unesco

The right to education

Past, present and future directions

Education 2030

UNESCO – a global leader in education

Education is UNESCO's top priority because it is a basic human right and the foundation for peace and sustainable development. UNESCO is the United Nations' specialized agency for education, providing global and regional leadership to drive progress, strengthening the resilience and capacity of national systems to serve all learners. UNESCO also leads efforts to respond to contemporary global challenges through transformative learning, with special focus on gender equality and Africa across all actions.

The Global Education 2030 Agenda

UNESCO, as the United Nations' specialized agency for education, is entrusted to lead and coordinate the Education 2030 Agenda, which is part of a global movement to eradicate poverty through 17 Sustainable Development Goals by 2030. Education, essential to achieve all of these goals, has its own dedicated Goal 4, which aims to ***"ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all."*** The Education 2030 Framework for Action provides guidance for the implementation of this ambitious goal and commitments.

unesco

United Nations
Educational, Scientific
and Cultural Organization

Education 2030

Published in 2025 by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization,
7, place de Fontenoy, 75352 Paris 07 SP, France

ISBN 978-92-3-100836-8
DOI https://doi.org/10.54675/GONT9347

Cover credits: © UNESCO/Weiwei Kang; Josep Curto/Shutterstock.com*; Anton27/Shutterstock.com*; PeopleImages/Shutterstock.com*; SUKJAI PHOTO/Shutterstock.com*; STILLFX/Shutterstock.com*

Inside icons: © UNESCO/Weiwei Kang

Designed and printed by UNESCO

Printed in France

SHORT SUMMARY

Securing the right to education in a transforming world

Education remains the most critical means to accelerate societal progress, strengthen social cohesion and foster individual growth – but the right to education stands at a critical juncture.

This report reviews 25 years of progress on the right to education, highlighting major gains such as near universal access to primary education, expansion of formal learning from early childhood through to higher education, and the growing recognition of lifelong learning as a cornerstone of human and social development.

At the same time, radical shifts in the ways that we live, work and learn, have placed education systems under unprecedented pressure to adapt in a remarkably short period of time.

The report explores the impact of digitalization, conflict, migration and demographic change on the right to education, in particular for vulnerable groups. It underscores the urgent need for renewed global commitments to strengthen the legal and institutional foundations of the right to education, close persistent equity gaps, and adapt to emerging demographic, technological, and societal realities. Reinforcing these dimensions is essential to ensure that education remains both a protective and transformative force for all.

unesco

"Since wars begin in the minds of men and women, it is in the minds of men and women that the defences of peace must be constructed"

The right to education

Past, present and future directions

Foreword

© UNESCO

The right to education is at a pivotal moment as the world approaches the target year of the Education 2030 Agenda. Multiple forces are reshaping the foundations of this right: rapid advances in artificial intelligence, intensifying climate change, demographic shifts and rising human displacement. At the same time, strains on multilateral cooperation, declining international aid and eroding trust in democratic institutions are deepening the global learning crisis.

These new realities require stronger normative frameworks to ensure that the right to education remains both relevant and resilient amid accelerating change.

This report marks a significant milestone within UNESCO's Initiative on the Evolving Right to Education, launched in 2021 to explore how international human rights instruments can be reinforced to address today's needs and challenges. It reflects the important progress made so far and draws from extensive analytical work, expert perspectives and broad consultations with Member States and partners.

Historically, the right to education has served not only been a legal principle but also a moral compass for humanity. Today, amid profound transformations in how people learn, work and live, this right must once again be reinterpreted so that inclusion and human dignity remain the foundation of our shared future.

Education is increasingly recognized as a lifelong endeavor, extending beyond formal schooling to continuous learning throughout one's life, enabling individuals to adapt to rapid social, economic, cultural and technological change. UNESCO's recent adoption of the Recommendation on the Ethics of Neurotechnology illustrates the pace of scientific and technological change, revealing how new progress challenges established understandings of rights and responsibilities and reinforcing the need to ground innovation firmly in ethics and human rights.

At this critical moment of uncertainty and opportunity, this report provides both reflection and forward-looking guidance. It consolidates achievements to date while fostering renewed dialogue on the frameworks needed for the future. Above all, it urges the protection and revitalization of the universal vision of the right to education throughout life as a dynamic, evolving right capable of guiding humanity through ongoing transformations and shaping a shared future.

Stefania Giannini
Assistant Director-General for Education, UNESCO

Acknowledgements

This report was produced by the Section of Education Policy of the Education Sector of UNESCO, under the leadership of Borhene Chakroun and the supervision of Gwang-Chol Chang. The Report was prepared by a drafting team led by Rolla Moumné Beulque and composed of Katherine Nguyen, Elise Rondin, Hamdi Addow, Agathe Charles Bray, Yeliz Inci, Maya Cléré, with the support of Julia Morand.

The team wishes to express its sincere appreciation to the reviewers for their valuable insights, inputs and constructive feedback, which greatly strengthened the quality of this report. Special thanks are extended to colleagues from UNESCO:

- Division for the Future of Learning and Innovation: Mark West, Keith Holmes, Elena Toukan.
- Section for Higher Education: Noah Webster, Leila Loupis, Carmela Salzano, Manuel Sanchez Masferrer and Teter Wesley.
- Section of Education for Inclusion and Gender Equality: Elspeth McOmish, Florence Migeon.
- Section for Youth, Literacy and Skills Development: Claudia Pompa.
- Section for Teacher Development: Carlos Vargas Tames, Emilia Soto Echeverri, Héloïse Dumenil, and Matthew Aaron Martin Thomas

and to the peer reviewers:

- Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC): Sophie Kiladze (chairperson) and several members of the Committee.
- Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR): Helen Griffiths.
- Right to Education Initiative: Delphine Dorsi, Juliana Lima and Rajakumari Michaelsamy.
- UNESCO Chair in Education for Human Development and Solidarity among Peoples, Università Cattolica, Milan: Rita Locatelli.
- OIDEL: Ignasi Grau.

Table of contents

List of boxes, figures, and tables

Abbreviations and acronyms

AI	Artificial Intelligence
ALE	Adult Education and Learning
AQF	Australian Qualifications Framework
CADE	Convention against Discrimination in Education (1960)
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women
CONFINTEA VII	Seventh International Conference on Adult Education
COVID-19	Coronavirus disease
CPF	Compte Personnel de Formation (France) [Personal Training Account]
CRC	Convention on the Rights of the Child
CRPD	Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
ECCE	Early Childhood Care and Education
ESD	Education for Sustainable Development
GCED	Global Citizenship Education
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GPE	Global Partnership for Education
GPI	Gender Parity Index
GRID	Global Report on Internal Displacement
HRE	Human Rights Education
ICESCR	International Covenant on Economic, Social and Political Rights
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
IDMC	Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
ILO	International Labour Organization
LLLE	Lifelong Learning Entitlement
NLC	Republic of Korea's National Learning Card
NQF	National Qualification Framework
MDG	Millennium Development Goal
MLE	Multilingual Education
ODA	Official Development Assistance
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PIRLS	Progress in International Reading Literacy Study
PISA	OECD's Programme for International Student Assessment
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal

Major global instruments

- Convention against Discrimination in Education (1960)
- Recommendation against Discrimination in Education (1960)
- International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1966)
- International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1966)
- ILO/UNESCO Recommendation concerning the Status of Teachers (1966)
- Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (1979)
- Salamanca Statement (1994)
- Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989)
- UN Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities (1992)
- UNESCO Recommendation concerning the Status of Higher-Education Teaching Personnel (1997)
- Dakar Framework for Action (2000)
- Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006)
- UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (2007)
- Recommendation concerning Technical and Vocational Education and Training (2015)
- Recommendation on Adult Learning and Education (2015)
- 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (2015)
- Education 2030: Incheon Declaration and Framework for Action for the Implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 4 (2015)
- Global Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education (2019)
- RewirED Global Declaration on Connectivity for Education (2021)
- CONFINTEA VII Marrakech Framework for Action: Harnessing the transformational power of adult learning and education (2022)
- Tashkent Declaration and Commitments to Action for Transforming Early Childhood Care and Education (2022)
- Recommendation on Education for Peace, Human Rights and Sustainable Development (2023)
- Fortaleza Declaration adopted at the Global Education Meeting (2024)

Introduction

The year 2025 marks the close of the first quarter of the twenty-first century. This period has been defined by rapid technological transformation, recurrent global crises including devastating conflicts and a catastrophic pandemic, and a heightened awareness of the profound impacts of climate change, raising existential questions about the future of humanity. While many today enjoy more prosperous lives than ever before, progress in reducing global poverty has slowed to a near standstill, and around one-fifth of the world's population today lives in countries with high levels of inequality (World Bank, 2024). At the same time, radical shifts in the ways that we live, work, and learn, have placed education systems under unprecedented pressure to adapt in a remarkably short period of time.

In this context, education stands as the most critical means to accelerate societal progress, strengthen social cohesion, contribute to inclusive growth and foster personal development and human flourishing. Yet, ensuring that education systems respond effectively to present and future needs require more than policy innovation, it requires clarity regarding their fundamental purposes. It calls for a renewed understanding of what societies expect and need from education in an age of complexity, uncertainty, and interdependence.

Developing a deeper understanding of education normative underpinnings – both in their historical evolution and with a forward-looking perspective – is essential to guarantee that, in line with the SDG 4 commitment, no one is left behind when it comes to the right to education.

In this context, the international legal framework for the right to education remains fundamental, enshrining key principles: the aims of education; the prohibition of discrimination; state obligations across different levels and forms of education, and ensuring minimum standards of quality. However, the most comprehensive treaties defining this right date back to the 1960s.

In recent years, UNESCO has fostered a global discussion on reviewing the right to education to ensure it remains protective, resilient, and responsive to contemporary realities and future developments.

It is now being framed and better positioned within a new social contract for education (UNESCO, 2021e) and a lifelong learning perspective. Learning is now seen as a continuous process spanning all life stages – from early childhood through to old age and occurring across diverse settings – formal, non-formal and informal, and for multiple purposes. It is also further examined in its intersections with other human rights. The right to education is the foundation for the realization of all human rights (OHCHR, n.d.a.); it is intrinsically linked with the rights of the child, the right to work, the right to culture, the right to information, the right to health, and beyond.

This report pursues three objectives. In its first section, it takes stock of achievements relating to the right to education over the past 25 years, highlighting progress in defining its normative framework through a review of international consensus expressed in recent global agreements, such as the Marrakech Framework for Action, the Tashkent Declaration, and the revised Recommendation on Education for Peace, Human Rights and Sustainable Development. It presents innovation and developments at regional and national levels, looking at laws, policies, and practices.

Second, the report further outlines key contextual developments that are questioning and reshaping the relevance of education systems, including digitalization, rising conflict, human mobility, demographic change, and more. It examines persistent gaps that continue to obstruct the full realization of the right to education, particularly for vulnerable and marginalized communities.

After examining where the right to education stands today, the third section concludes that certain aspects of the international normative framework may require strengthening to remain both protective, relevant and transformative for all.

From a methodological perspective, the report draws on a range of sources, processes and outcomes. UNESCO's work on the future of education, and cross-cutting issues such as digitalization and artificial intelligence, climate change, displacement, inclusion and equity, early childhood care and education (ECCE), lifelong learning, and the regulation of non-state actors, has informed its thematic analysis. Insights from national-level practices are drawn from recent consultations on the UNESCO Convention against Discrimination in Education, and from HerAtlas – a tool that tracks the right to education for girls and women worldwide and serves as a directory of national legal frameworks, shedding light on enforcement.

Youth voices
(SDG4 Youth & Student Network)

> By including and empowering the voices of the most impacted by whether or not education is enacted as a basic human right, young people everywhere have been able to speak up about the fundamental right to education in spaces that have predominantly only been accessed by those in positions of power
>
> Ilan Enverga, SDG4 Youth & Student Network

Another major input has been the UNESCO Initiative on the Evolving Right to Education, which begun in 2021 and was officially launched in 2024, after several years of research, international consultations (including a formal Dialogue with Member States and other key stakeholders in 2023), policy analysis, and global engagement. This Initiative has drawn insights from experts, educators, activists, and learners themselves in examining a potential expansion of the international legal framework. Therefore, this report draws on a broad and participatory process conducted between 2021 and 2024, combining extensive consultations with diverse constituencies and rigorous research. These combined inputs brought a wide range of perspectives and experiences, ensuring that the report reflects voices from across education systems.

Finally, following the Geneva Human Rights Dialogue on the Right to Education (2024), a series of opinion pieces were published in a special issue of the 'Frontiers in Education' journal (anglophone series) and 'Education in debate: comparative analysis' journal (better known as 'L'éducation en débats: analyse comparée' for the francophone series), entitled 'The Right to Education and Addressing Inequalities: Examining New Forms of Privatization, Impact of Digitalization, and Learning in Crisis Situations'. These contributions have served as a springboard for many of the report's arguments, with select excerpts included here to amplify a wider range of expert voices from academia to international organizations.

The preparation of the report was underpinned by an inclusive and participatory approach. A diverse range of opinions and voices also inform this report. An important number of consultations were conducted with experts of diverse backgrounds, as well as youth representatives, through the SDG 4 Youth and Student Network, and with parents through their representations, such as the Make Mothers Matter Association, ensuring that perspectives from those directly engaged with education systems are included.

Section 1: The right to education, progress, bottlenecks and future directions in the 21st Century

Discussions on human rights too often dwell solely on violations and shortcomings, painting a picture of slow or uncertain progress, as if each step forward is met with two steps back. While recognizing these challenges is essential to driving improvement, such a lens can obscure the remarkable gains achieved through the collective efforts of international organizations, civil society, individual advocates, and most importantly states themselves.

This section seeks to restore that balance by describing some of the tangible gains made in the field of the right to education so far in the twenty-first century, including the adoption of new international instruments and agreements, and improvements made in country-level practices evidenced both by progress in national legal frameworks and in global statistical data demonstrating gains in implementation.

A) Universalizing and extending school education

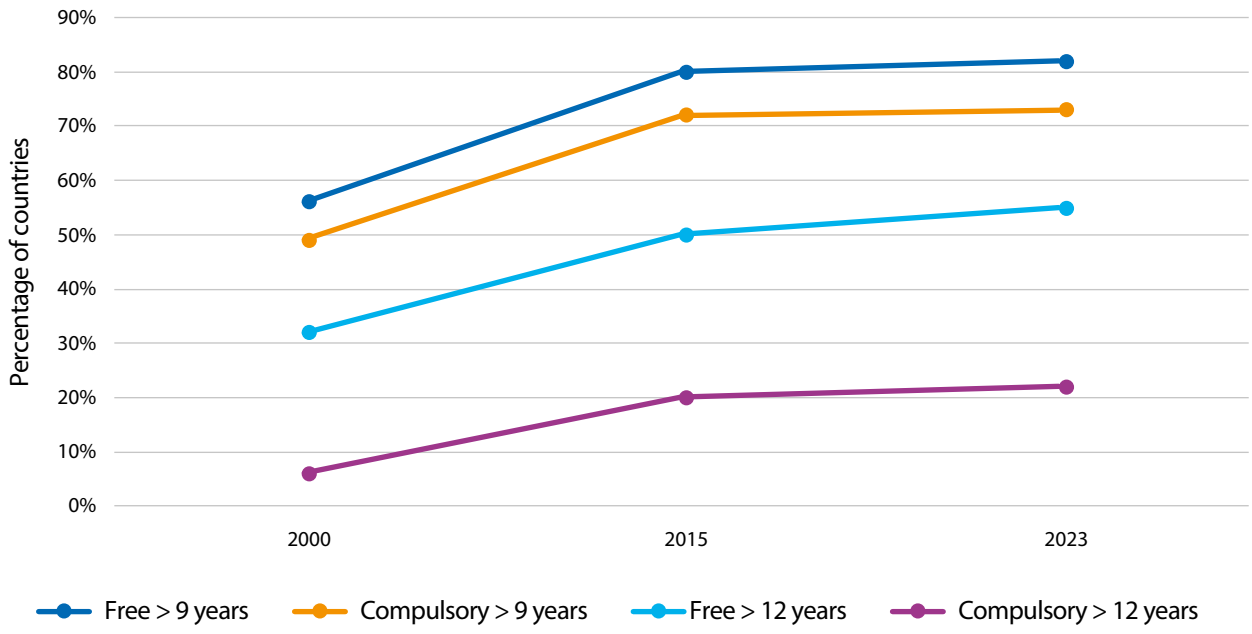
At the time of drafting the major international treaties on the right to education, the primary focus of international lawmakers was on formal schooling and its universalization. Instruments such as the UNESCO Convention against Discrimination in Education (CADE) (UNESCO, 1960) and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) (UN, 1966) affirmed that primary education should be free and compulsory, secondary education should be generally available, accessible to all, and progressively free, and that parents should have the liberty to choose their children's education in accordance with their convictions. These standards were reaffirmed in the drafting of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) (UN, 1990).

Over time, in non-binding instruments, emphasis shifted from merely universalizing primary education to ensuring equal and inclusive access to all levels of school education. The sixties witnessed significant growth in enrolment across all levels of education including pre-primary, a trend that continued through the seventies and early eighties (UNESCO IBE, 1985; see also International Commission on the Development of Education, 2013). During this period, global educational expenditure also increased rising from 3.6% of GNP to 5.7% by 1981 (UNESCO IBE, 1985). The World Declaration on Education for All (1990) introduced the concept of 'basic learning needs' expanding the vision and recognizing that 'learning begins at birth'.

This trajectory continued into the new millennium. While Millennium Development Goal 2 was narrowly focused on achieving universal primary education and Millenium Development Goal 3 on eliminating gender disparity in all levels of education (UN, 2000), the Dakar Framework for Action (2000), reaffirmed the broader commitment to meeting 'basic learning needs' with more nuanced and inclusive goals. Greater attention was placed on ensuring that all children – particularly girls, children in difficult circumstances, and those from ethnic minorities – had access to and completed free, compulsory, and high-quality primary education. Elimination of gender disparities and the eradication of illiteracy remained central to priorities, while the limitations of the simplistic 'universal primary education' target became increasingly evident.

This evolving understanding of the right to education laid the foundation for the adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in 2015 (UN, 2015). The SDGs marked a breakthrough by affirming that the right to education encompasses clear entitlements long before and after primary schooling. They also recognize the value of education as a catalyst for achieving progress across the entire sustainable development agenda.This visible shift – from a narrow focus on primary education to recognition of access to, and completion of, formal education from pre-primary to upper secondary – was enabled in large part by the near-universalization of primary education in most parts of the world.

Figure 1. Countries reporting number of years of free and compulsory primary and secondary education in the legal framework



Data source: UIS data (n.d.). Available under CC BY-SA 4.0

Reflecting the global commitment to free and compulsory education, an increasing number of countries have incorporated into their legal frameworks the right to at least twelve years of free, and a minimum of nine years of compulsory, primary and secondary education, in line with SDG 4 targets. Figure 1 illustrates the steady global rise in provisions for both free and compulsory education since 2000. It is important to note, however, that the sharper increase observed between 2000 and 2015 is partly attributable to the growing number of countries reporting data to UNESCO's Institute for Statistics (UNESCO UIS, n.d.) during that period.

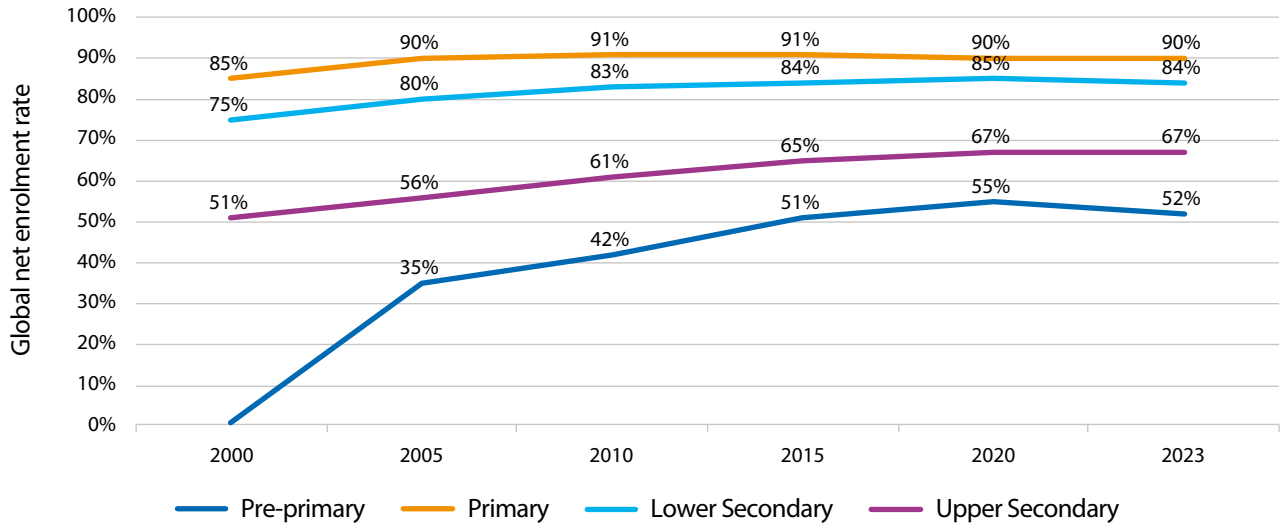
Box 1: India's codification of free and compulsory elementary education

In **India**, the right to free and compulsory education was codified in 2009 in the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act of 2009. This law, extending to the whole of India, gave every child aged six to fourteen the right to free and compulsory education in a neighbourhood school until completion of elementary education. In 2006, completion rate in primary education was 78.46% (82.34% for boys and 74.50% for girls), whereas by 2019 (latest available figures on UIS), the completion rate was 94.15% (93.89% for boys and 94.43% for girls). Interestingly, these gains were subsequently mirrored at lower and upper secondary levels, showing that completion of primary education paved the way for completion at upper levels.

Data sources: HerAtlas India country profile (UNESCO, n.d. c) and UIS data (n.d.)

Stilted progress has also been seen in net enrolment rates in school education since the year 2000 (see figure 2), though at every level, from pre-primary to upper-secondary education, enrolment has remained the same or even reduced between 2000–2023 (UNESCO UIS, n.d.).

Figure 2. Global net enrolment rates in formal education



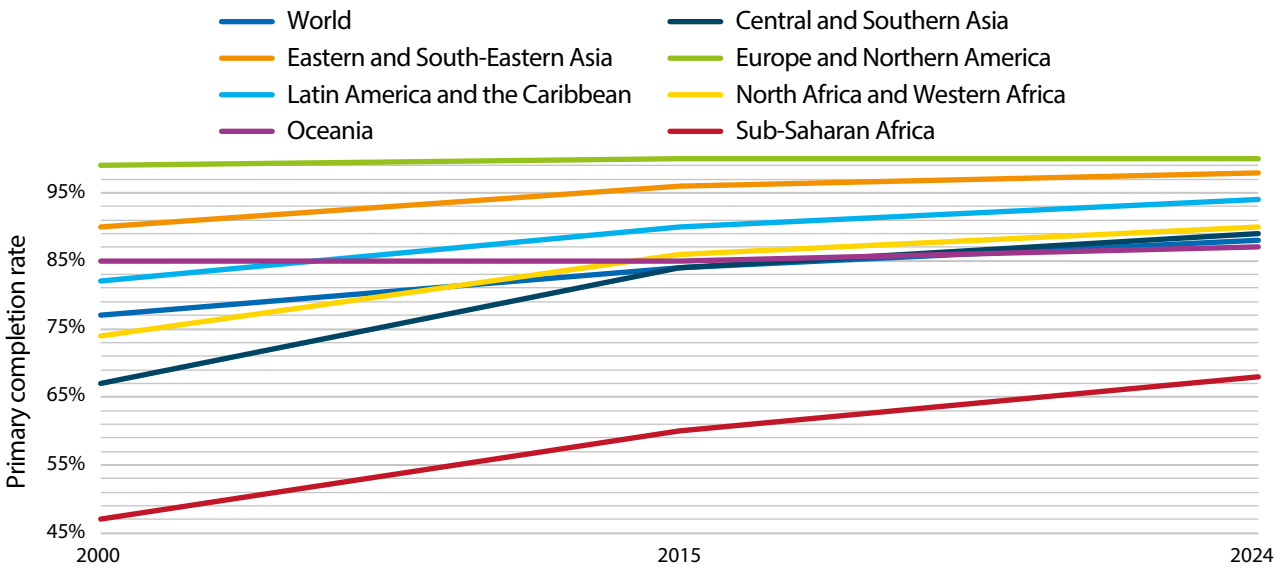
Data source: UIS data (n.d.). Available under CC BY-SA 4.0
Note: no global NER is available for pre-primary education in 2000.

While global progress has stagnated, some regions have seen enormous gains in the percentage of the population accessing and completing school. In sub-Saharan Africa, for example, the gross enrolment rate leapt from 79% in 2000 to 97% in 2024 at primary level, and from 25% in 2000 to 46% in 2020, at lower secondary level (UNESCO UIS).

Completion rates at primary level have also progressed (see figure 3). Worldwide, 77% of children were completing primary education in 2000, compared to 88% in 2024 (UNESCO UIS, n.d.).

However, concerns abound regarding the number of out-of-school children. While rates of out-of-school children have undoubtably declined since 2000, largely due to the strong global political commitment to the universalization of primary education coupled with low-income countries' response in eliminating primary school fees, recent data show a reversal of progress. In 2023, the global out-of-school population was revised to 272 million, including 78 million children of primary school age (UNESCO and UNESCO UIS, 2025a). This figure exceeds the number recorded in 2015, signalling a concerning upward trend. The updated estimate reflects a correction to earlier undercounts and has been attributed, in part, to the underestimated impact of conflict and crisis on education.

Figure 3. World and regional primary education completion rates



Data source: UIS data (n.d.). Available under CC BY-SA 4.0

Early childhood care and education

Over the last 25 years, significant momentum has developed around the recognition and promotion of concrete rights in the field of ECCE. The right to education is now formally interpreted as beginning at birth (UNCRC, 2005) and early childhood is widely recognized as an absolutely critical period of development during which children undergo their most rapid and foundational growth. While the CRC defined specific rights for this stage of life, these primarily referred to the right to health and the provision of education and support for parents and caregivers, access to appropriate child care services and facilities, and adequate assistance in child-rearing and development. However, UN Human Rights treaty bodies such as the Committee on the Rights of the Child have repeatedly interpreted the right to pre-primary education as being an implicit part of the right to education (Fredman et al, 2022; Nyitray 2024).

At the turn of the millennium, the Dakar Framework for Action gave heightened precedence to the expansion and improvement of comprehensive ECCE. Operational goals for the year 2015 included the assurance of access to pre-primary education for children from the age of three, upon parental request (Dakar Framework for Action, 2000). This was also reflected in UNESCO's World Education Report (2000) 'The Right to Education. Towards Education for All Throughout Life', which emphasized early childhood care and initial education as critical components in fulfilling the right to education, targeting the developmental and learning needs of young children before they enter formal schooling.

In 2010, UNESCO organized its very first global conference dedicated to ECCE in Moscow, giving heightened visibility to early childhood and paving the way for its integration in the SDGs, several years later (UNESCO, 2010). At the adoption of SDG 4 in 2015, states committed to ensuring at least one year of free and compulsory pre-primary education, alongside access to quality early childhood development and care. This commitment marked a turning point, acknowledging ECCE as essential to levelling the playing field and preparing children to succeed in primary education.

This momentum was further reinforced in 2022 at the second World Conference on Early Childhood Care and Education, where the Tashkent Declaration was adopted. The Declaration reaffirmed the right of every young child to access quality ECCE from birth to eight years of age. In addition to promoting equitable and inclusive ECCE for all children – particularly those from vulnerable and marginalized groups – it placed strong emphasis on the professionalization, training, and fair remuneration of ECCE personnel. Recalling the Incheon Declaration, it also reaffirmed the global commitment to ensuring at least one year of free and compulsory quality pre-primary education for every child and called for states' efforts to allocate at least 10% of national education budgets to pre-primary education (UNESCO, 2022j).

Box 2: Ghana's introduction of legal guarantees to two years of free and compulsory kindergarten

Ghana extended basic education to include two years of free and compulsory kindergarten education in 2008, in the Education Act 2008. The country was a front-runner in sub-Saharan Africa in offering pre-primary education and has seen significant success. The net enrolment rate in pre-primary education in 2007 was 51.65%, and by 2021, this had jumped to 75%.

It is important to note that the implementation of two years of free and compulsory pre-primary education has not been without workforce challenges. In 2009, the pupil-to-trained teacher ratio rose sharply to 155:1. Although this figure had improved to 47:1 by 2021, further efforts are needed to ensure that all pre-primary educators are adequately qualified and trained to deliver quality early learning.

Data sources: HerAtlas Ghana country profile (UNESCO, n.d. c) and UIS data (n.d.)

Secondary education

Treaties adopted in the last century provide for the progressive realization of secondary education (ICESCR, article 13.2.(b); CRC, article 28.1.(b)). However, early on the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1990) explicitly explained that progressive realization should not be misinterpreted as depriving the obligation of all meaningful content. On the contrary, the Committee reaffirmed that states have an 'obligation to move as expeditiously and effectively as possible'. It is notable that the 2000 Dakar Framework for Action did not set a specific goal for expanding secondary education. This omission reflected the Framework's grounding in international legal instruments, which require secondary education to be available and accessible to all, and progressively free, rather than universally free and compulsory. A significant shift came with the adoption of the Education 2030 Framework for Action (2015), fifteen years later. SDG Target 4.1 commits states to 'ensure that all girls and boys complete free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education leading to relevant and effective learning outcomes.' This target effectively sets a 15-year timeline to achieve at least 12 years of free, publicly funded, inclusive, and equitable quality education – of which a minimum of nine years must be compulsory.

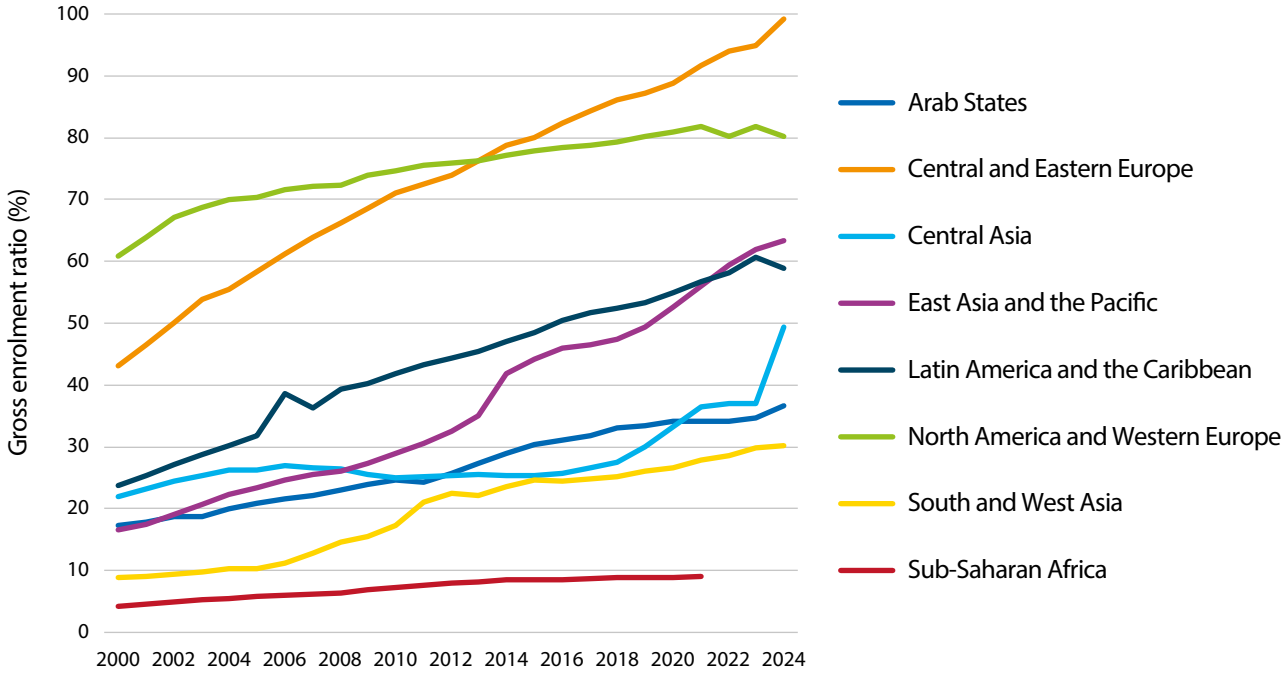
The recognition of free and compulsory secondary education is now widely understood as an essential component of the broader right to education. Secondary schooling serves as a bridge to higher education or vocational pathways and is often a minimum qualification for entry into the labour market. For children to realize their full potential, and for education to achieve its purpose of being 'directed to the full development of the human personality' (Grover, 2004), it cannot reasonably end at the primary level. Moreover, the considerable economic growth achieved since the drafting of the major international treaties on education, makes the guarantee of free and compulsory secondary education more attainable than ever before (Sheppard, 2022).

The compulsory nature of secondary education is also critical for harmonizing education frameworks with international labour standards. Aligning the end of compulsory schooling with the minimum age of employment under ILO conventions helps to close a legal gap that can otherwise leave children in a vulnerable situation. In the absence of such alignment, children may find themselves neither in school nor legally employable, a condition that increases the risk of child labour and exploitation – contradicting internationally recognized child rights standards (UNESCO, 2023b).

Higher education

Higher education has undergone a profound transformation in recent decades. Global gross enrolment more than doubled between 2000 and 2023, rising from 19% to 43% (UNESCO UIS, n.d.). This expansion, often referred to as the 'massification' of higher education, has been driven by improved progression through primary and secondary education, increased enrolment in low- and middle-income countries, and higher participation among women.

Figure 4. Gross enrolment ratio for tertiary education per region



Data source: UIS data (n.d.). Available under CC BY-SA 4.0
Note: no GER for tertiary education is available for sub-Saharan Africa in 2022, 2023 and 2024.

Despite this impressive growth, significant disparities persist across regions and income groups. In sub-Saharan Africa, for example, enrolment has nearly doubled but remains far below levels in Europe and North America (see figure 4). Traditionally under-represented groups continue to experience lower completion rates, concentration in less prestigious institutions, weaker academic outcomes, and poorer labour market opportunities (UNESCO, 2022c). Higher education remains a sector marked by deep inequality.

Moreover, the increase in enrolment in higher education has not sufficiently been supported by adequate financing, which can lead to the development of high fees private institutions, not always offering quality education and recognized qualifications (Calvel and Chareyron, 2023).

Disparities also persist between genders. In fact, in 2025, there were more women than men studying in higher education on average worldwide, with 113 women enrolled in higher education for every 100 men (UNESCO, 2025g). Regardless of these statistics, persistent gender-based barriers such as under-representation in leadership and the STEM field, and the continued risk of harassment and gender-based violence on campus, show that equal access does not yet mean equal opportunities (UNESCO and IESALC, 2021).

Unlike other levels of education, higher education has not historically been considered universally open to all. Instead, international instruments require it to be 'equally accessible to all, on the basis of capacity', and 'in particular by the progressive introduction of free education' (ICESCR, Article 13(2)(c)). The huge expansion of participation in higher education that has happened in the twenty-first century therefore brings into question the delineation of rights at this level today: to whom should higher education be extended, and how should states fulfil their obligation to ensure its progressively free status?

These questions were examined during the consultations underpinning the Initiative on the Evolving Right to Education (n.d. d). Guided by principles of fairness and equality of opportunity, the Initiative advocates for a right to 'affordable' higher education, at least in contexts where fully free provision remains unfeasible. Affordability may be achieved through a combination of low tuition fees, needs-based scholarships, and income-contingent loan schemes – mechanisms that, collectively, help bridge the gap between educational quality and financial accessibility (UNESCO and UNESCO IIEP, 2017). Another option is to begin with targeted free tuition, intended to reach the most vulnerable students, rather than offering subsidies to all students regardless of their parents' income (UNESCO and UNESCO IESALC, 2022). While, in many countries, tuition fees are actually on the rise, it is crucial that higher education remains affordable for the most marginalized to avoid cementing societal inequalities.

The concepts of 'capacity' and 'merit' in accessing higher education have also evolved. Foundational international instruments – such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UN, 1948), the CADE (1960), and the ICESCR (1966) – traditionally framed access in terms of academic merit or capacity. However, structural inequalities, including unequal access to quality early education, systemic discrimination, and disparities in cultural capital, have long distorted these assessments.

In response, contemporary interpretations increasingly advocate for a more inclusive and context-sensitive understanding of 'merit'. The SDG4-Education 2030 Steering Committee (2020), for example, redefined 'merit' as 'the potential to succeed,' introducing the notion of 'merit in context.' This approach supports diversified admissions mechanisms that recognize the varied challenges students face. In line with this thinking, the concept of 'capacity' should be understood in a forward-looking manner – placing greater emphasis on students' potential rather than solely on their academic history (UNESCO, 2023b). It is particularly important for students from disadvantaged background – with limited familial, social and cultural capital – who face significant barriers to participation and success in higher education when admission practices and merit criteria reflect structural inequalities. (UNESCO and Right to Education Initiative, 2022). Today, the emphasis extends beyond simply enrolling marginalized groups in higher education to ensuring their persistence, completion, and transition into the labour market. Effective inclusive measures could include, for example, access to tutoring and mentorship programmes, bias-free curricula, flexibility in course transfers, and initiatives to strengthen social integration and student well-being (UNESCO and the Right to Education Initiative, 2022). Success is no longer defined only by access, but also by the holistic development of students, their readiness for work, and post-college outcomes (UNESCO and UNESCO IESALC, 2022).

In 2015, countries committed to SDG Target 4.3: 'By 2030, ensure equal access for all women and men to affordable and quality technical, vocational and higher education, including university' (UN, 2015). The explicit inclusion of both 'women and men' is representative of the importance given to gender equality in higher education today, while noting that current understandings of gender may extend beyond this binary. Encouragingly, global female enrolment more than doubled between 2000 and 2025 (UNESCO UIS, n.d.). However, women remain under-represented in leadership positions and in fields such as STEM – disciplines often associated with higher earning potential and broader career opportunities (WEF, 2021) illustrating that there is still work to be done to level the playing field between women and men.

Finally, the reference to higher technical and vocational education and training (TVET) as an explicit SDG target highlights a broad conception of higher education, including not only higher education delivered in universities, but also education and training that leads directly into many vocational careers and creates wider opportunities for youth and adults. The rapid growth of part-time, online, and distance learning opportunities also diversifies the sector, creating new opportunities and challenges for equitable access. (UNESCO, 2023b).

Labour migrants numbered about 167.7 million in 2022, representing 66% of international migrants of working age, raising implications for TVET and the recognition of skills (Migration Data Portal, 2024). While TVET is widely recognized as a key driver for improving the prospects of migrants in the labour market, yet they continue to face major obstacles in accessing quality training, and many institutions remain insufficiently prepared to respond to their needs (UNESCO-UNEVOC, n.d.). Moreover, gender inequalities persist, with women significantly underrepresented in many TVET fields - particularly in STEM, where women account for only 30% of students enrolled in related fields worldwide (UNESCO-UNEVOC, 2020) - which limits both individual opportunities and the broader socio-economic benefits associated with emerging and future jobs.

B) Quality and learning outcomes

The evolution of the right to education over the past decades has been marked by a significant shift: from a predominant focus on access and universalization toward a growing emphasis on education quality. It is now widely recognized that access alone is insufficient – the right to education is meaningless unless it ensures a quality learning experience. A right to quality education can be read into the original wording of the CADE, where education is defined in Article 1(2) as: 'all types and levels of education, and includes access to education, the standard and quality of education, and the conditions under which it is given' (UNESCO, 1960). This framing places a duty on states to establish and enforce a uniform framework of quality standards applicable across the education system (Special Rapporteur on the Right to Education, 2012).

By 2000, the importance of education quality was already firmly embedded in international commitments. The 1990 Education for All (EFA) agenda highlighted quality as a key concern, and this was further reinforced in the Dakar Framework for Action (2000), which affirmed the commitment of states to provide all children with 'free and compulsory primary education of good quality.' Goal 6 of the Dakar Framework called on countries to improve 'all aspects of the quality of education and ensure excellence so that recognized and measurable learning outcomes are achieved by all, especially in literacy, numeracy and essential life skills.'

However, the early 2000s also revealed a persistent tension between the massification of basic education and the assurance of quality. By 2005, concerns had emerged that the focus on enrolment was overshadowing attention to learning outcomes. The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), in emphasizing universal primary education and the elimination of disparities in primary and secondary schooling, directed political and financial resources toward getting children into school, often without sufficient attention to the quality of education provided (UNESCO, 2005). As a result, many children were attending school but not acquiring foundational skills. Donor agencies and non-governmental organizations largely aligned their efforts with the access-focused MDG target, contributing to a widespread neglect of quality considerations.

With the adoption of the SDGs and the Education 2030 Framework for Action in 2015, the global education agenda explicitly integrated quality dimensions into the education discourse. SDG 4 marked a paradigm shift, committing the international community to 'ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all,' thereby placing learning, equity and quality at the heart of the global education commitment.

While some pitfalls have been identified through critics (Twombly, 2024), one important way to gauge education quality is through student learning outcomes, often measured by test scores. Over the past two decades, a growing number of countries have implemented national learning assessments, helping to track how well students are performing against nationally defined standards (UNESCO, 2015a). This trend has been accompanied by rising participation in international assessments. For example, the OECD's Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), first conducted in 2000 with 43 participating countries, had expanded to include 81 countries by 2022 (Institute of Education Sciences, n.d.). Similar growth has been observed in the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA)'s assessments (n.d.): the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS), and the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS). These assessments have not only broadened their global reach but have also evolved methodologically, by incorporating digital tools, providing increasingly robust longitudinal data to monitor trends in learning outcomes and overall education quality worldwide.

The growing use of learning assessments helped alert the international community to the then emerging 'learning crisis'. By 2013, the term had become common in the language of UNESCO and the World Bank, as it became clear that increased enrolment alone was not enough: an estimated 250 million children could not read, write or count well, whether they had been to school or not (UNESCO, 2013). This recognition underscored the

urgent need empathized in the Incheon Declaration and Framework for Action (2016) - to 'ensure teachers and educators are empowered, adequately recruited, well-trained, professionally qualified, motivated and supported within well-resourced, efficient and effectively governed systems'. It also underscores the need for increased investment in quality learning materials, classrooms, curricula, and learning assessments that enable governments to monitor learning outcomes and drive improvement. Unfortunately, the COVID-19 pandemic and widespread school closures led to even more severe learning losses – particularly among the most vulnerable children, including girls and boys in many regions, socioeconomically disadvantaged students, and those living in rural areas (UNESCO, 2021f; UNICEF et al., 2022).

With this in mind, the Transforming Education Summit was convened to respond to the 'global crisis in education – one of equity and inclusion, quality and relevance' (United Nations, 2022). In a demonstration of hope, states acknowledged the ongoing learning crisis and pledged to take concrete action. Commitments included implementing diagnostic assessments, reaffirming adherence to international benchmarks for domestic financing, and strengthening teacher training and professional development as key determinants of learning quality (UNESCO, 2022b).

Redefining the aims of education

The aims of education are clearly articulated in the international normative framework on the right to education. Education shall be directed to the 'full development of the human personality'; 'promote respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms', 'promote understanding, tolerance and friendship', and develop 'respect for the natural environment' (CADE, Article 5 (1) (a); ICESCR, Article 13 (1); CRC, Article 29 (1)). While these aims remain unchanged, the global context has evolved. Rising social and economic inequalities, climate change, biodiversity loss, environmental degradation, backsliding in democracy values and principles of gender equality, and armed conflicts have all heightened the importance of education's purpose and role in society (UNESCO, 2023b).

Parents' voices

(Member from Make Mother Matter)

> The greatest challenge facing education will be to adapt quickly and inclusively to the profound transformations in the world of work and society, against a backdrop of technological, climatic, and demographic change. Education systems will need to equip learners with stronger critical thinking, creativity, digital literacy, and artificial intelligence skills. Education must integrate sustainability and climate resilience into educational content and practices, as young people will have to live and work in a world marked by ecological transition and environmental crises.
>
> Annick Chaffa
> (Translated from French)

The International Commission on the Futures of Education (2021) has called for a 'new social contract for education,' grounded in a shared vision of education's public purposes. Its landmark 2021 report proposes renewing education along key axes: organizing pedagogy around cooperation, collaboration, and solidarity; fostering intellectual, social, and moral capacities; emphasizing ecological, intercultural, and interdisciplinary learning; and promoting active citizenship and democratic participation.

On this basis, the integration of Human Rights Education (HRE), Global Citizenship Education (GCED), and Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) become vital components of the right to education. UNESCO's revised Recommendation on Education for Peace, Human Rights and Sustainable Development (2023f), which includes commitments to international understanding, cooperation, fundamental freedoms, and global citizenship, reflects this expanded vision.

Learner happiness and well-being

Another notable shift in the global education agenda is the growing emphasis on learners' happiness and well-being. It is increasingly recognized that schools should nurture not only academic achievement but also the physical, mental, and emotional health of students. They should offer essential protection and health-related services, including professional mental-health counselling. Education, viewed holistically, must contribute to both individual and collective well-being.

The UNESCO Happy Schools Initiative, launched in 2014, has played a key role in encouraging governments to prioritize happiness as a central aim of education. This initiative is grounded in the belief that schools are more than just instructional spaces – they are vibrant social and community hubs. As microcosms of society, schools should promote not only cognitive development, but also students' social, emotional, physical, and moral growth (UNESCO, 2024j).

This movement towards well-being has also brought renewed attention to the issue of school-based violence and bullying, including gender-based violence and the rising threat of cyberbullying. In the 11th Consultation on the Convention against Discrimination in Education, 24 countries identified violence as a significant barrier to achieving quality education. In response, many governments are advancing policy and legislative solutions. For example, Sweden mandates that all forms of offensive treatment, bullying, and discrimination are prohibited in schools and pre-schools under national law. Similarly, Italy has taken robust steps to address cyberbullying: a 2017 law offers legal protection to minors, while 2021 guidelines require schools to develop an internal e-policy, integrate it into broader school frameworks, and enhance collaboration with families and law enforcement in addressing online abuse (UNESCO, Forthcoming b).

Youth voices
(SDG 4 Youth and Student Network)

> "Looking ahead, the biggest challenge will be ensuring that education systems become equitable ecosystems of care […] To uphold the right to education in this new reality, schools must evolve from being sites of academic instruction to being spaces of safety, healing, and human connection.
>
> Richa Gupta, CEO & Co-Founder, Labhya

Beyond cyberbullying, strong legal protection against all forms of violence in education, including corporal punishment, is essential to ensure safe learning environments free from violence and discrimination (UNESCO, 2025j). Such legal protection forms the foundation for prevention, accountability, and support mechanisms. According to UNESCO's HerAtlas, as of early 2025, only 17% of countries provide legal protection against corporal punishment as well as physical, psychological, and sexual violence in education, while an additional 51% offer protection against at least one of these forms of violence.

C) Formal recognition of the lifelong learning perspective

Recognition of education as a lifelong right is increasingly embedded in international discourse. In fact, the right to education has never been limited, either in theory or in law, to children or to primary education alone. International instruments such as the ICESCR, the CADE, and others, affirm that the right to education applies to all individuals. Over the past 25 years, there has been growing clarity around what this right entails at different ages and stages of life.

The term 'lifelong learning' first appears in a legally binding international instrument in the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) (UNGA, 2006). Article 24(1) affirms that states must ensure inclusive education at all levels and throughout life. The concept is also included in the Global Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education (UNESCO, 2019c), which defines lifelong learning as encompassing all formal, non-formal, and informal learning across the lifespan, aimed at developing human capacities, knowledge, skills, and competencies. This Convention also refers explicitly to non-traditional learning modes. From a regional standpoint, the African Youth Charter recognized in 2006 the 'value of multiple forms of education, including

formal, non-formal, informal, distance learning and life-long learning, to meet the diverse needs of young people' (African Union, 2006).

The 2021 report of the Commission on the Futures of Education propelled the idea that a 'foundation principle of the social contract for education […] is the right to education for all throughout life'. It cautions against narrowly expanding the traditional school model to all age groups and instead calls for recognizing diverse forms, spaces, and times of learning. This vision demands the deliberate design of lifelong learning ecosystems, including learning in the biosphere, widening our conception of where learning happens beyond human-centred spaces and institutions, including city streets, rural paths, gardens, wilderness, farmlands, forests, deserts, lakes, wetlands, oceans and all others that are sites of more-than-human life.

Therefore, it is important to recognize that, although the term 'lifelong learning' is often associated with adult education, it should be understood as affirming the right to education as a lifelong entitlement, 'from cradle to grave' and across various life settings and for different purposes. This perspective necessitates acknowledging the right to education from birth, including for very young children before formal schooling begins. It also encompasses learning opportunities that occur alongside traditional education, through informal and non-formal means, recognizing that children learn not only in schools but also within families, communities, and, increasingly, in digital environments.

A lifelong learning perspective also reflects a more integrated and holistic approach to human rights. Adult education is no longer viewed merely as a means for individuals to catch up on basic skills; rather, it is increasingly recognized as intrinsically linked to a broader set of rights considering rapid societal and economic changes. These include the right to work, by supporting employability and economic security; the right to information, by enhancing individuals' capacity to access, understand, and critically engage with knowledge; and the right to participate in cultural life, by fostering inclusion, identity, and self-expression. Lifelong learning thus plays a vital role in enabling people to exercise their civil, political, economic, social, and cultural rights throughout their lives, contributing to more inclusive and equitable societies (Meyer-Bisch, 2025).

The evolving understanding of adult education – from a focus on second-chance education and literacy to a broader, lifelong learning perspective – is reflected in the Fifth Global Report on Adult Learning and Education (UNESCO UIL, 2022a), which centred on citizenship education. The report highlights the vital role of adult education in empowering individuals to drive change in their communities and societies. It underscores the importance of citizenship education in addressing contemporary global challenges, including large-scale displacement due to conflict or environmental crises, climate change, digital transformation, and the need for active democratic participation. Notably, the report found that approximately 74% of countries have adopted policies related to citizenship education for adults.

The 2015 adoption of SDG4, with its call to 'promote lifelong learning opportunities for all' elevated learning outside of formal education levels and made explicit its importance in the context of the right to education. More recently, the adoption of the Marrakech Framework for Action at CONFINTEA VII in 2022 saw representatives of almost 150 countries committed to translating the vision of the right to learning beyond schooling into a reality, with special attention to adult learning and education (ALE). The framework emphasizes inclusion and access for disadvantaged groups, while advancing the professionalization of personnel and the strengthening of quality standards in the adult learning sector (2022).

The consultative process underpinning the Initiative on the Evolving Right to Education similarly highlighted the need to build a common accepted understanding of lifelong learning in order to shift government priorities (UNESCO, 2023b). The Special Rapporteur on the Right to Education has argued the term 'lifelong learning' can be interpreted through commitments made by the Incheon Declaration. These include equitable and expanded access to quality TVET and higher education and research, the provision of flexible learning pathways, robust systems of recognition, validation and accreditation of knowledge, skills and competences acquired through non-formal and informal education (Special Rapporteur on the Right to Education, 2016). The Special Rapporteur on the Right to Education has further reaffirmed that the right to education is a right to lifelong learning (Special Rapporteur on the Right to Education, 2023).

To ensure that the right to education is respected, protected, and fulfilled at all stages of life, a range of guarantees must be in place. The UNESCO Recommendation on Adult Learning and Education (RALE) (UNESCO, 2015b) outlines some of the guarantees that should be in place to ensure adult education, including 'many learning opportunities for equipping adults with literacy and basic skills; for continuing training and professional development; and for active citizenship, through what is variously known as community, popular, or liberal education' (Paragraph 3). Continuing training and professional development can include recent trends such as the provision of micro-credentials and the use

of learning vouchers, entitlements, or accounts (see Box 3 below). There are strong arguments that foundational education for adults who did not complete formal schooling must also extend beyond numeracy and literacy and include digital literacy (see section 2(D)).

Equally important are inclusive and high-quality TVET, flexible learning pathways, and strong national frameworks for skills recognition and accreditation, including national qualifications frameworks (NFQs). The right to education must also be realized from the earliest stages of life, through quality ECCE starting in infancy.

