Ann Skelton introductory remarks:

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, girls and boys, good afternoon.

In this session we are going focus on those who are left behind. If we begin with those who are completely left out: the numbers are mind-numbing. According to UNESCO, 262 million children still do not attend school. At all. No access to education.

New headline figures tell us that the poorest children in low-income countries are less than ½ as likely to complete primary school than the richest. Less than 40% of girls in sub-Saharan Africa complete lower secondary school and some 4 million child refugees are out of school. Children with disabilities make up a sizeable percentage of children who are out of school, and many are not even included in those who are counted.

And then of course, even for those children who do have access to education – the ineffectiveness of that education may still leave them behind. And here the numbers are 3x more than the out of school figures - 617 million who are in school cannot read and do basic math at an age appropriate level.

Commodification of education has engulfed public systems in some countries, leaving children behind because their parents are unable to pay.

It has been said time and again on platforms like this one that we cannot break the cycle of poverty or achieve gender equality until we bring all children into effective education systems, from early childhood, and keep them in schools as long as possible. But we need to say it again: A worldwide political commitment to ensure equal access to quality education is what is required. The commitment to SDG 4 is certainly a good start, but as the 2030 deadline looms, we should be seeing more action, at a greatly accelerated pace.

Our thinking about the content and modalities of education cannot be allowed to ossify. As some children themselves are telling us through Friday strikes and other actions –they want an education that will produce citizens who will act to find solutions to climate change. It is a task they expect educated adults to be taking on right now. The technological revolution too, while it presents many opportunities, also presents new risks of some children being left way behind.

So – there is much to talk about!

It is therefore my great pleasure to introduce you to the panel: