

WFEO President Statement to UNESCO Information Meeting on Engineering and Innovation

3 February 2026 – UNESCO Headquarters, Paris

Madam Assistant Director-General for Natural Sciences,

Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a distinct honour and pleasure to address this information meeting on behalf of the World Federation of Engineering Organizations. WFEO was created under the auspices of UNESCO in 1968 and today represents more than 100 countries and over 30 million engineers worldwide. We are an Associate Non-Governmental Organization in official partnership with UNESCO, with liaison status to ECOSOC and close working relations with a number of United Nations agencies and programmes, including the United Nations University.

Over the past days, our entire Executive Board and a number of its committee chairs convened in Dubai to shape our 2026–2035 strategic framework – a ten-year renewed vision deliberately aligned with UNESCO's Medium-Term Strategy and built on its results-based management framework. Coming directly to Paris, we are here to reaffirm to all UNESCO Member States WFEO's unwavering commitment to work hand in hand with the Sciences Sector in advancing engineering as a strategic enabler of the 2030 Agenda and beyond.

WFEO's Five Strategic Objectives (2026–2035)

Our strategic framework is built on five objectives aligned, as I said, with the UNESCO's approach:

First, strengthen engineering's role in sustainable development and global policy – positioning WFEO as a trusted source of evidence-based guidance to governments and international bodies.

Second, advance engineering education and capacity-building – empowering engineers and building their capacity, with particular emphasis on professional mobility and lifelong learning.

Third, promote ethical, inclusive and responsible engineering – establishing a global code of ethics for engineers and championing women in engineering and gender equality across the profession.

Fourth, promote global awareness of engineering for sustainable development (WED) – strengthening advocacy through World Engineering Day for Sustainable Development and elevating the visibility of engineers' achievements.

Fifth, enhance WFEO's resilience and effectiveness – strengthening governance, ensuring financial sustainability and supporting active member engagement globally.

These objectives directly support UNESCO's strategic priorities and the International Decade of Sciences for Sustainable Development (2024-2033), in which WFEO serves on the Executive Committee.

Why Engineering Matters

Engineering is at the heart of sustainable development and of our daily lives. Engineers design and build the infrastructure and technologies that make life possible – water systems, renewable energy, digital connectivity and climate-resilient infrastructure – and virtually every product and innovation we see or use here, and everywhere in our daily lives, has been designed and developed by engineers or with a strong involvement of engineering. They translate scientific knowledge into practical solutions and are crucial in the green and digital transitions.

However, engineering remains under-represented in high-level policy discussions. World Engineering Day for Sustainable Development, proclaimed by UNESCO's General Conference in 2019, was therefore established precisely to recognize engineering's strategic role and to mobilize engineers, policymakers and the public around its contribution to a sustainable, inclusive and resilient world.

2026 World Engineering Day for Sustainable Development

Although almost all WFEO members have committed, since 2019, to celebrating the World Engineering Day for Sustainable Development on 4 March in their own countries or regions, this year the main global celebration will take place in Jakarta, Indonesia. This flagship event is organized by WFEO in partnership with our National Member, the Institution of Engineers Indonesia (PII), and with the support of UNESCO. Under the theme "Smart Engineering for a Sustainable Future Through Innovation and Digitalization", we will showcase how engineering is indispensable for achieving the SDGs, particularly SDG 9 on industry, innovation and infrastructure.

On 4 and 5 March, an international conference will bring together ministers, senior officials, heads of multilateral institutions, industry leaders, academics and engineers to discuss innovation, digitalization and sustainable infrastructure development. The Jakarta event is designed as a space where engineers and policymakers sit together as equal partners, exchange views and co-design solutions that can be translated into national and regional policies.

We warmly invite UNESCO Member States to encourage participation at the highest possible level – including ministers, national engineering leaders, women engineers and young professionals – and to help make this a yearly milestone for the International Decade of Sciences for Sustainable Development.

The WFEO Hackathon 2026

Linked directly to WED 2026, the WFEO Hackathon is our flagship youth engagement initiative. Registrations are open, with the challenge themes released on 12 January 2026.

More than 270 teams of engineering students and young engineers from around the world compete virtually to design creative, practical solutions to real-world problems under the same theme as WED 2026 " –Smart Engineering for a Sustainable Future through Innovation and Digitalisation" – with a primary focus on SDG 9: Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure. Additionally, the three challenge tracks are aligned with SDG 11 on sustainable cities and communities, SDG 12 on responsible consumption and production, and SDGs 14 and 15 on life below water and life on land.

Winners will be announced during the Jakarta celebrations. WFEO views this Hackathon as a concrete mechanism to engage the next generation in the SDGs, to develop their innovation and digital skills, and to amplify the visibility of youth-led solutions from all regions, including Africa and small island developing States. We encourage Member States to promote participation from

universities and engineering schools and to recognize winning teams from their countries. The Hackathon is a bridge connecting national youth initiatives with the global WED platform.