One concrete initiative widening opportunities for lifelong learning is UNESCO's Global Network of Learning Cities: a growing community of 356 cities across 79 countries, making lifelong learning a reality for more than 390 million people (UNESCO UIL, n.d.). Lifelong learning happens in libraries, workplaces, parks and other public spaces, and as urban populations continue to grow, it is crucial that cities are designed and built to offer learning opportunities and cultural experiences to enrich life from childhood to old age.

To guarantee the right to education throughout life, many countries have recently undertaken to include explicit mention of lifelong learning within national constitutional, legal and policy frameworks.

Box 3: Explicit mention of lifelong learning within national legal framework

Lao People's Democratic Republic: The Prime Minister's Decree on Lifelong Learning (2020) 'aims to enable all Lao citizens to access learning opportunities to advance their level of education, knowledge, vocational and professional capabilities, to develop sound morals and ethics, and be ready to contribute to regional and international integration and national socio-economic development'. It outlines regulations in three main domains: teaching and learning delivery (emphasizing flexible provision across diverse contexts); assessment, recognition, certification, equivalence and transfer (strengthening permeability between formal, non-formal, and informal learning systems) and quality assurance (setting national standards to ensure consistency and credibility across programmes).

Japan: The Basic Act on Education 2006 incorporates the concept of lifelong learning as a principle of education. Article 3 states: 'Society shall be made to allow all citizens to continue to learn throughout their lives, on all occasions and in all places, and apply the outcomes of lifelong learning appropriately to refine themselves and lead a fulfilling life.'

Data sources: UNESCO UIL 2023b and 2023c

The Transforming Education Summit in 2022 marked a global endorsement of a lifelong and holistic vision for education. It defined transformative education as one that fosters the full development of every learner throughout their life, enabling them to pursue their aspirations and contribute meaningfully to their families, communities, and societies. Transformative education empowers individuals to (UNSG, 2022):

- **Learn to learn** – acquiring foundational skills upon which all further learning is built;
- **Learn to live together** – fostering respect for diversity, global solidarity, and active citizenship, and linking the right to education with other human rights;
- **Learn to do** – equipping learners with skills for a rapidly evolving world of work; and
- **Learn to be** – nurturing the values and capacities needed to lead a fulfilling and meaningful life.

Box 4: Lifelong learning entitlements, vouchers, learning account systems

The concept of lifelong learning entitlements (LLLEs) has gained prominence as a valuable approach to providing individuals with rights to education and training that are not tied to specific employment. This approach has become increasingly relevant in the context of non-standard employment arrangements and fragmented career pathways. In 2023, UNESCO conducted a desktop study across 13 countries, identifying a diverse array of mechanisms for designing and implementing LLLEs to support professional development.

A prominent example is **France**'s Compte Personnel de Formation (CPF, Personal Training Account), a cumulative and universal entitlement to continuing education and training available to all economically active citizens. In 2018, the CPF underwent a major reform, transitioning from a time-based system (credits awarded in hours) to a monetized model. This shift introduced greater flexibility and established a more demand-driven framework. Under the current system, individuals receive €500 per full-time year of work, up to a ceiling of €5,000. For workers with lower qualifications, the annual amount increases to €800, with a maximum accumulation of €8,000.

In the **Republic of Korea**, the Individual Learning Card, introduced in 2008, was replaced in 2020 by the National Learning Card (NLC). The NLC provides a base subsidy of 3 million KRW, with an additional 2 million KRW available based on an assessment conducted at job centre. Participants are required to co-finance part of their training costs.

Singapore's SkillsFuture Credit (SFC), launched in 2016, is frequently cited as a pioneering LLLE initiative. All Singaporeans aged 25 and above receive an opening credit of SGD $500, which can be used to offset the cost of a wide range of approved training programmes. The SFC is designed to promote a culture of lifelong learning and to support continuous skills upgrading across the workforce.

Source: UNESCO, forthcoming a.

D) Gains in gender equality and inclusion

Since 2000, the global education agenda has undergone a profound transformation, with gender equality and inclusion rising to the forefront of international commitments to realize the right to education. This shift reflects a growing consensus that education must serve as both a right in itself and an enabler of broader human rights, capable of addressing structural inequalities and enabling full participation in society.

The centrality of gender equality and inclusion has been increasingly embedded in global education frameworks, regional declarations, and national education policies. The adoption of the CRPD in 2006, which has now reached 193 ratifications (UNTC, n.d.), clearly marked the global commitment to inclusive education. Article 24 of the Convention recognizes the right of persons with disabilities to inclusive, quality, and free education on an equal basis with others, thus positioning inclusive education as a legal obligation under international human rights law. While often associated with ensuring the right to education for people with disabilities, since the Salamanca Statement of 2004, the concept of inclusion has broadened to extend beyond disability and to embrace all forms of diversity among learners.

By 2015, the transition from the MDGs to the SDGs was a key turning point for the principle of inclusive education, introducing a holistic vision that had a heightened focus on achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls through SDG 5.

Reflecting this global agenda, UN organizations have contributed to shaping a robust and coordinated international framework that supports countries in fulfilling their obligations under international human rights law and advancing gender equality in and through education. UNESCO has designated gender equality as one of its global priorities since 2007 and adopted the

2019-2025 strategy for gender equality in and through education (UNESCO, 2019b). It focuses on strengthening education systems to be gender-transformative and to promote gender equality and the empowerment of girls and women through education. Through its normative work and technical cooperation, UNESCO has supported Member States in reviewing legal frameworks, adopting gender-responsive education sector plans, and strengthening the capacity of education systems to identify and overcome gender-based barriers to learning.

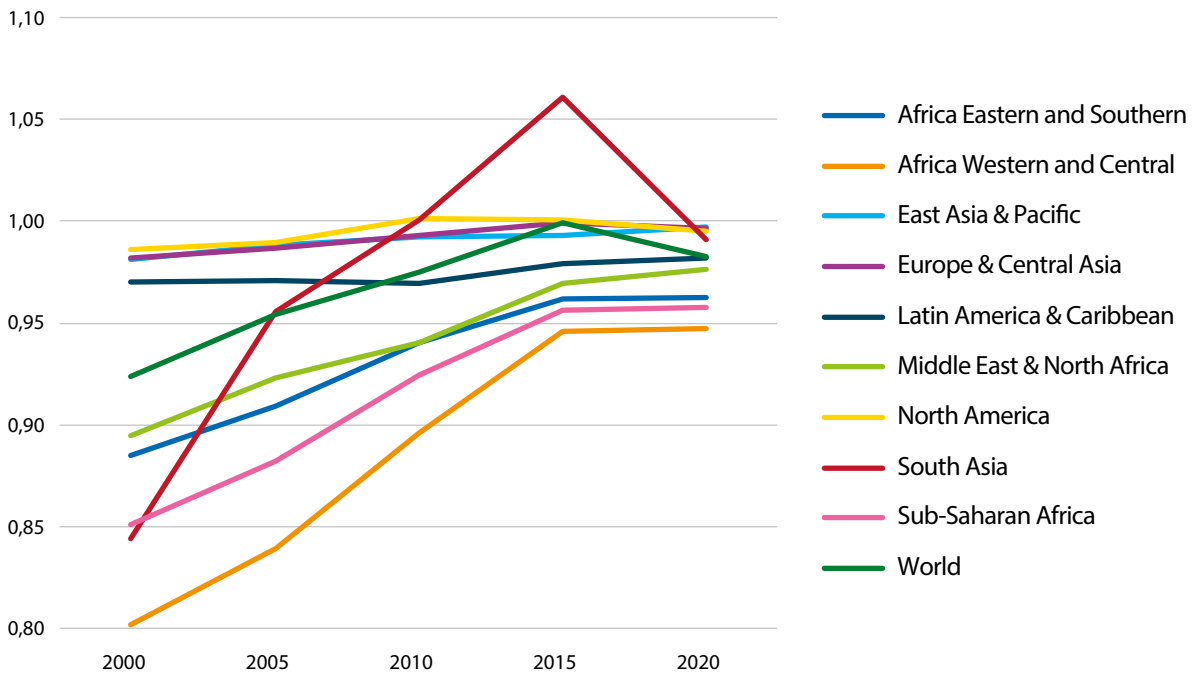
Other entities, such as UN Women, have been instrumental in promoting gender equality across all sectors, including education, by supporting governments in implementing national gender equality strategies and producing global reports that track progress and gaps.[1] Under its Gender Action Plan 2022–2025, UNICEF (UNICEF, 2021b) has focused on girls' education by supporting gender-responsive education systems and equitable education access for all and adolescent girls' leadership, learning and skills.

Other entities, such as the Global Partnership for Education (GPE), also contributed to advance this global agenda by making gender equality a core priority, requiring partner countries to conduct gender analyses and integrate gender equality into education sector plans, and dedicating funding to gender-responsive approaches, notably through the Girls' Education Accelerator.

Progress toward gender parity in education

Over the past two decades, notable progress has been made toward achieving gender parity in access to education. In 2020, the gender parity index[2] (GPI) for primary education was close to 1.00 globally (UNESCO UIS, n.d.) (see Figure 5 below), indicating near-equal participation of girls and boys.

Figure 5. School enrolment, primary (gross), gender parity index

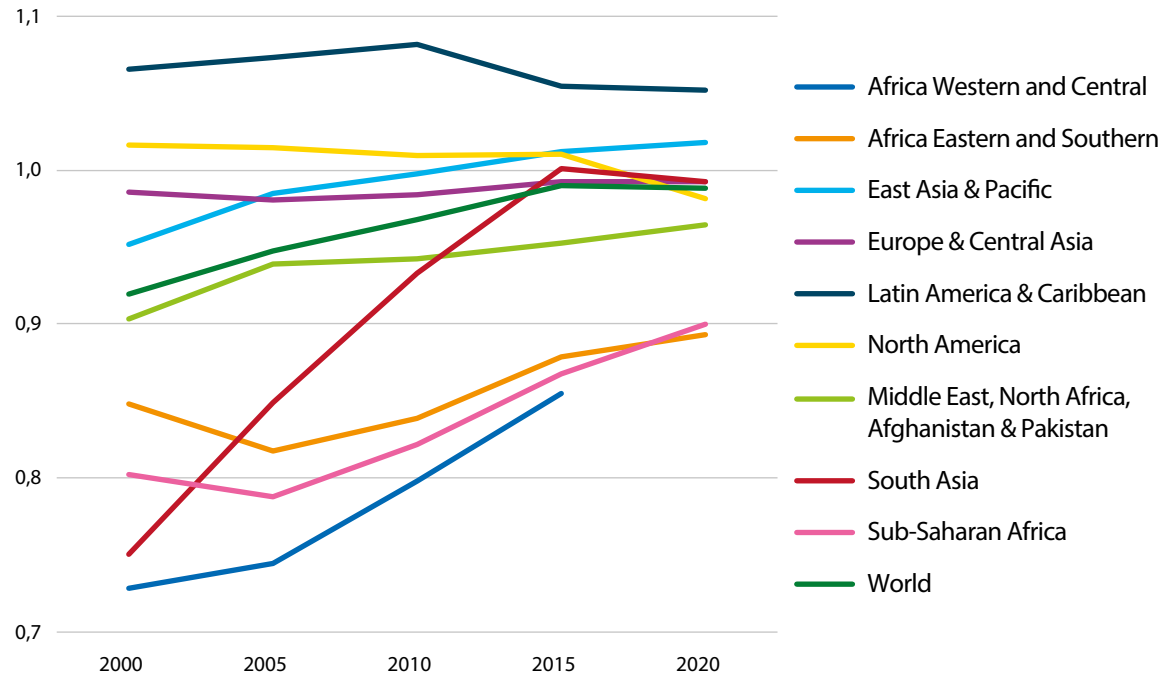


Data source: UIS data retrieved through World Bank. CC BY-4.0

In secondary education (see figure 6), disparities have also narrowed (UNESCO UIS, n.d.), although challenges remain, to the detriment of boys or girls depending on the context, particularly in low-income countries, where according to UIS data (n.d.), the GPI rose from 0.7 to 0.8 between 2000 and 2020.

1 See for example: Gender Equality: Women's Rights in Review 25 Years after Beijing, 2020 (UN Women, 2020).
2 The Gender Parity Index (GPI) indicates parity between girls and boys. A GPI of less than 1 suggests girls are more disadvantaged than boys in learning opportunities and a GPI of greater than 1 suggests the opposite. Eliminating gender disparities in education would help increase the status and capabilities of women.

Figure 6. School enrolment, secondary (gross), gender parity index



Data source: UIS data retrieved through World Bank. CC BY-4.0

The gains in gender parity are being reinforced by a broader understanding of what true gender equality in – and through - education requires. The pursuit of gender equality can no longer be limited to access and participation alone, it must also address quality, social norms and learning outcomes, alongside teacher preparation and pedagogies, curriculum, educational materials and the safety and inclusiveness of learning environments. Increasingly, attention is also turning to intersectional barriers, recognizing that learners who face multiple forms of disadvantage – such as being both a girl and living in poverty, or growing up in a rural location – need targeted support to ensure their right to education is fully realized (UNESCO and UNESCO UIS, 2024).

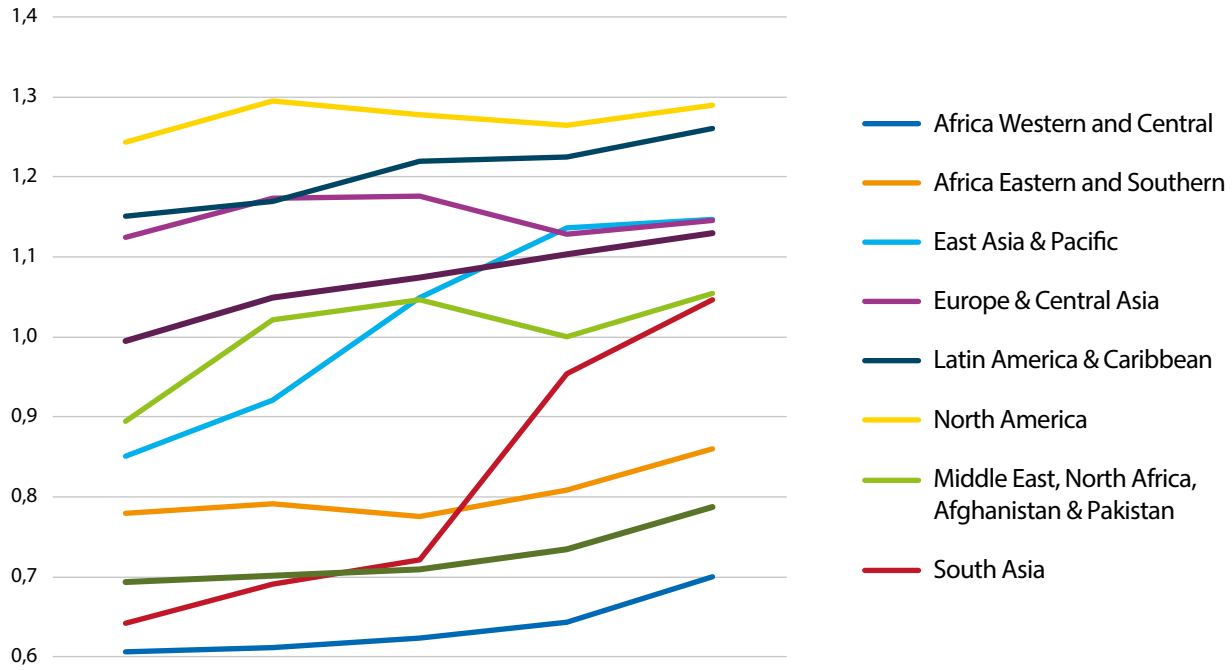
Youth voices

(SDG 4 Youth and Student Network)

> […] From our perspective, globally, the most significant achievement has been the inclusion of women in all levels of education. Undoubtedly, it has increased the formal access of girls, adolescents and young women especially in state-sponsored spaces that are 100% free […] However, the most important challenge […] has been to start talking about how to guarantee the effective belonging of women within educational spaces.
>
> Ljubica Fuentes, Executive Director, Fundación Ciudadanas del Mundo. Co-chair of inclusive and equitable education of Youth and Students Network of UNESCO

As for tertiary education, the number of students enrolled in higher education has more than doubled between 2000 and 2023, with 100 million in 2000 compared to 264 million in 2023. Regarding gender parity, women are now outnumbering men (see figure 7). In 2000, 49 million women were enrolled in tertiary education; by 2023, that number had reached 137 million, showing evidence of progress in gender representation in higher education (UNESCO, 2025g). This trend is observed across all regions of the world, with the share of female students continuing to rise since 2015.

