WORLD SCOUTING



Executive Brief

The State of Scouting Education 2026

How Scouting Educates,
Empowers, and Transforms Lives

1. Purpose and Scope

The *State of Scouting Education 2026* report offers a comprehensive overview of how Scouting education is organised, rooted and experienced across the world. It draws on data from World Scouting systems to describe the Movement as a global non-formal education provider, to identify the factors that shape the quality and reach of its educational offer, and to propose a set of forward-looking trails for the period leading to 2030 and beyond. It was developed in reference to the *Strategy for Scouting* adopted at the 43rd World Scout Conference (Cairo, 2024) and to the *Roadmap for Education in Scouting* (2023), the outcome of the 4th World Scout Education Congress.

This brief summarises the principal findings, the ten trails proposed for the future, and the implications for National Scout Organizations. It is intended for readers who require the substance of the report in a concise form, including Member Organizations, partners, policy makers and the wider education and youth sectors.

2. Scouting Education at a Glance

> This report defines **Scouting Education** as the intentional process that enables personal development, facilitated by the Scouting environment, in which young people shape and live meaningful learning experiences.

Scouting is one of the world's largest youth movements, engaging around 60 million young people and adults in 176 countries and territories. Its purpose is to support the full development of young people as individuals and as responsible citizens, leaders and active contributors to positive change in their communities. It pursues this purpose through a value-based, non-formal education approach centred on the Scout Method, in which young people learn by doing, in small teams, through activities that they help to design.

Young people, from roughly five years of age to the early twenties, represent 92% of the registered membership. They are supported by adult volunteers who act as mentors, educators and role models, with a global average of ten to eleven young people for every adult leader. Education is delivered primarily through more than one million local Scout Groups, each belonging to one of the 176 National Scout Organizations, which translate global principles into national youth programmes, quality assurance and governance. The Movement has now accompanied generations of young people for almost 120 years, a longevity that the report attributes largely to its capacity for adaptation.

3. A Framework of Four Dimensions

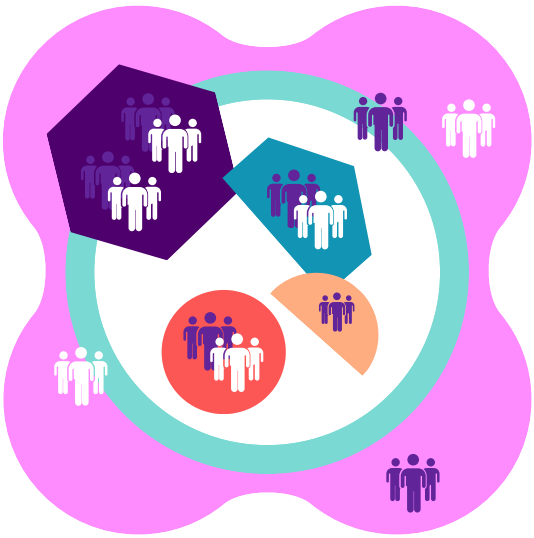
The report observes Scouting education through four interrelated dimensions. The report argues that the quality and impact of Scouting education emerge from the interaction of these four dimensions rather than from any one of them in isolation, and this framework structures the analysis throughout.

Macro Environment
Geography, demography, HDI, education systems, etc.

Member Organization
Organizational models, governance, delivery modalities

Young People and Adults
Demographics, gender balance, adult–youth dynamics

Educational Spaces
Educational design, participation formats, non-formal learning structures



4. Principal Findings

The analysis yields ten reflections, which may be grouped around five central messages.

FIRST MESSAGE

Context shapes the role of Scouting education

The first message is that context shapes the role of Scouting education. In regions with young and rapidly growing populations, such as Africa, Scouting contributes to expanding access to learning and to developing sakills where formal education is limited. In high-income regions with well-established education systems, such as Europe, it complements formal education by strengthening life skills through hands-on experience, civic engagement and youth leadership. The report also finds that a large share of the world's Scout youth is concentrated in contexts of medium-to-high and high inequality, which reinforces the relevance of Scouting as a catalyst for personal and community development while placing considerable demand on volunteer capacity, governance systems and safeguarding frameworks.

SECOND MESSAGE

Institutions and adults are structural enablers

The second message is that institutions and adults are structural enablers. The maturity of governance and management systems in National Scout Organizations strongly influences the reach, quality and sustainability of educational delivery, across single-nation, federated, school-linked or community-based models. Adult volunteers are at once the Movement's core strength and its most significant structural challenge. Youth-to-adult ratios range from approximately two to four young people per adult in some regions to nearly twenty in others; changing patterns of volunteering mean that retention will depend on the ability of Member Organizations to adapt their volunteer management systems to more diverse forms of contribution.

THIRD MESSAGE

Delivery modalities and global initiatives

The third message concerns delivery. Scouting education is delivered through community-based, school-linked and hybrid arrangements that reflect national education ecosystems. The report finds that none of Scouting's delivery modalities is inherently superior; what matters educationally is whether the surrounding conditions allow the Youth Programme and the Scout Method to be implemented consistently and with quality. Learning remains experiential, youth-centred and closely connected to the community, and it is complemented by global initiatives, grant-supported projects and international events. Between 2021 and 2025, twenty-two Global Initiatives were tracked across the Movement, 164 National Scout Organizations took part in at least one of them, and 16.4 million actions were reported. Grant-supported initiatives are estimated to have reached between 20 and 25 million young people.

FOURTH MESSAGE

Policy foundations are established, while implementation gaps persist

The fourth message is that policy foundations are established, while implementation gaps persist. An analysis of selected criteria from the Global Support Assessment Tool, covering seventy-five Member Organizations between 2017 and 2025, shows relative strength in Youth Programme, Adults in Scouting and Safe from Harm in most regions. National Scout Organizations in Asia Pacific and Europe show higher maturity in educational systems, including evidence-based programme improvement, while those in Africa and the Arab region have strong foundations in educational and adult development systems and those in Interamerica are particularly strong in adult support. Safe from Harm records a global performance of 66.7%, reflecting solid policy foundations, but gaps remain in implementation, particularly in integrating safeguarding into educational content and adult training, in reporting and response mechanisms, and in consistent practice at local level. The report is explicit that safe spaces are a prerequisite for youth development. Youth leadership and youth participation in governance, for their part, score lower in several regions, which indicates that young people are empowered through programme participation more readily than through decision-making structures.

FIFTH MESSAGE

Adaptation and evidence are both needed

The fifth message is that adaptation and evidence are both needed. Demographic change, technological transformation, environmental pressure, polarisation and shifting patterns of volunteering require Scouting to innovate intentionally, through curiosity, critical reflection and experimentation, while preserving the methodological integrity on which its identity rests. At the same time, although Scouting is widely understood to have a profound effect on young people, volunteers and communities, robust evidence demonstrating that effect remains limited. Governments, partners and donors increasingly request outcomes, and Member Organizations themselves must often take programme decisions with little data to guide them. Strengthening evidence frameworks and analytical capacity is therefore a priority.

5. Factors Influencing the Quality of Scouting Education

The report identifies ten interconnected factors that may influence the quality and consistency of Scouting education and of the learning experiences it provides. These are national context; institutional maturity and governance systems; support and resource mechanisms, including technical assistance, partnerships, funding and digital infrastructure; intentional and responsive programmes; adult volunteer capacity and culture; delivery modalities; safeguarding and well-being systems; youth engagement and leadership; Scouting culture, including the practices, symbols and rituals that constitute the identity of its learning spaces; and partnerships and systems integration with schools, governments, civil society and international partners. These factors do not operate independently, and it is their combination in each national setting that conditions the educational experience.

6. Ten Trails for a Relevant and Meaningful Scouting Education

Read against global megatrends, trends in education systems and emerging trends affecting youth and volunteering, the findings point towards ten forward-looking trails that World Scouting may wish to explore. They are presented as invitations to reflection and dialogue rather than as prescriptions.

1. The first trail concerns wellbeing and resilience as an explicit educational outcome, built into the Youth Programme through emotional literacy, safe spaces and the mental-health competence of adult leaders.
2. The second concerns nature-connection and environmental stewardship in an urbanising world, including new models of meaningful outdoor experience for Groups without easy access to nature.
3. The third is digital fluency without losing the campfire, whereby Scouting provides digital citizenship education while remaining a guardian of first-hand, face-to-face experience.
4. The fourth trail is the recognition and credentialing of non-formal learning, so that badges, certificates and competency frameworks connect legibly to national qualification and employability frameworks.
5. The fifth is flexible and modular volunteering, which would allow volunteering to fit into a life rather than requiring a life built around it.
6. The sixth is youth voice, governance and real participation, deepening genuine youth decision-making and avoiding tokenism.
7. The seventh trail is inclusion, equity and reaching new publics, embedding inclusion structurally through outreach, safeguarding, accessibility and diverse leadership.
8. The eighth is Scouting as a values-based space for peace and citizenship, strengthening intercultural learning, critical thinking and informed civic participation.
9. The ninth is intergenerational and diverse adult engagement, which invites a rethinking of who can be an adult volunteer.
10. The tenth is strategic partnerships and institutional positioning, through which educational credibility is converted into legitimacy, funding and long-term standing within national education, youth and employment frameworks.

7. Alignment with the Strategy for Scouting and the Roadmap for Education

The ten trails were tested against both reference documents. In relation to the *Strategy for Scouting*, six trails align closely with existing strategic priorities and mainly contribute operational detail, namely specific mechanisms, delivery models and pedagogical choices that the strategy sets as ambition without fully specifying as practice. Three trails expose more substantial gaps between ambition and operationalisation: environmental stewardship for an increasingly urban membership, the recognition of young people's own learning pathways, and intergenerational adult engagement as a deliberate design principle. The trail on youth voice and governance is strongly anchored in the strategy's rhetoric, but the report suggests that this commitment should be tested against structural practice rather than assumed.

The comparison with the *Roadmap for Education in Scouting* produces a tighter fit. Seven of the ten trails correspond directly to one of the Roadmap's ten transformative directions, which confirms that they are consistent with the Movement's own recent educational thinking. Two trails, on nature-connection and on strategic partnerships, partially overlap with Roadmap directions while retaining a distinct contribution, namely the urban dimension of nature-based learning and the use of partnerships as a strategy for institutional legitimacy and resourcing. One trail, intergenerational and diverse adult engagement, finds no home in either document and is identified as the clearest candidate for genuinely new territory. Finally, the Roadmap direction on embracing change and innovation has no corresponding trail, because it functions as a meta-capacity on which several trails depend and connects most directly to monitoring and evaluation.

8. Implications for National Scout Organizations

The report observes that relevance is not produced by updating programme content alone. Translating the trails into practice requires attention to eight operational domains within National Scout Organizations. Youth Programme design and review cycles should allow new content to be absorbed without a full programme overhaul, with recognition structures periodically aligned to national qualification frameworks. Governance structures should give young people genuine decision-making power, with real voting authority, youth-led budget lines and youth structures that feed directly into national decisions. Adult volunteer lifecycle management should operate as a designed system, from recruitment and onboarding to recognition and offboarding, with flexible roles that lower barriers for time-scarce adults.

Safeguarding and wellbeing should be embedded as functioning systems, with implementation plans, trained focal points, reporting and response processes and regular assessments, rather than policy documents without operational follow-through. Digital and data infrastructure should be coherent enough to support hybrid delivery and evidence-based decisions, and should itself model the digital citizenship that Scouting seeks to teach. Partnership and external positioning structures should be sustained by a dedicated function and by agreements that survive leadership turnover. Financial sustainability and resourcing models, including fee structures and diversified funding, determine whether inclusion commitments are realised in practice. Finally, monitoring, evaluation and impact data, including census data disaggregated by inclusion criteria and tracking of retention and dropout, allow organisations to know whether the other domains are working and to demonstrate their impact to external stakeholders. Across all eight domains, the common thread is the need for structures flexible enough to keep absorbing new content as the realities of young people continue to change.

9. Conclusions and Questions for the Post-2030 Horizon

The report concludes that Scouting constitutes one of the world's largest non-formal education systems, and that despite significant diversity of organisational models, delivery arrangements and national contexts, its practice displays strong coherence. This coherence, combined with local adaptability, is identified as one of World Scouting's core strengths.

Scouting's distinctive contribution to the wider education debate lies in its development of transferable lifelong competencies, character, leadership, service, resilience, environmental stewardship and global citizenship through experiential learning and a sense of ownership, qualities which remain highly relevant to the challenges identified in international discussions on the future of education.

Looking towards the post-2030 agenda, the report invites reflection on four questions:

1. How can World Scouting continue to strengthen National Scout Organizations as educational institutions capable of delivering high-quality, safe and inclusive learning at scale while remaining responsive to local realities?
2. How can Scouting demonstrate its educational contribution through evidence that reflects the complexity of non-formal learning without reducing it to narrow indicators?
3. How can the Movement innovate while preserving the educational coherence that has kept it relevant for more than a century?
4. And how can it deepen its collaboration with governments, education systems, civil society and international organisations, so as to complement formal education and expand opportunities for young people where access is constrained?

For World Scouting, the responsibility is to provide support and guidance to National Scout Organizations so that they create the right conditions for Scouting to continue to transform individual lives in the more than one million communities in which it is implemented.

10. Note on Methods and the Use of Artificial Intelligence

The report is based on data from World Scouting systems, including census, assessment and grant data, complemented by contextual and trend analysis. Artificial intelligence tools were used to support selected aspects of data compilation, processing and analysis, including the synthesis of information, the identification of patterns and trends, and the exploration of regional and global relationships. AI-assisted outputs were subject to human review and interpretation and were considered alongside the original data and relevant contextual information. AI was used as a complementary analytical tool and did not replace human judgement, and the final findings, conclusions and recommendations remain the responsibility of the report team and World Scouting.

The full *State of Scouting Education 2026* report, including the regional executive briefs, the data sources and the figures index, is available from World Scouting at **scout.org**.

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Use of artificial intelligence

Artificial intelligence (AI) tools were used to support selected aspects of data compilation, processing, and analysis for this report, including the synthesis of information, identification of patterns and trends, and exploration of regional and global relationships across different dimensions of Scouting Education. AI-assisted outputs were subject to human review and interpretation and were considered alongside the original data and relevant contextual information. AI was used as a complementary analytical tool and did not replace human judgement. The final findings, conclusions, and recommendations remain the responsibility of the report team and World Scouting.