The Third UNESCO Global Engineering Report

A major expression of WFEO's partnership with UNESCO is our substantive contribution to the UNESCO Global Engineering Reports. The 2021 report, *Engineering for Sustainable Development: Delivering on the Sustainable Development Goals*, has become a key reference for governments, professional institutions, universities and development partners worldwide.

WFEO is eager to work hand in hand with UNESCO on the third Global Engineering Report. This new edition will assess progress since 2011 (1st report) and 2021 (2nd report) in aligning engineering with the SDGs, identify emerging trends and challenges – including digitalization, climate resilience and artificial intelligence – and provide robust data and policy guidance on engineering capacity-building, with particular attention to women in engineering, youth engagement, Africa and small island developing States.

WFEO stands ready to mobilize its member organizations, committees, working groups and regional partners to contribute data, case studies and expert insights, to ensure that this third report is as impactful, evidence-based and policy-relevant as possible for Member States.

Capacity Building: Africa and Women in Engineering

To realize engineering's full potential for sustainable development, critical capacity gaps must be addressed – particularly regarding women in engineering and Africa.

The 2021 report documented persistent under-representation of women in engineering education and practice. Diverse teams are demonstrably better equipped to address complex societal needs. This is not only an equity imperative; it affects solution quality.

In response, WFEO launched the Engineering Capacity Building for Africa Programme (ECBAP), a 10-year initiative endorsed within the International Decade of Sciences for Sustainable Development that strengthens engineering education, professional development and institutional capacity across African countries.

WFEO commits to working with UNESCO and its Member States to expand opportunities for women in engineering, support gender-responsive education policies and scale up programmes like ECBAP aligned with UNESCO's digital transformation initiatives in Africa.

WFEO's Policy Offer to UNESCO and Member States

My important message to you today is that WFEO is committed to work even more closely with UNESCO and its Member States to address key policy questions:

- 1) integrating engineering systematically into national policies, education strategies and sustainable development plans, with attention to gender equality and youth engagement;
- 2) supporting frameworks for engineering education, accreditation and professional practice aligned with sustainable development objectives and international standards; and
- 3) facilitating partnerships between governments, academia, industry, financial institutions and professional bodies so that engineering solutions respond effectively to societal challenges.

Our objective is to translate these commitments into concrete contributions to sustainable development by mobilizing our global community of experts – including the Fellows and Distinguished Fellows of the Global Engineering Academy, to be announced as a flagship WFEO

initiative at WED 2026 – and by evolving the WFEO Academy into a WFEO Institute that will not only deliver training and capacity-building programmes, but also support certification-related activities in collaboration with engineering universities and promote applied research programmes with multiple stakeholders, including the United Nations University. Together with our national member engineering organizations, and with the backing of development partners and potential donors such as the World Bank, regional development banks and others, we aim to engage at policy level and on the ground so that well-designed engineering projects in your countries can be supported, implemented and scaled for the benefit of your societies.

I call upon UNESCO Member States to reach out to existing WFEO national members and invite their proactive engagement in addressing sustainability-related challenges. Where no national engineering organization yet exists, it is our duty to work with you to establish one and to support its development, so that engineering capacity can be mobilized to advance your national sustainable development priorities.

Conclusion

In closing, I reaffirm WFEO's unwavering commitment to UNESCO, to the Sciences Sector and to the International Decade of Sciences for Sustainable Development. Engineers are ready to play their full part in designing and implementing the innovative solutions our societies urgently need.

The global challenges we face – climate change, digital transformation, urbanization and persistent inequalities – are fundamentally linked to how we design, build and manage our infrastructure and technologies. They are, in many ways, engineering challenges, and meeting them requires inclusive and globally distributed engineering capacity, robust evidence-based guidance, strong and equitable education systems and responsible innovation frameworks.

Because of time, I cannot mention all the work currently under way, but allow me to highlight two examples of our joint action with UNESCO. Our Standing Technical Committee on Disaster Risk Management is collaborating with UNESCO's disaster risk reduction team on the use of artificial intelligence for disaster risk management – a promising initiative for which we are mobilizing resources, and where we call on your generous financial and in-kind contributions to support work in particular in small island developing States and least developed countries. Our Standing Technical Committee on Water is also preparing, together with UNESCO, a new publication entitled « *New Water: Engineering and Integrated Resource Management* », building on our recent report on engineering, groundwater and integrated water resources management.

WFEO is committed to being a strategic bridge and a catalyst. We look forward to deepening our joint efforts with UNESCO on the third UNESCO Global Engineering Report, to advancing women in engineering and strengthening capacity in Africa, to expanding youth engagement through the World Engineering Day Hackathon, and to welcoming you in Jakarta next March for the 2026 main World Engineering Day for Sustainable Development celebration.

Thank you.