Figure 7. School enrolment, tertiary (gross), gender parity index



Data source: UIS data retrieved through World Bank. CC BY-4.0

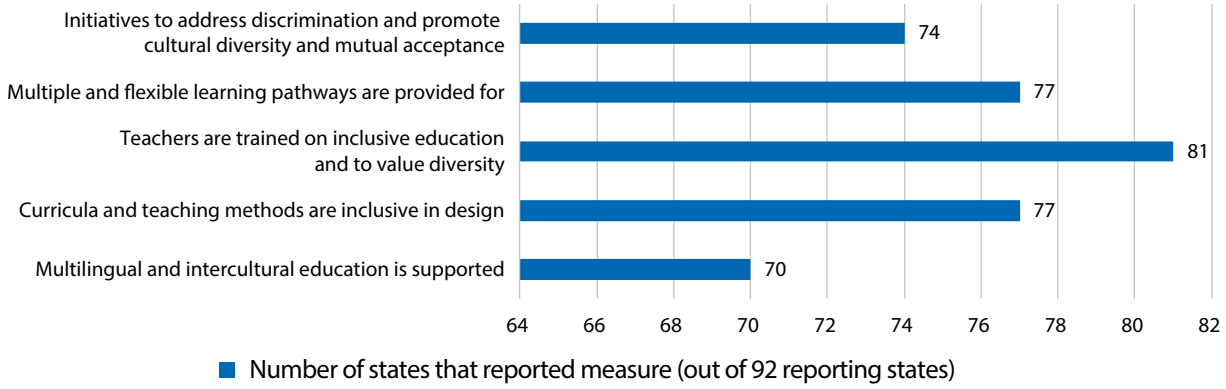
While many countries have achieved meaningful progress toward gender equality in education, in some contexts the situation is alarming. For instance, since the takeover by the de facto authorities in August 2021, Afghanistan has become the only country in the world where girls and women are formally prohibited from accessing education beyond the primary level. Economic instability has also forced many boys, particularly in rural areas, to leave school for income-generating activities. These restrictions have severe and lasting consequences, including increased early and forced marriage, loss of learning and skills development, intergenerational cycles of poverty, and the erosion of the country's human capital and future prospects. (UNESCO, 2025b). Continued advocacy and collective mobilization are essential to ensure that the fundamental and inalienable right to education – for every girl and every boy – is upheld everywhere.

Inclusive education as a guiding principle

Inclusion has emerged as a core principle guiding the right to education since 2000, reinforcing the commitment to ensure that no learner is left behind. The Salamanca Statement (1994) laid the conceptual foundation for inclusive education, which has been reinforced by the adoption of the CRPD twelve years later, and the formulation of the SDGs 20 years later. Over the past two decades, the notion of inclusion has expanded considerably, moving beyond access for learners with disabilities to encompass the full spectrum of diversity within education systems. This shift was crystallized in the UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities' General Comment No. 4 (2016), which redefined inclusive education as a systemic transformation, requiring schools not just to admit all learners, but to adapt in ways that respect, value, and celebrate their differences.

This evolution reflects a deeper trend: the move away from segregated education models towards learner-centred systems that recognize inclusion as a benefit for all, by fostering diversity, mutual respect, and equity. Evidence from the 11th Consultation on the Convention against Discrimination in Education underscores this momentum, with the vast majority of reporting states highlighting legislative and policy reforms to strengthen inclusive education frameworks (80 and 81 countries out of 92, respectively, see figure 8 below) (UNESCO, forthcoming b). The 2024 conference marking the 30th anniversary of the Salamanca Statement reaffirmed this trajectory, calling once again for the radical redesign of education systems so that they accommodate every learner, regardless of physical, intellectual, social, emotional, or linguistic characteristics.

Figure 8. Measures taken by states to ensure inclusive education, as reported in the 11th Consultation



Data source: UNESCO, forthcoming b.

Minority and indigenous rights and multilingual education

Efforts to advance inclusive education have also strengthened recognition of the rights of minority and Indigenous Peoples learners. Language of instruction remains a key barrier to inclusion, as many children are taught in a language they do not speak at home (UNESCO, 2025i). The CADE (1960), recognizes in article 5 the right of minorities to carry out their own educational activities, including the maintenance of schools and the use of, or teaching in, their own language(s). Building on the UN Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities (UNGA, 1992), the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples was passed in 2007 (UNGA, 2007) and affirms the right of Indigenous Peoples to establish and control their own education systems and institutions providing education in their own languages, in ways consistent with their cultural methods of teaching and learning (Article 14(1)). The UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNGA, 1992) further reaffirms that all indigenous peoples have the right to all levels and forms of education of the state without discrimination (Article 14(2)). Moreover, states have the obligation to take effective measures to ensure their access to an education in their own culture and provided in their own language (Article 14(3)). In response, several countries have expanded mother-tongue-based multilingual education, especially at the early grades, to enhance learning outcomes and reduce dropout (UNESCO, 2025l). However, despite increasing primary enrolment globally, marginalized groups, such as Indigenous Peoples and minorities, continue to be left behind (UNESCO, 2020d). The Special Rapporteur on minority issues (2025), recommended that states 'should support minority-led non-governmental schools, based on human rights principles, enabling them to offer free and culturally relevant education aimed at preserving and promoting the cultural, linguistic and religious identities of minorities'.

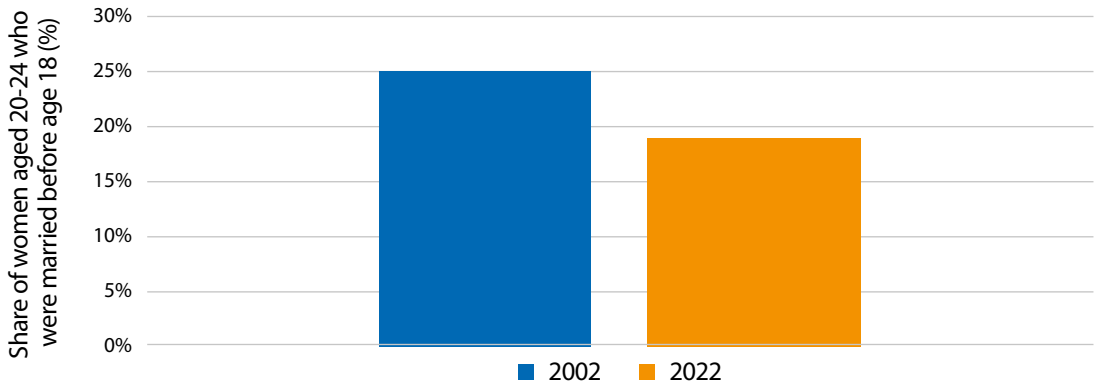
UNESCO's 'Languages Matter' report (UNESCO, 2025i) reaffirms that multilingual education (MLE) improves learning outcomes, enhances access and inclusion and supports sustainable development. UNESCO also advocates for ECCE to be delivered in children's home languages, recognizing its crucial role in supporting emotional well-being, cognitive development, school readiness, and inclusive learning (UNESCO, 2021b). The importance of mother tongue-based multilingual education, and the use of the mother tongue as the language of instruction, was further reinforced by the Tashkent Declaration and Commitments to Action for Transforming ECCE (UNESCO, 2022j). UNESCO's leadership during the International Decade of Indigenous Languages (2022–2032) reinforces these principles, emphasizing culturally-relevant MLE as a key mechanism for achieving SDG 4 by 2030.

Interlinked gains in human rights: child marriage and child labour

The realization of the right to education has advanced in parallel with progress in related human rights, particularly those that have disproportionate effects on girls' and boys' ability to enter and complete their schooling. Since 2000, the world has seen great reductions in barriers such as child marriage and child labour, two practices that have historically curtailed children's educational opportunities. According to UNICEF (2023), the share of women aged 20–24 who were married before age 18 fell from 25% in 2002 to 19% in 2022, representing millions

more girls able to pursue their education (see figure 9 below). While the pace of change remains insufficient to meet the global target to end child marriage by 2030, progress is clearly moving in the right direction.

Figure 9. Share of women aged 20-24 who were married before age 18 overtime (worldwide)



Data source: UNICEF, 2023. Available under CC BY-NC 3.0 IGO.

Adolescent pregnancy has also declined in all regions since 2000, with global rates falling by roughly one-third (Our World in Data, 2024). Still, every year an estimated 21 million girls aged 15–19 in low- and middle-income countries become pregnant (WHO, 2025), a risk compounded by child marriage and limited access to the information and resources needed to make informed decisions about sexual and reproductive health. Early pregnancy restricts educational prospects, particularly in countries where national laws or policy frameworks prohibit or limit access to education for pregnant girls (UNESCO, 2022i), thereby reinforcing cycles of poverty and inequality that can extend across generations.

There has been a significant decline in the prevalence of female genital mutilation or cutting. In East Africa, the prevalence for children aged 0 to 14 declined from 71% in 1995 to 8% in 2016, and in North Africa, from 58% in 1990 to 14% in 2015 (Kandala et al., 2018). Aside from avoiding the immediate and long-term health risks associated with the practice, this decline also reduces the likelihood of child marriage, which directly interrupts schooling.

Child labour has also decreased dramatically, opening more opportunities for children to learn and thrive. Globally, the number of children engaged in child labour fell from 245.5 million in 2000 to 137.6 million in 2024, with prevalence dropping from 16% to 7.8% (ILO and UNICEF, 2025). Encouragingly, every region has made gains since 2020, demonstrating the impact of sustained global and national efforts. Boys remain over-represented in child labour at every age, with 9% of boys aged 5 to 17 compared to 7% of girls of the same age engaged in child labour, but gender difference in child labour closes when household chores are considered (ILO and UNICEF, 2025).

E) Education financing

Over the past quarter of a century, states' obligations and commitments to education financing have been more clearly articulated, recognizing that adequate, equitable, and efficient financing is essential to fully realize the right to education.

Under international law, a state is required to finance education to 'the maximum of its available resources' (ICESCR, Article 2 (1); CRC, Article 4), a concept that has developed over time. 'Available resources' is now thought to encompass monetary and non-monetary resources, such as natural, human, technological, organizational, informational, and administrative resources (International Bar Association's Human Rights Institute, 2017). Moreover, treaty bodies and special procedures increasingly interpret this obligation not merely as utilizing existing funds, but as an active duty to mobilize resources through their preservation and expansion. This obligation can be fulfilled through various channels, such as progressive taxation of individuals and corporate taxation (Archer and Muntasim, 2020).

A strong consensus has emerged around this obligation. In the 2005 Jakarta Declaration, states reaffirmed that ensuring the right to education requires sustained and adequate financing from states and the international community (UNESCO and the Republic of Indonesia, 2005). Milestones such as the 2015 Incheon Declaration and the 2021 Paris Declaration on Investing for the Futures of Education, established concrete benchmarks: allocating at least 4–6% of GDP and/or 15–20% of total public expenditure to education and committing 0.7% of donor Gross National Income to official development assistance (ODA) (UNESCO, 2015c; UNESCO, 2021). The TES Call to Action 2022 reaffirmed the ODA figure of 0.7% and called for increasing the share of aid directed to education, and for concessional loans and grants to education, to represent 15–20% of donor portfolios, particularly in countries where needs are greatest.

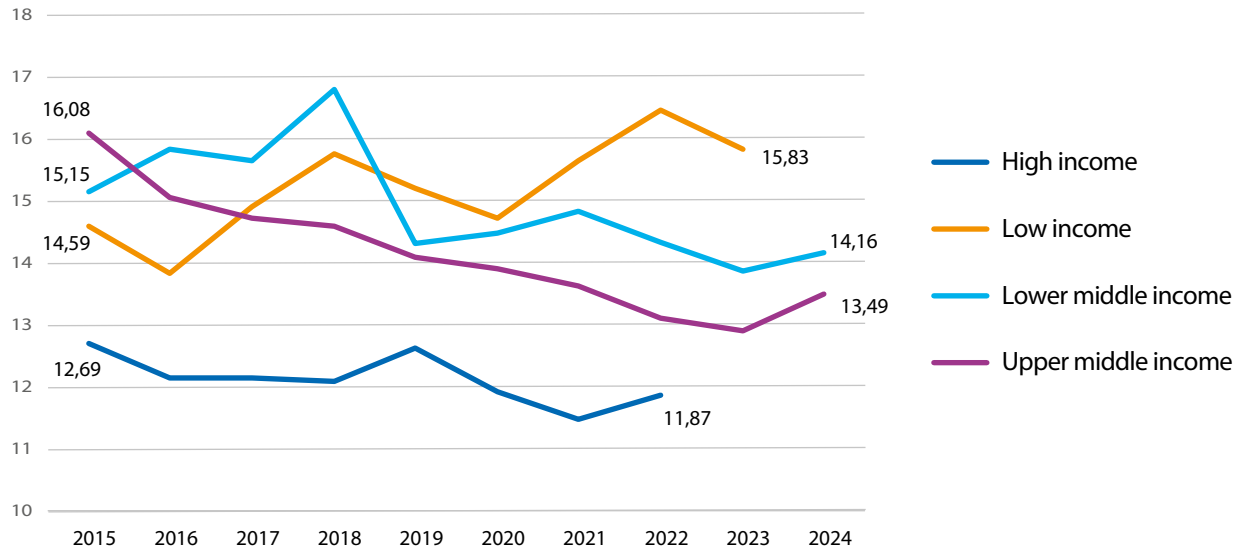
Several countries have taken concrete legal steps to protect education financing in law. For instance, Indonesia's Constitution (1945) mandates allocating a minimum of 20% of the State Budget and Regional Budgets to fulfil the needs of national education (article 31. (4)). Similarly, Brazil's Constitution (1988) requires the federal government to allocate not less than 18% of its tax revenues to education, and states, the Federal District and municipalities at least 25% (article 212). Also, Panama recently amended its Organic Law on Education (2023) to increase public spending and investment in education from a minimum 6% to 7% of GDP starting in 2024 (article 266). Moreover, multiple states legally committed to ensure financing education in an equitable manner by focusing on marginalized and vulnerable communities. For example, Equatorial Guinea's General Law on Education (2005) provides that the state must give full effectiveness to the principle of equal opportunities in education notably 'by granting aid, scholarships, grants or loans that are fundamentally necessary to students who need it and lack the necessary economic means' (article 3.4). Likewise in Bulgaria, according to the Pre-School and School Education Act (2016), the state must spend its budget to support equal access including through pupil scholarships and transportation of children and pupils (articles 280 and 283).

Following the 2022 Transforming Education Summit, the Call to Action urged stronger national and international commitments to 'invest more, more equitably and more efficiently in education'. These appeals were reiterated in the Fortaleza Declaration at the 2024 Global Education Meeting, which highlighted the persistent inadequacy of financial resources allocated to education, further strained by debt servicing (UNESCO and Ministry of Education of Brazil, 2024). They were also echoed in the 2025 Sevilla Commitment, adopted at the Fourth International Conference on Financing for Development (United Nations, 2025).

> 'Education ought to be one of the most powerful equalising forces in any society, but when provision is fragmented and stratified by the ability of parents to pay, it becomes a way of entrenching inequality and injustice.'
>
> Archer, 2025, available under CC BY 4.0

Encouragingly, over the past decade total education spending by governments, households and donors has increased from US$4.7 trillion in 2010 to US$5.8 trillion in 2022, with governments contributing nearly three-quarters of all education expenditure (74.6% in 2022). Nevertheless, government spending on education has risen in lower-income countries since 2015, it has declined in other income groups (see figure 10). Due to this disinvesting trend, households are forced to bear the financial burden, especially in low and lower-middle income countries where household contributions accounted for respectively 25.8% and 43.9% in 2022 (World Bank and UNESCO, 2024).

Figure 10. Expenditure on education as a percentage of total government expenditure, by country income group, 2015-2024



Data source: UIS data (n.d.). Available under CC BY-SA 4.0
Note: no data is available for high-income countries in 2023 and 2024 and for low-income countries in 2024.

Despite this progress, stark disparities remain in domestic expenditures. The annual global financing gap is estimated at US$97 billion (UNESCO, 2023c). Approximately 34% of low- and lower-middle-income countries fail to meet the SDG 4 financing benchmarks (Inter-agency Task Force on Financing for Development and UNESCO, 2025). This shortfall directly affects per-learner spending: low-income countries allocate just US$55 per student annually, compared with US$8,543 in high-income countries (World Bank and UNESCO, 2024).

Moreover, growing global debt puts a severe constraint on securing sustainable and sufficient funds for education. Global public debt reached US$102 trillion in 2024, with stark regional disparities: developing countries account for 31% of this total. According to UNCTAD Secretariat calculations, based on the IMF World Economic Outlook, public debt in developing countries is growing twice as fast as in developed countries. Today, 2.7 billion people live in countries that spend more on interest payments than on education (UNCTAD, 2025).

In low-income countries, aid remains a critical source of education financing, covering 17% of public education expenditure, and in some cases up to half. While overall aid to education has increased since 2016, the volume of programmable aid has stagnated, and grant-based revenues in parts of Africa and Asia have declined (UNESCO, 2025f). Aid is also not reaching those most in need: only one fifth is directed to low-income countries, and the share allocated to basic education has fallen from 40% in 2016 to 30% in 2023 (UNESCO, 2025f). Since 2005, the proportion of official development assistance allocated to education has fallen significantly, dropping below 6% by 2023 (UNESCO IIEP, 2025). According to the latest projections, aid education is expected to fall by 25% between 2023 and 2027 (UNESCO, 2025f).

In the face of these challenges, the international community is exploring ways to ensure sustainable financing of education. The High-Level Steering Committee focusing on financing for education has recommended measures such as tax harmonization and justice; debt relief and management; debt swaps; smart aid financing; special drawing rights; and public sector wage constraints (SDG4 High-Level Steering Committee, 2024). Although there is no universally accepted definition of 'innovative financing for education', the concept generally refers to non-traditional mechanisms that mobilize additional resources and emphasize results-based financing (Luana Marotta and Mercedes Mateo Diaz, 2025). While innovative financing holds potential, it also carries risks for the right to education, notably through unintentionally displacing traditional funding sources or exacerbating inequalities by excluding marginalized communities in pursuit of financial returns (Marina Dreux Frotté, 2025).

Section 2: How contextual drivers are shaping the evolution of the right to education

The evolution of the right to education hinges on external forces in the global landscape, creating differing pressures on education to remain relevant and resilient. From demographic shifts to the changing nature of the world of work, technological advancements and geopolitical dynamics and human mobility, the world is changing at a record pace. This section examines some of these contextual drivers and looks to the systemic changes happening within education – such as the evolution of the role of the teacher and the rise of private actors in the field of education – and considers the challenges that these bring to the protection and fulfilment of the right to education.

