no one behind”. SDGs in focus: **SDG 3, 5, 8, 14, 17**

The [International Association of Universities \(IAU\)](#), is an international NGO based at UNESCO in Paris, France, with a global Membership. IAU holds UN ECOSOC and UNESCO Associate Status.

IAU Secretary General and Senior Programme Officer with UNESCO Co-Chairs at York University, in front of the UN Headquarters, New York. Photo: IAU.

The event

The High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) is the yearly conference of the United Nations where governments, UN Agencies and civil society come together to discuss the achievements that have been made towards the 2030 Agenda and SDGs. **HLPF 2025.**

The High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF) was held from **Monday, 14 July, to Wednesday, 23 July 2025** under the auspices of the Economic and Social Council. It included the three-day ministerial segment of the forum from Monday, 21 July, to Wednesday, 23 July 2025 as part of the High-level Segment of the Council. The 2025 theme was: “Advancing sustainable, inclusive, science- and evidence-based solutions for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its Sustainable Development Goals for leaving no one behind”.

The 2025 HLPF acknowledges the integrated, indivisible and interlinked nature of the Sustainable Development Goals, and co in-depth reviews of: **SDG 3: Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages**; **SDG 5: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls**; **SDG 8: Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all**; **SDG 14: Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development**; and SDG 17: *Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development*.

Thanks to the **Major Group and other Stakeholder-Mechanism**, unique to the HLPF, representatives from higher education connect join efforts, and are encouraged to join the [Education and Academia Stakeholder Group](#) and connect with stakeholders with similar interests.

IAU co-organized the following events:

- Friday 18th July: Global HE Symposium <https://www.un.org/en/academic-impact/bringing-together-diverse-stakeholders-reimagine-higher-education>
- Tuesday 22 July - Side Event with the University of Gothenborg, University College Dublin and others on SDG 8 : [How academia can support policies and partnerships that provide decent work for all and sustainable economic growth](#)

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Global Higher Education Symposium

IAU in partnership with [UN Academic Impact](#), the [International Science Council](#) (ISC), the [Sustainable Solutions Network](#) (SDSN), [German Center for Research and Innovation New York](#) (DWIH), [York University](#) (Canada), [UNESCO](#), [UNITAR](#), and the [Higher Education Sustainability Initiative](#) (HESI), convened academics, policymakers, and experts to reflect on the role of higher education in achieving the SDGs. The symposium opened with remarks from UN Under-Secretary-General for Global Communications Melissa Fleming and ISC President-elect Robbert Dijkgraaf. Nudhara Yusuf, Executive Coordinator of the Global Governance Innovation Network, delivered the keynote, posing guiding questions on embedding resilience in institutions, people, and principles. Chaired by Noah Sobe of UNESCO and Helen Bond of SDSN USA, the [panel discussions](#) highlighted the need to further integrate higher education institutions into policymaking and to prioritize soft skill development such as emotional intelligence, negotiation, and creativity. IAU Secretary General Hilligje van't Land, who was a panelist in the first round of conversations, stressed the need for strong partnerships within the HE sector, and for a global voice of HE to counterbalance the backsliding of democracy in many parts of the world.



Participants at the GHES, 18 July, NYC. Photo: UNAI.

SDG 8 Side event

IAU co-organized the event on 22 July “[Accelerating SDG 8 Implementation](#)” led by the [University of Gothenburg-EfD Initiative](#), IAU’s SDG 8 Cluster Lead, together with the [University College Dublin](#), the [Sustainable Solutions Network](#) (SDSN), [UN Academic Impact](#) (UNAI) SDG Hub 8, [University of Auckland](#), [International Labour Organization](#) (ILO), [University of Nigeria Nsukka](#) and [Makerere University](#). Discussions centered on how academia can support policies and partnerships that provide decent work for all and promote sustainable economic growth. Read more about the discussion in this [article by the University of Gothenburg](#). The event also served to draw attention to a new book on Goal 8 in Agenda 2030: *Achieving UN Sustainable Development Goal 8: Economic Growth and Decent Work for All* . [The book is available as open access via Routledge](#)



Speakers at the Side Event on 22 July, UN HQ, New York. Photo: IAU/GU

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Other events of interest for Higher Education

- The EASG Side Event ([Education and Academia Stakeholder Group](#)) took place on the topic of ESD (Education for Sustainable Development) on Wednesday 16 July – IAU is a part of EASG and attended briefings throughout the HLPF with other representatives of the group.
- IAU attended the HESI special event which took place virtually on Monday 21st July: See here: [HESI Global Forum - Breaking Barriers in Sustainable Development Through Scientific, Inclusive and Equitable Solutions](#)
- On 17th July, a [Session on Multilateralism](#) not only celebrated the launch of a new MGO Handbook, but also included several country statements including the (now former) Rector of the University of Oslo, Svein Stolen, as part of the Norwegian Delegation stressing the importance of Science and HE in a short intervention.
- [UNAI-Millennium Campus Network Session](#) with contributions from Student Leaders
- [22 July “Turning the tide”](#) - A panel discussion and reception hosted at the German consulate with experts discussing SDG 8 and SDG 14, the blue economy, and partnerships building on the achievements of the recent UN Ocean Conference (UNOC3).

Furthermore, Members of the IAU Delegation were able to meet with Members and Partners during their stay in New York, including the United Nations University (UNU), the New School, Yale University, York University, McGill University, Sulitest, the German Center for Research and Innovation (DWIH), the SDG Academy, and many more.



Photo: IAU

Pages for reference: www.iau-aiu.net ; <https://www.iau-aiu.net/HESD?onglet=3> ; <https://iau-hesd.net/news/high-level-political-forum-sustainable-development-2025>

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