A) Demographic shifts

Building an education system that effectively guarantees the right to education throughout life requires a clear understanding of the demographic changes already reshaping the world. While global population growth has long been recognized, recent projections give a more balanced picture of what lies ahead. In 2024, the world's population stood at 8.3 billion and is expected to peak at around 10.3 billion in the mid-2080s (UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2024). This trajectory underscores the need for education systems that are well-prepared, not only to expand capacity, but also to respond to the intersecting challenges of population pressure and environmental stress. Education must play a central role in equipping individuals to become conscientious and responsible citizens, capable of addressing complex global challenges such as climate change, food insecurity, and broader disruption.

Furthermore, demographic shifts also mean examining population changes at each life stage. In almost every part of the world, the share of children in the population is expected to decrease. However, by the mid-2050s, more than a third of the world's children will live in four countries: China, India, Nigeria and Pakistan, and just 10 countries will be home to half of the world's children (UNICEF, 2024b). In countries with declining fertility rates, and a smaller share of children, there is potential to increase investment per child and make improvements in education quality, while supporting adults' reskilling and upskilling. It is critical that education for children and the provision of lifelong learning opportunities for all remain a political and budgetary priority, and safeguards must be in place to prevent funding cuts or neglect of this fundamental right.

Some countries will experience a 'youth bulge' – a demographic situation in which a large share of the country's population is between the ages of fifteen and twenty-four. This trend is often pronounced in developing countries, where infant mortality is declining, though fertility rates remain high (Lin, 2012). These large youth cohorts are in the process of transitioning from basic education to secondary and higher levels, requiring expanded access to learning opportunities at these levels as well as support for their successful integration into the workforce. It is critical that high-growth countries are prepared to invest now in teachers, infrastructure, vocational programmes, and inclusive policies for marginalized and vulnerable youth so that this demographic wave can be transformed into a demographic dividend, a force for economic growth and development.

At the same time, many regions are facing an aging population. This has significant implications for the right to education over the life course. An ageing population has various implications: it can lead to a rise in the dependency ratio, calculated by the number of children and older adults relative to the working-age population. According to the OECD, by 2060 the working-age population in OECD countries will have declined by 8% (OECD, 2025b). However, in contrast, dependency ratios are projected to decline in regions like West and Central Africa and Eastern and Southern Africa between 2025 and 2050, offering potential for a demographic dividend (UNICEF, 2024b).

In ageing societies, lifelong learning takes on great significance. The right to education is no longer tied primarily to acquiring professional skills, it increasingly

encompasses learning for its own sake and an opportunity to acquire foundational skills such as literacy for those who did not have access earlier in life. Learning in old age is closely related to the rights to health, culture, information, and removed from the societal pressure for productivity.

Engaging in learning helps older adults remain active and healthy, maintain cognitive abilities and preserve independence (EAEA, 2024). As the World Health Organization notes, autonomy is a core component of well-being for the elderly, and is heavily dependent on access to services, such as education and life skills, that allow people to age with dignity and integrity (WHO, 2016). Participation in learning supports the mental and emotional well-being of older adults, particularly those in vulnerable situations (Narushima et. al., 2018). Furthermore, if older people can remain active and engaged in learning, they are able to positively enrich society and the economy through their skills and experience (International Commission on the Futures of Education, 2021).

Box 5: Intergenerational learning

These demographic shifts present important opportunities for intergenerational learning. This form of learning is reciprocal: it allows older adults – such as parents, grandparents, elders, and retirees – to engage in teaching, mentoring, or co-learning activities, while also creating space for younger generations to share skills that older adults may lack, particularly in areas such as digital literacy.

An example of this approach was highlighted by Portugal during the 11th Consultation on the Convention and Recommendation against Discrimination in Education. The Digital Academy for Parents programme offers parents and guardians of students in basic and secondary education the opportunity to attend training sessions focused on digital skills. Schools become intergenerational learning hubs, with students volunteering to support adult learners, thereby strengthening connections between families and the school community.

To support implementation, schools are provided with kits containing materials for three training courses:

i. Basic digital skills,

ii. Digital safety, and

iii. Citizenship and the digital consumer.

Source: Report of Portugal submitted for the UNESCO 11th Consultation on the implementation of the CADE

Another demographic trend that is set to continue is urbanization. In 2018, 55% of the global population lived in urban areas; by 2050, this proportion is expected to rise to 68% (UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2019). The combination of a pronounced shift from rural to urban living, coupled with overall population growth, could result in an additional 2.5 billion people residing in urban areas by mid-century – largely concentrated in Asia and Africa. This trend has significant implications for the right to education. In principle, urban environments should make it easier for governments to deliver education and essential services due to population density and infrastructure concentration. However, the reality is more complex. Rapid urbanization is often accompanied by a rise in often precarious, informal settlements and slum housing, where access to education – as well as to water, health care, and other basic services – is far from guaranteed.

For most of human history, people across the world have lived in small, tight-knit communities. Rapid and unplanned urban growth can weaken traditional forms of community connection. Furthermore, children and adults in urban areas may be exposed to unsafe environments and violence. Anonymity and social fragmentation can foster loneliness and exclusion, underscoring the need for schools and other learning spaces to serve as crucial anchors for the community, strengthening social inclusion and cohesion.

Conversely, learners in rural areas face a different set of challenges. These became starkly evident during the COVID-19 pandemic, when disadvantaged students, and especially those in remote areas, experienced disproportionate learning losses (UNICEF et al, 2022). The pandemic amplified existing inequities in access and quality. As education becomes increasingly digitalized, many countries have reported a struggle to ensure

sufficient access to electricity, the internet and devices, widening the educational gulf between urban and rural populations (UNESCO, forthcoming b).

Parents' voices
(Member of Make Mothers Matter)

> African education must not choose between tradition and modernity, but learn to articulate them. Such a synthesis would make it possible to build a sustainable, inclusive education system that is faithful to the realities of the continent. It would reconcile Africa with itself, while affirming the legitimacy of its own paths to human development. Contemporary educational challenges require a revaluation of initiatory knowledge and cultural traditions, not as relics of the past, but as levers for building a shared future. This education, which is both rooted and universal in its aims, constitutes an essential foundation for meeting the challenges of the 21st century
>
> NGO AJAD
> (Translated from French)

Migration is another critical trend shaping education systems. According to the IOM World Migration Report 2024 (McAuliffe, M. and L.A. Oucho L.A., 2024), the number of international migrants has steadily increased over the past five decades, with 1 in every 30 people globally now classified as a migrant. However, most displacement occurs within national borders: at the end of 2024, there were 83.4 million internally displaced persons (IDPs) – up from 75.9 million in 2023 (IDMC, 2025b). Conflict, disasters, and climate change are expected to continue driving both internal and cross-border displacement.

Increased migration – both internal and international – leads to more diverse classrooms, encompassing a broad range of languages, cultures, religions, and lived experiences. It can also be the source of great trauma. To uphold the right to education in this context, inclusive pedagogies are essential to ensure both equity and a sense of belonging. Measures such as the removal of administrative barriers, language support and remedial classes, and equipping educators, are needed to meet learners' diverse needs. Encouragingly, in the 11th Consultation on the Convention against Discrimination in Education, 47 out of 92 reporting countries indicated that teachers receive specific training on inclusion for displaced learners, and 70 out of 92 reported implementing multilingual and intercultural education policies (UNESCO, forthcoming b).

B) The disruption of the world of work

The world of work is undergoing profound transformation. Technological disruption, including the rise of AI and automation; the green transition; geopolitical fragmentation; economic volatility; and demographic shifts are all redefining labour markets and reshaping the skills needed to participate fully in society (WEF, 2025).

Among these drivers, technological change is perhaps the most disruptive: AI and automation are expected to affect nearly every sector of the economy, with up to one in four jobs at risk globally due to generative AI, and clerical occupations particularly exposed (ILO, 2025a; see also WEF, 2025). Yet, these technologies are not only displacing tasks, they are also creating new roles. Digital literacy, once peripheral, has become essential even in non-technical jobs, while advanced skills such as data analysis and programming are increasingly in demand. The ability to use AI effectively is emerging as a prerequisite across occupations.

Youth voices
(SDG 4 Youth and Student Network)

> The future of work is rapidly evolving, yet our curricula and pedagogy are still outdated and exam-centric. We must begin preparing our children, especially from low-income communities, not just with hard skills, but with resilience, adaptability, climate literacy, ethical reasoning, and digital skills.
>
> Anoushka Sinha, Founder & Director Anupam Foundation

The green transition is another powerful engine of change. Moving towards sustainable economies could generate tens of millions of jobs by 2030, far outweighing the number of jobs that will be displaced in Asia, Europe and the Americas (ILO, 2018). However, without deliberate investment in skills training, some regions risk being left behind in tackling skills mismatch, especially where economies remain heavily dependent on fossil fuels. Integrating green skills into education, from technical fields like construction and energy to financial services and public administration, is essential to ensure sustainability becomes a universal opportunity rather than a source of exclusion.

Demographic and geopolitical dynamics compound these shifts. Ageing societies in Europe, North America, and East Asia, are seeing rising demand for health and eldercare workers, while sub-Saharan Africa – projected to drive most global labour force growth by mid-century – faces the challenge of equipping a young population with skills for digital and climate-smart economies (WEF, 2025; see also OECD, 2025b). These diverging realities illustrate that no single skills strategy can suffice; instead, education must provide flexible pathways that can respond to both local labour demands and global interdependence.

Employers are also redefining the core attributes they seek. Analytical thinking, adaptability, leadership, and creativity constantly rank among the most valued skills, alongside digital literacy and technical expertise (WEF, 2025). The challenge for education is to cultivate this complementarity: preparing learners to not only master technology but also to work with it in ways that preserve human judgment, collaboration, and cultural awareness in an increasingly automated world. This is why, embedding social-emotional learning (SEL) within curricula and pedagogical approaches is imperative. SEL – encompassing emotional awareness and regulation, empathy, interpersonal skills, ethical reasoning and resilience – serves to strengthen learners' ability to engage meaningfully, adaptively and responsibly in complex professional and social environments (UNESCO, 2024d). Integrating SEL also fosters the human-skills underpinning effective teamwork, leadership and lifelong professional learning.

These changes carry profound implications for the right to education. A model based on one-off schooling early in life is no longer adequate. Education must be guaranteed across the life course, enabling people to reskill and upskill as industries evolve (Giannini, 2023; see also UNESCO, 2025c). Recognition and accreditation of non-formal and informal learning – including skills gained in workplaces and communities - is essential to allow multiple and flexible forms and pathways of learning beyond schooling (see the recommendations put forward in the 2015 RALE). Many countries now operate national qualifications frameworks that elevate vocational, non-formal and informal learning to the level of qualifications, while others (e.g. France, Norway, Canada) codify legal rights to validate experiential learning (European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training et al., 2019; see also UNESCO UIL, 2023d).

Taken together, these transformations make clear that the future of work is both a challenge and an opportunity. Therefore, a lifelong learning approach is essential, recognizing that skills are developed across all stages of life and in diverse settings - formal, non-formal, and informal. Systems should enable flexible pathways for skilling, reskilling, and upskilling; assess and value acquired skills and prior learning; and facilitate micro-credentials in ways that promote individual empowerment, social inclusion, decent work, and inclusive economic growth. As the ILO underscores, coordinated skills policies are key to constructing resilient, inclusive labour markets (ILO, 2025b). By embedding digital, green, and human skills into inclusive lifelong learning ecosystems, education can ensure that people across generations and regions are prepared to adapt, contribute, and flourish in a rapidly changing world. Some of these directions transcend borders and call for stronger international cooperation and normative instruments.

C) Crises, climate change, displacement and human mobility

While the convergence of crises is not new, the scale and interconnectedness of such crises have deepened in the twenty-first century: longstanding threats of armed conflict are now compounded by the growing impacts of climate change, disasters (including man-made or stemming from natural hazards), and pandemics. Together, these overlapping crises place additional strain on the realization of the right to education. Often described as a 'polycrisis' (WEF, 2023), these overlapping shocks compound one another, with conflicts erupting in areas already facing climate stress, while disasters fuel displacement and instability. As countries emerged from the COVID-19 pandemic and adjusted to a 'new normal', the world was then confronted with geopolitical crises,

including war in Europe and conflicts in the Middle East. In 2025 alone, extended heatwaves, floods, and wildfires in many parts of the world have led to a substantial number of human casualties. For learners, the result is profound disruption, including loss of schooling, exposure to trauma, and weakened prospects for the future (UNESCO, 2023b).

Conflicts and violence

By 2024, the number of conflict-affected countries was at its highest since World War II (Institute for Economics and Peace, 2024) and the number of children living in a conflict zone has steadily increased over time: from 10% in the mid-1990s to almost 19% in 2023 (Østby and Aas Rustad, 2024).

Conflict and violence expose learners and teachers to physical injury, trauma, and safety concerns (UNESCO, 2021e). Educational institutions may be forced to close for reasons of safety, financial constraints, or wider social disruption. They may be damaged or destroyed or be repurposed for military use or as emergency shelters. School closures, as well as moving children away from schools, heighten protection risks for children and young people, rendering them more vulnerable to being subjected to violence, exploitation, and recruitment into armed groups. (UNESCO, 2025k). Between 2022 and 2023, approximately 6,000 attacks on students, educators, and educational institutions were documented, alongside a 20% increase in the military use of schools. During this period, over 10,000 students were killed, abducted, detained, or otherwise harmed (Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack, 2024). Meanwhile, these attacks contribute to large-scale displacement: conflict-driven displacement reached 20.1 million new displacements in 2024, contributing to a total of 73.5 million people living in internal displacement by the end of the year, further compounding the challenges to access and continuity of education (IDMC, 2025b).

Beyond immediate disruption, conflict leaves deep scars, including trauma, interrupted learning, and lost opportunities. Yet education also plays a key role in the long term in recovering from shocks and building future economic stability and development. It also fosters values such as solidarity, tolerance, and peace, helping to prevent future conflicts and strengthen social cohesion. Paying particular attention to the most vulnerable, identifying alternative education pathways, securing adequate funding, and investing in trauma-informed pedagogy are crucial measures to safeguard and advance the right to education in emergencies.

The right to education in emergencies

Education remains a fundamental human right and a binding obligation on states, even during times of crisis. Every country in the world has ratified at least one treaty committing to the protection of this right. Crises, however, create specific conditions that place heightened demands on states and communities. While some protections are enshrined in international humanitarian law, the United Nations Security Council Resolution 2601 (United Nations Security Council, 2021) expressed grave concern at the significant rise in attacks on educational facilities in recent years. It called on all parties to uphold the right to education during armed conflict, implement measures to prevent attacks on schools, and strengthen domestic legal frameworks accordingly.

The normative framework has been reinforced in recent years. The Incheon Declaration and Framework for Action (2016), which supports the implementation of SDG 4, underscores states' obligations to build 'inclusive, responsive and resilient' education systems and to strengthen national capacities for disaster risk reduction, preparedness, and response. Similarly, the New York Declaration (UNGA, 2016) paved the way for the Global Compact on Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (UNGA, 2019) and the Global Compact for Refugees (UNCHR, 2018), both of which stress the importance of timely access to primary and secondary education for displaced learners in host countries.

Other international agreements also define state responsibilities in crisis contexts. These include the 2015 Safe Schools Declaration, the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction (2015–2030) (UNDRR, 2015), the 2015 Paris Agreement, and the revised Comprehensive School Safety Framework (2022–2030) (GADRRRES, 2022), which adopts an all-hazards approach. This framework calls on states to strengthen disaster risk reduction and resilience in education, addressing risks from disasters, climate change, conflict, and biological and health hazards such as the COVID-19 pandemic (UNESCO, 2022l). The 2019 Global Convention on the Recognition of Higher Education Qualifications (UNESCO, 2019c) also marked a breakthrough for people on the move, reducing barriers to higher education for displaced learners.

As the lead UN agency for SDG 4, UNESCO plays a central role in safeguarding education during crises. Its normative, operational, and advocacy work advances the right to education in emergency contexts. In 2024, UNESCO adopted the Strategic Framework for Migration, Displacement, Emergencies and Education (2024–2029) (UNESCO, 2024i), which bridges humanitarian, development, and peacebuilding approaches to guide both immediate and long-term responses (UNESCO, 2025m). Tools such as the UNESCO Qualifications Passport also help displaced learners have their qualifications recognized (UNESCO, 2024h).

Further protection is needed. The Initiative on the Evolving Right to Education emphasized states' responsibility to reinstate in-person education as soon as possible following a crisis (UNESCO, 2023b). Lessons from the COVID-19 pandemic, such as the value of distance learning innovations, effective data tracking, and the use of EMIS, highlight the importance of crisis-sensitive education planning. Countries must identify risks in advance, adopt preparedness and mitigation measures, and prioritize proactive disaster risk reduction alongside investment in resilient education infrastructure. It is also essential, in order to uphold the dignity of the teaching profession and ensure continuity of learning, to provide time-bound support for the sufficient, timely and regular payment of salaries of teachers during times of crisis and emergency. To this end, the High-Level Panel on the Teaching Profession recommended in 2024 that the international community establish a Global Fund for Teacher's Salaries in crisis-affected contexts or similar situations of threat or vulnerability (ILO, 2024).

Strengthening the international framework could affirm the principle of shared responsibility in guaranteeing education during crises. Coordinated assistance would provide a reference point for national governments in developing or adapting legal and policy tools (UNESCO, 2023b). The recommendations of the 2022 Abuja Conference also offer valuable guidance for moving toward a broader international agreement on education in emergencies (UNESCO, 2023b).

Box 6: National responses for people on the move

The 11th Consultation on the Convention and Recommendation against Discrimination in Education marked the first time states were explicitly asked whether they had adopted specific measures to support climate-displaced persons, though only seventeen of the ninety-two reporting states answered in the affirmative.

Chad reported actions such as building shelters, infrastructure, mobile clinics, and the deployment of security teams for climate-displaced persons. Uganda focused on planning and financing education for climate-displaced learners, including bridging programmes, classroom expansion in host communities, and the provision of learning materials and teachers. In **Mozambique**, the government has provided temporary learning spaces for use as classrooms, and, in other cases, students have been integrated into safe schools.

However, most states have enacted legislation that provides for the right to education of people on the move and trapped populations more generally, and 63 have adopted policy measures aimed at enhancing this right.

Recognizing the specific challenges faced by crisis-affected and trapped populations, roughly half of the reporting countries (44 in total) have adopted crisis-sensitive and disaster risk-informed education planning and programming.

In addition, of the fifty-three National Adaptation Plans submitted in 2024 as part of the follow-up to the Paris Agreement, 74% explicitly reference disaster displacement. However, only 38% include concrete provisions or commitments to address this phenomenon in some capacity (IDMC, 2025a).

Similarly, a study commissioned by the UN Refugee Agency and the UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction found that in 2023 an increasing number of countries have incorporated disaster displacement into their disaster risk reduction strategies and plans (78% of the 112 frameworks reviewed). Nevertheless, few of these strategies outline concrete actions to be taken (IDMC, 2025a)

Source: UNESCO forthcoming b.

Ultimately, prioritizing education in crises is both a moral and legal imperative, as well as a strategic investment in the future. Yet education is often deprioritized during emergencies. In 2023, humanitarian funding for education declined, breaking a decade-long upward trend (Geneva Global Hub for Education in Emergencies, 2024). Short-term crisis responses too often neglect the continuity of education, underscoring the need for forward-looking strategies and financing that address both immediate and long-term needs. Investments in resilience are critical, and effective action depends on accurate, timely, and disaggregated data (UNESCO, n.d b).

Crisis contexts, while profoundly challenging, also provide an opportunity to 'build back better'. Beyond restoring what has been lost, they offer a chance to strengthen education systems so that they are more inclusive, equitable, resilient, and firmly grounded in human rights. By embedding the principles of equity, non-discrimination, and lifelong learning into recovery and preparedness efforts, countries can ensure that education systems emerge from crises not only restored but transformed into stronger vehicles for realizing the right to education for all and building more peaceful societies.

Climate change and disasters

Climate change continues to be a defining challenge for education systems. In 2024, more than 242 million students in 85 countries experienced education disruption due to extreme weather events (UNICEF, 2025). One billion children live in areas of extremely high climate risk, facing both fast-onset events such as floods, cyclones, and wildfires, and slow-onset impacts such as rising sea levels, soil salinization, and heat stress (UNICEF and ITU, 2021). These forces damage schools and infrastructure, compromise health, economic livelihoods, and food security, and displace families, making continuity of learning more difficult.

Disaster-related displacement is increasing rapidly. In 2024 alone, 45.8 million movements were triggered by natural hazards, with nearly 10 million people remaining displaced by the end of the year (IDMC, 2025b). These displacements create multiple barriers to education. In such contexts, host communities face capacity pressures on schools, teachers, and infrastructure, limiting their ability to support both the educational and psychosocial needs of climate-displaced learners. These learners often encounter linguistic, economic, legal and administrative obstacles in accessing education, as well as risks of exclusion and xenophobia.

Climate crises, and their effects on education, do not affect all populations equally. The poor; agricultural workers; girls and women; minorities; Indigenous Peoples; and children with disabilities are among the most affected by climate change (International Commission on the Futures of Education, 2021). In addition, those that have already been displaced, regardless of the cause of their initial displacement, are often forced to live in sub-standard settlements and in fragile makeshift shelters, making them more vulnerable to future sudden disaster and further displacement (IDMC, 2025a). Layers of vulnerability can accumulate, leaving these populations among the most at risk while remaining largely overlooked.

Youth voices
(SDG 4 Youth and Student Network)

> "Looking ahead, the biggest future challenge is addressing the long-term impacts of trauma, displacement, and educational disruptions caused by protracted conflicts. To meet this, educational systems must integrate trauma-informed pedagogy, provide psychosocial support, and prioritize inclusive education frameworks.
>
> Si Thu Wai, TET Myanmar

While some states have enacted crisis-sensitive and disaster risk-informed education plans, only a minority have measures that specifically address climate-induced displacement (IDMC, 2025a). Looking ahead, climate change highlights the need for education systems that are resilient, adaptive, and forward-looking. Climate risk must be integrated into education sector planning, school infrastructure, and teacher training. The education of persons displaced by climate change must be planned with both immediate and long-term perspectives, ensuring access and continuity alongside other essential needs. Legal recognition of climate-displaced persons is critical to guarantee their right to education, while international cooperation and a transdisciplinary national approach are essential for coherent and sustainable policy implementation. Equally, learners must be equipped with the knowledge and skills to adapt, to mitigate and innovate in response to the climate crisis (UNESCO, 2023e)

Global student mobility and the need for fair recognition of qualifications

In parallel with crisis-related displacement, the number of students pursuing higher education abroad has grown dramatically, increasing from 2.1 million in 2000 to nearly 6.9 million in 2022 (UNESCO, 2025g). This surge reflects the growing demand for quality education, skills development and international experience. Hosting international students benefits institutions by increasing diversity, boosting academic reputation, and contributing to local economies. For students, studying abroad offers access to perceived higher-quality programmes, specialized skills and language learning opportunities (OECD, 2025c).

However, disparities persist. Not all regions attract international students to the same extent: Europe and North America host more than half of all internationally mobile students (UNESCO, 2025g). Likewise, not all students have equal opportunities to study abroad. Students from low-income countries remain significantly under-represented due to financial, administrative and structural barriers (OECD, 2025c).

The Global Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education (UNESCO, 2019c), adopted in 2019 and entered in force in 2023, provides the first international legal framework for transparent, fair and non-discriminatory recognition of higher education qualifications and access qualifications. It also facilitates recognition of qualifications obtained through digital or non-traditional learning and explicitly supports the recognition of refugees' qualifications.

In 2025, UNESCO adopted the Operational Guidelines for the Convention (UNESCO, 2025d) affirming that every individual has the right to have their qualifications assessed and that recognition procedures must be fair, timely, transparent and affordable.

As of April 2025, thirty-eight countries have ratified the Global Convention, representing 29% of all internationally mobile students. When combined with UNESCO's regional conventions, nearly one hundred participating countries account for 72% of global student mobility (UNESCO, 2025k). Ratifying both global and regional conventions strengthens academic cooperation, builds trust in qualifications and promotes equitable student mobility.

D) Digitalization and AI

Digitalization in education is not new, but the COVID-19 pandemic and emerging technologies such as Artificial Intelligence (AI) have greatly accelerated its expansion, reshaping education systems and their processes, including teaching, learning, management, administration, research, and knowledge generation.

This theme is further explored in the UNESCO report 'AI and education: Protecting the rights of learners' (2025) which explores the impact of digital technologies, particularly AI, on the right to education, as well as their broader implications for other human rights.

Digital divide

Education inequalities are increasingly amplified by what is commonly referred to as the 'digital divide'. This divide has multiple facets. First, there is a stark distinction between those that have access to digital devices, electricity and internet connection, and those that do not. According to the most recent UIS data on SDG indicator 4.a.1,[3] globally, only around 60% of secondary schools are connected to the internet (Broadband Commission et al., 2020). Others are experiencing a 'homework gap' due to lack of home internet access, preventing students from completing their schoolwork at home due to insufficient internet access (Broadband Commission et al., 2020). Notably, 2.2 billion individuals under the age of 25 lack internet access at home (UNICEF, 2020). Addressing connectivity, including infrastructure and affordability, especially for girls and women and in rural and remote areas, is essential to ensuring equitable access to educational platforms and materials in all contexts. Furthermore, only 47.1% of households worldwide had a computer in 2019, with figures reaching nearly 80% in developed countries, and lagging at just 36.1% in developing ones (Statista, 2025). The cost of devices

3 SDG Indicator 4.a.1 measures the proportion of schools offering basic services, by type of service. This includes, among others, access to the internet for pedagogical purposes and access to computers for pedagogical purposes.

and their maintenance remain a major barrier to digital inclusion in education.

Second, a lack of digital skills makes the availability of digital pedagogical tools and platforms worthless. In Latin American, for example, approximately 25% of students have access to ICT infrastructure but do not use it (OECD, 2020). Inadequate digital skills and competencies have been identified as one of the most significant barriers to educational technology use, regardless of a country's level of development (UNESCO, 2022k). These disparities disproportionately affect rural, low-income, disadvantaged, marginalized, and vulnerable populations. Moreover, the challenge is not confined to learners alone: the effective uptake of digital technologies also depends heavily on teachers' ability to integrate them into classroom practice. Without adequate training and support, many teachers struggle to adapt their pedagogies to digital environments, as made evident during the COVID-19 pandemic (UNESCO et al., 2021). Building teachers' digital capacity and fostering an enabling culture are therefore essential to ensure that technology meaningfully enhances teaching and learning. Similarly, it is also important to ensure digital literacy of family and community workers in order to support young people's use of digital technologies (UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2024).

Main challenges of digitalization and AI in education

Ensuring connectivity and digital skills can expand access to education, especially where in-person learning is not possible; however, this also presents challenges that must be addressed through appropriate safeguards. Indeed, marginalized communities, particularly those in rural areas, as well as people with disabilities, women, older persons, and low-income groups, continue to face disproportionate barriers to accessing digital information (ITU, 2022; UNESCO, 2022i). Yet access to information and knowledge is essential for developing critical thinking, making informed decisions, and participating fully and actively in society. With the rise of AI-powered tools, ensuring these technologies are free from bias, misinformation, and discrimination is more urgent than ever. The Recommendation on the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence (UNESCO, 2021c) underscores the need for transparency and understandability of AI algorithms, the data on which they have been trained, and their potential impact on human rights and fundamental freedoms. Strengthening critical digital literacy is therefore essential, equipping educators and learners to detect bias, engage with diverse sources, and foster a more inclusive digital culture.

Increased use of digital platforms has also raised concerns over learners' physical and mental health (UNESCO, 2023d). Prolonged screen time is linked to eye strain, headaches, musculoskeletal discomfort, and sedentary behaviour, potentially contributing to unhealthy weight gain (UNESCO, 2023a). Mentally, digital learning environments can lead to isolation, disconnection, anxiety, and stress due to reduced face-to-face interactions (UNESCO, 2023d; UNESCO, 2023a). The psychological effects of generative AI tools, including chatbots, remain under-researched but could prove significant, particularly for children, according to the UNESCO Guidance for generative AI in education and research (2023). A 2025 MIT study further suggests that excessive reliance on large language models for educational tasks can diminish cognitive engagement (Kos'myna, Nataliya et al., 2025). Addressing these risks and ensuring psychosocial well-being and mental health requires multisectoral collaboration across education, health and child protection services (UNESCO IUS et al., 2022).

The increased use of digital tools has also facilitated cyberviolence. In 2024 alone, 62.9 million files related to child sexual exploitation were reported to CyberTipline, with a 1,325% increase in reports of child sexual exploitation involving generative AI (NCMEC, 2024). Transgender, gender-diverse individuals, women, and girls face disproportionate risks, including online harassment, data surveillance, and exclusion (UN Women and UNICEF, 2021; CIGI, 2023). The impacts range from emotional distress to academic decline (UNESCO, 2024f). A 2020 survey across 22 countries found that 58% of girls and women had experienced online violence (Plan International, 2020).

Youth voices
(SDG 4 Youth and Student Network)

> We need to design AI systems that augment - not replace - human intelligence, with policies that uphold ethical use, data protection, and creative integrity. The goal should be to leverage technology to simplify tasks and expand access, without dulling the very skills that make us human: curiosity, imagination, and problem-solving.
>
> May Oghenerukeme Asagba, Founder/CEO CAIN Educational Foundation

The digitalization of education raises significant data privacy concerns. Students' personal data is often shared with private providers or used to train AI systems, frequently without sufficient safeguards. Children are particularly vulnerable due to their limited understanding of data rights (UNICEF, 2021a). The Special Rapporteur on the right to education (2024) has highlighted how the use of AI increases the risks of data misuse and necessitates transparency and accountability.

AI and digital technologies often reflect dominant cultural and linguistic norms, marginalizing minority perspectives (Foka and Griffin, 2024). As noted by the UNESCO Recommendation on the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence (2021c), the concentration of cultural content in a few global languages undermines diversity. English comprises over 50% of online content, while many widely spoken languages remain under-represented (Snene, 2024). The neglect of minority languages risks deepening digital exclusion and accelerating cultural and linguistic erosion (Special Rapporteur in the Field of Cultural Rights, 2025). However, there is also the possibility that AI systems can contribute to the preservation and accessibility of culture heritage, as highlighted by the UNESCO Recommendation on the Ethics of AI (2021c). AI can be leveraged to support culturally responsive teaching and learning, but only if AI-training data sets incorporate multiple languages, and particularly local and indigenous languages (UNESCO, 2025a).

The growing role of private actors as providers of educational technologies presents significant governance challenges. While outsourcing has improved efficiency, reduced costs, and enhanced quality in some contexts (Bates, Choi and Kim, 2021), reliance on private providers raises concerns around quality, transparency and accountability (UNESCO, 2021a; UNESCO, 2022f). There are risks that public education systems may become overly dependent on commercial actors whose primary interests may not align with the right to education (UNESCO, 2022h).

Digital technologies also carry substantial environmental costs. A recent report from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change warns that surface temperature will rise due to human causes if we continue the current pathway (IPCC, 2023). By 2030, the electricity consumption of data centres needed to train and deploy AI models will be equivalent to Japan's total consumption (International Energy Agency, 2025). Policy-makers must therefore design educational digitalization policies that minimize negative impacts, in terms of raw materials, energy requirements, and waste (UNESCO, 2022e). Conversely, digital content can help in reducing waste therefore reducing the ecological impact of educational content compared to traditional print materials (Haleem et al., 2022).

Access to educational opportunities

AI and assistive technologies offer powerful tools for learners with disabilities. Tools such as screen readers, speech recognition or sign recognition software, and alternative input devices enable greater accessibility. The UNESCO Guidelines for ICT in Education Policies and Masterplans (2022e) urges the integration of inclusive strategies for learners with disabilities throughout the planning and implementation of ICT in education, and for the assessment of digital content accessibility.

Digital tools can support cultural and linguistic inclusion. For example, the Papa Reo Project in New Zealand created a Māori language dataset to train tools that respect cultural context and promote linguistic inclusion (Papa Reo, n.d.). The interlink between AI and the language of instruction is critical and must be reinforced, particularly given that 40% of learners do not understand the language in which they are taught (UNESCO, 2025i).

Besides, in the context of emergency or crisis, digital technologies can offer educational continuity. In 2019, 27 million school-age children and young people in crisis-affected countries were out of school (INEE, 2020). When designed inclusively, digital technologies can facilitate access to education through innovative combinations that allow for timely and effective learning (UNHCR, 2021). Crisis-sensitive planning must always prioritize inclusivity and equity (UNESCO, 2020b).

> 'Before AI systems are more widely implemented throughout education (...), it is imperative that policy-makers, school leadership, educators, and developers prioritise the rights and well-being of children, over the unevidenced, putative and highly contested "benefits" of the technology, to ensure that any AI systems used in education are fully aligned with the principles of children's rights. Only by doing so can we create an educational environment that truly empowers and respects children.'
>
> Holmes, 2025, available under CC. BY. 4.0

Evolving responses in the face of technological advances

As AI transforms our world, curricula must evolve to prepare learners for the future. The UNESCO Recommendation on the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence (2021c) stresses the need for ethical reflection, responsible design practices and new skills, and critical thinking. In the twenty-first century, the concept of literacy now needs to encompass digital literacy skills. The Committee on the Rights of the Child (2021) recommends integrating digital literacy skills as part of basic education curricula from the pre-school level onwards. This would help children build resilience and develop critical thinking allowing them to responsibly engage with technology (Broadband Commission, ITU and UNESCO, 2020).

As stated by the RewirEd Declaration (UNESCO, 2022k), teachers and educators must remain at the centre of the education process. AI can assist by automating tasks such as assessment, educational content creation, and administrative duties, allowing educators to focus on student support and interaction. At the same time, as stated by the Beijing Consensus on Artificial Intelligence and Education (UNESCO, 2019a), adequate training and policies that empower teaching staff, while safeguarding teachers' rights, working conditions, and role, are essential.

Inclusive digital transformation requires collaboration among teachers, students, parents, digital solutions providers, and states. Yet 45% of educators across ninety-four countries reported that they were not consulted about new technologies that they were asked to work with, and that students and parents are consulted even less (Special Rapporteur on the right to education, 2024). Participatory decision-making, aligned with SDG 16.7, contributes to more responsive and rights-based design of learning technologies. In countries such as Canada, Ecuador, Saudi Arabia, Singapore, and Uruguay, feedback from teachers, students and parents shaped regulations on ethics, data privacy, bias and automation (Special Rapporteur on the right to education, 2024).

The question of whether guarantees of connectivity constitute a new element of the right to education reflects the evolving nature of learning in the digital era.

Robust international and national legal frameworks must evolve alongside technology. They need to address digital protection and security grounded in human rights, to ensure that digital spaces are safe and inclusive (UN High Commissioner on Human Rights, 2024). The UNESCO Recommendation on the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence (2021c) emphasizes the need for transparency, accountability, and fairness in AI deployment. Digital education must align with the aims of the right to education and more broadly human rights. By ensuring proactive legal safeguards, education can be safeguarded as a fundamental human right, ensuring that no one is left behind in the digital age.

E) Education outside the state system

The provision of education outside the formal school system is a growing and complex trend that is reshaping the global education landscape. This expansion is driven by multiple factors, including rapid digitalization, accompanied by an influx of private technology companies, and, following COVID-19, a marked increase in alternative learning modalities such as homeschooling, private tutoring, and online learning platforms. At the same time, the role of non-governmental schools, already well-established in many contexts, continues to expand in many parts of the world on the side of public provision.

Beyond traditional schooling, the growing emphasis on lifelong learning opportunities has created increased demand for continuing and adult education. In response, private providers have increasingly offered professional training, upskilling programmes, and certification. Similarly, local communities and private companies often provide ECCE services, that bridge the gap between child care and early childhood development and education.

It is, therefore, misleading to frame education in terms of a simple public vs. private dichotomy. Non-state actors involved in education are comprised of a myriad of often undiscernible and disparate organizations ranging from privately-owned (for-profit or not-for-profit) institutions, corporations, foundations, non-government organizations (NGOs), denominations, parent groups, local communities to name a few. Non-state involvement has become highly diverse, extending well beyond the provision of schooling. It includes a wide range of interventions – from learning assessments to supplementary tuition – across all education levels, from early childhood care to adult language learning (UNESCO, 2021a). In fact, a pluralist provision of education is not new; in many countries, public-private approaches have long been embedded in education

systems. What remains essential is that the presence of non-state actors in education fully complies with human rights principles of fairness, accessibility, quality and transparency, and does not undermine the realization of the right to education (Berner, 2025.)

What does this influx of private actors mean for the right to education? In some respects, the growth of private provision raises serious concerns. Private education has long been criticized for fostering a two-tier system that deepens inequalities by privileging wealthier families. The diversification of education providers may come with reduced levels of oversight, and core human rights principles such as equity, quality, and accountability can be diminished. As a result, these models risk exacerbating existing inequalities and shifting public responsibility for education toward market-based approaches. There are also concerns that the involvement of private actors introduces commercial interests that may undermine the foundational aims of education, as articulated in international normative frameworks. There is a danger that corporate gains will take precedence, diluting education's role as a public common good.

Mary et al., (2025), in their opinion piece for the journal 'L'éducation en débats', discuss the rise of 'edupreneurs' and describe education as undergoing 'intense multiform privatization.' Edupreneurs aim to revolutionize education through new economic models, standards, tools (often digital), and teaching practices. Initially limited to areas such as pre-school provision, distance learning, and homework assistance, their reach has expanded significantly to cover broad sectors of education – from alternative teaching methods to widespread digitalization. While concerns around private players in education are not new, such actors often operate in ways that exacerbate or reinforce existing educational segregation. Despite frequently receiving public funding, their influence has contributed to the growing 'corporatization' of education.

The international normative framework has yet to catch up with these developments. The 1960 Convention Against Discrimination in Education (UNESCO) and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (UNGA, 1966), permit non-state provision, provided it complements rather than supplants public education and adheres to state-defined minimum standards. In this regard, the Abidjan Principles (2019) contain guidance to protect, respect and fulfil the right to education in such contexts. More recently, UNESCO has explored the design and implementation of regulation of non-state education, providing considerations on how to strengthen these systems to ensure the right to quality education for all children (UNESCO, 2024e).

Yet, in the 11th Consultation on the Convention and Recommendation against Discrimination in Education, only about 70% of countries reported that their legal or regulatory frameworks set out conditions and minimum standards for establishing and operating non-state educational institutions. These minimum standards typically cover registration, state monitoring and inspections, teacher qualifications, health and sanitation, infrastructure, safety, and curriculum. However, only thirty-eight countries reported regulating school fees, compared to sixty-two that regulate teacher qualifications – suggesting varying areas of state oversight. Furthermore, current frameworks do not address the full diversity of today's private actors operating in the education sphere, notably providers of educational technologies.

Box 7: Five key recommendations from UNESCO GEM Report on non-state actors (2021/2022)

i. Fulfil the commitment to make one year of pre-primary and twelve years of primary and secondary education free – but publicly financed need not mean publicly provided if equity can be ensured

ii. Establish quality standards that apply to all state and non-state education institutions

iii. Establish common monitoring and support processes that apply to all state and non-state education institutions

iv. Facilitate the spread of innovation through the education system for the common good

v. Maintain the transparency and integrity of the public education policy process so as to block vested interests

Source: UNESCO, 2021a

Beyond the broad dynamics of public and private provision, educational practices outside formal schools – most notably private tutoring and homeschooling – are reshaping this landscape in distinctive ways. These practices are often driven by dissatisfaction with school provision, demand for more personalized learning, and, in some contexts, the acceleration brought on by COVID-19. While they may respond to legitimate needs and open new opportunities, they also pose complex challenges for equity, quality, and accountability.

Private supplementary tutoring

Private supplementary tutoring has become a global phenomenon with profound implications. For struggling learners, it can provide a lifeline of support, offering the extra help necessary to keep up with their peers. For fast learners, it can offer enrichment beyond what schools provide. Yet it also generates stark inequalities between families that can afford it, and those that cannot – or those that cannot afford the same quality or quantity of private tutoring as others.

In recent decades, private supplementary tutoring has expanded dramatically across income contexts, delivered by commercial enterprises, full time teachers seeking extra incomes, and even informal providers ranging from senior secondary students to retirees (Bray, 2025). Concerns abound regarding situations where teachers (often pushed by a wide range of circumstances) do not teach the full curriculum in school, then provide the additional lessons for money, undermining the principle of free education protected by the right to education.

However, regulating this field of education is not easy. Overly strong regulation or prohibition has been found to drive tutoring underground, so it must be advanced cautiously. Bray suggests regulation regarding fees, quality, safety, and honesty in marketing, as well as more thought being given to the social inequities that may be cemented in countries with high levels of tutoring.

Homeschooling

Homeschooling is another expanding practice. The COVID-19 pandemic was a turning point, with many countries reporting a significant rise in the percentage of homeschooled children before and after school closures. Motivations vary: in some contexts, homeschooling is chosen as a critique of the highly structured nature of formal schooling, while in others it reflects families' disagreement with the values promoted in public education.

Legal frameworks diverge sharply. In some countries, homeschooling is illegal; in others, it is permitted but subject to strict oversight. Regulations often require parents to meet minimum educational standards to ensure that instruction is appropriate to the child's age, ability, and aptitude, or that they follow the national curriculum. It is imperative that countries collect high-quality, disaggregated data on this practice and work to elaborate policies and regulations on homeschooling that are in line with international commitments to the right to education with regard to quality, minimum standards and the aims of education (UNESCO, 2025h).

F) Teachers for the future we want

Teachers hold a unique position in relation to the right to education: they are essential to its fulfilment, while also being rights-holders themselves as teachers and workers. Today, in many countries, recruitment continues to lag behind demand: to achieve universal primary and secondary enrolment by 2030, an estimated 44 million additional teachers are needed – with one-third of them in sub-Saharan Africa (UNESCO and TFF, 2024).

Teacher shortages are not a new challenge. At the time of drafting the MDGs, it was recognized that insufficient numbers of teachers would hinder progress toward universal primary education. Since 2000, pupil-teacher ratios (i.e. the number of students per teacher in the classroom) have decreased across the globe, however, significant disparities remain, especially in remote areas where the ratio of pupils to trained teachers remains high (UNESCO and TFF, 2024).

The roots of this shortage vary. In some countries, the issue lies in insufficient recruitment and training due to lack of resources; in others, particularly many high-income nations, the profession is marked by high levels of attrition or lack of attractivity of the profession.

Understanding the drivers of teacher turnover is essential. According to UNESCO's Global Report on Teachers (UNESCO & TTF, 2024), many teachers leave classroom roles for other positions in education despite lower pay, suggesting that salary alone is not decisive. A meta-analysis by Li and Yao (2022) reinforces this, finding that stress, workload, and burnout are all associated with teachers' intentions to leave, with burnout emerging as the strongest predictor. UNESCO's Global Report on Teachers also highlights that mandatory mobility or assignment to remote or isolated areas can disproportionately affect women, as such postings are often associated with inadequate housing, unsafe or unsanitary working conditions, and may conflict with family or caregiving responsibilities.

The consultative process underpinning UNESCO's Initiative on the Evolving Right to Education echoed these concerns, highlighting the strain on teachers' mental health and well-being in overstretched systems (UNESCO, n.d. d). Stakeholders pointed to low salaries, limited professional development, and lack of systemic support as key factors undermining both motivation and quality (UNESCO, 2023b).

Expanding teacher supply must therefore not come at the cost of quality. Past experience shows that shortening training or relying on unqualified personnel or unqualified teachers to fill urgent gaps undermine learning outcomes (UNESCO &TTF, 2024). Similarly, policies must guard against the brain drain of teachers from developing countries with strong training programmes and adequate employment opportunities and conditions.

Part of the stress and discomfort faced by teachers today arises from growing isolation, insufficient support, and the increasing demands placed on the profession amid rapid change. Yet teaching is no longer viewed as the mere transmission of knowledge and skills, but as a deeply 'collaborative [and relational] profession' (International Commission on the Futures of Education, 2021). This collaboration takes two main forms. First, between teacher and learner: the teacher facilitates and guides learning by drawing on the learner's experiences, curiosity, and inquiry – fostering problem-solving skills that go beyond rote memorization. This relational bond, as reaffirmed in the Santiago Consensus (2025), is part of our common educational heritage and must be nurtured and preserved, even as technologies evolve. Second, collaboration extends beyond the classroom, as teachers work alongside colleagues, parents, communities, and other stakeholders to create inclusive learning environments that respond to diverse strengths and needs. Strengthening these collaborative and relational dimensions is, therefore, essential not only to improve teaching and learning outcomes but also to reinforce teachers' professional status, motivation, and well-being.

Inclusive teaching and learning often place additional demands on teachers, many of whom are already stretched thin by large class sizes. Today's classrooms are increasingly diverse – not only because of the growing emphasis on including learners with disabilities in mainstream settings where feasible, but also due to greater linguistic and cultural diversity resulting from increased human mobility. It is, therefore, imperative that inclusive education is supported by adequate teacher preparation. All teachers and educational personnel must receive the education and training necessary to create accessible, inclusive, and supportive learning environments for all (UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, 2016). In the sense, the Santiago Consensus (2025) emphasized the need to "promote and support [teaching personnel] capacities to contribute effectively to social dialogue and advocate for fair and inclusive education systems".

Furthermore, many teachers feel increasingly unprepared to manage the growing digitalization of education, often due to a lack of training and support. This was particularly evident during the COVID-19 pandemic, when teachers were abruptly required to shift to online and distance learning in response to widespread school closures, yet many lacked the necessary digital skills to do so effectively. As highlighted in the UNESCO report on AI and education (2025a), it is imperative that teachers are equipped with digital competencies through pre-service and in-service training, enabling them to benefit from the digital revolution, while ensuring technology use upholds human rights. Likewise, the Teacher Task Force (International Task Force on Teachers for Education 2030, 2025) stresses that teachers must be empowered to use AI in ways that support their professional autonomy, and benefit from technology that lightens their workloads. Moreover, as recommended in the Santiago Consensus (2025), with stronger digital and AI competencies, teachers can also co-create and effectively use education technologies to enrich the relational and affective aspect of learning while preserving the creativity, core competencies and pedagogical knowledge of teachers. At the same time, the human-centred approach to teaching and learning must be fiercely protected to maintain quality, ensuring that education remains relational, empathetic, and responsive to the diverse needs of all learners in an increasingly digital world.

One potential avenue to both tackling teacher shortages and improving gender equality within and outside of education, is to encourage more men into the teaching

workforce. Globally, women are massively over-represented in teaching, especially at lower levels – in pre-primary education, women make up 94% of the teaching force. However, at higher education levels, their numbers dwindle to 43%, and in leadership roles, women are very often under-represented (UNESCO, 2025e). Increasing diversity in the teaching workforce and striving for equality at different levels of education and within leadership, can play an important role in eradicating gender stereotypes. In that regard, the Santiago Consensus (2025) highlights that building an inclusive teaching workforce that mirrors the diversity of communities it serves is also vital to addressing often invisible barriers that discourage certain groups from pursuing a career in teaching. Moreover, diversity in the teaching profession directly benefits learners: students from under-represented groups tend to achieve better learning outcomes and develop stronger engagement when taught by teachers who share their ethnic, racial, linguistic, or cultural backgrounds (UNESCO & TTF, 2024).

Revising the international normative framework on teachers

The ILO/UNESCO Recommendation concerning the Status of Teachers (1966) and the UNESCO Recommendation concerning the Status of Higher-Education Teaching Personnel (1997) together form the most comprehensive international normative framework on teachers' rights and responsibilities. These instruments set standards for initial training, ongoing professional development, and the broader conditions of the teaching profession.

However, these frameworks fall short of addressing the evolving role and expectations placed on teachers in today's educational landscape. As underscored in the Final Report of the Fifteenth Session of the Joint ILO-UNESCO Committee of Experts on the Application of the Recommendations concerning Teaching Personnel (CEART) (ILO and UNESCO, 2024), teachers are increasingly expected to move beyond their traditional function as subject-matter experts to assume learner-centred roles as facilitators and guides. This shift, is also emphasized in Olivier Liang's analysis of the High-Level Panel on the Teaching Profession (2025), which calls for sustained investment in teacher training, mentoring, and professional support to ensure quality and motivation. Both the CEART and the Panel highlight that technology is a key driver of change in the teaching profession, yet stress that digital tools should not replace teachers, but empower them to guide their learners in their quest for curious, critical, creative, and lifelong learning (Liang, 2025.)

Teachers' working conditions must extend well beyond basic salary. They should include stable contractual arrangements, a safe and healthy workplace, manageable teacher-student ratios, support structures to manage challenging student behaviour, a balanced workload, safe, affordable and adequate housing, relevant, high-quality and accessible training and professional development opportunities, equitable access to technology and other resources, adequate social protection and pensions, and working time arrangements (including tasks beyond classroom teaching such as lesson preparation, marking and out-of-class commitments with students and parents) that allow for adequate rest and a work-life balance. This list of conditions represents a significant expansion of the terms of remuneration and benefits set out in the 1966 ILO/UNESCO Recommendation.

Higher education personnel encounter similar challenges. Since the adoption of the 1997 Recommendation on the Status of Higher Education Teaching Personnel (UNESCO, 1997), the landscape of higher education has undergone significant transformation. The expansion of digital technologies, including AI, open, distance, and hybrid learning systems, has reshaped how teaching, research, and institutional management are conducted, bringing both opportunities and challenges. At the same time, broader societal shifts, including deepening inequalities, demographic changes, increased mobility and displacement, have influenced the context in which higher education operates. Developments also included the proliferation of private education providers in contexts where normative frameworks to regulate them remain insufficient.

Within this evolving context, academic personnel continue to face persistent gender inequalities, especially in access to leadership roles, certain fields of study (e.g. STEM and TVET), and fair pay. New challenges have also emerged in areas such as academic freedom, institutional autonomy, managing rising enrolment rates, expanding academic offerings, adapting to new teaching modalities, and the growing internationalization of higher education institutions.

Emerging concerns also include the need for adequate financial support for students aiming to pursue teaching careers, the recognition of diverse pathways for entry into the academic profession, and career advancement and pedagogical training opportunities to attract and retain personnel. In addition, there is a growing call for academic evaluation systems to adequately recognize the importance of teaching, alongside research and societal engagement, ensuring that all aspects of academic work are valued and supported.

Considering these developments, it has become clear that while the principles outlined in the 1997 Recommendation remain highly relevant, the evolving realities of the higher education landscape need to be taken into account.

As the lifelong learning approach becomes central to the right to education, the rights of non-formal educators and early childhood educators must also be recognized. These personnel are frequently lacking in proper renumeration and working conditions and remain outside of traditional teaching rights frameworks. Similarly, non-teaching staff in educational institutions, from administrative personnel, to librarians, counsellors and custodial staff, play a vital role in ensuring safe and inclusive learning environments, and their rights must be safeguarded to ensure job satisfaction, retention and overall well-being within education system.

Section 3: Reimagining the right to education for a changing world

The right to education stands at a crossroads. The 65th anniversary of the Convention against Discrimination in Education offers a fitting moment to reflect on its achievements and future direction. While the Convention's core aim – to eliminate discrimination in education – is an unfinished struggle, significant progress has been made. In many regions, certain levels and forms of education have become near-universal rights, yet persistent gaps and exclusions continue to threaten equality. This section examines how educational inequalities are evolving in 2025 and builds on the work of the Initiative on the Evolving Right to Education, exploring how the right to education could be reframed to better withstand shocks and remain resilient and relevant in the face of the global changes described in Section 2.

A) Persistent barriers: Discrimination, exclusion and emerging inequalities in 2025

The Transforming Education Summit (UN, 2022) was convened in response to a global crisis in education – marked by challenges of equity, inclusion, quality and relevance. Despite normative advances and wider access, structural discrimination and systemic exclusion remain deeply rooted, disproportionality affecting the most vulnerable. By 2025, these persistent challenges are compounded by emerging global dynamics such as digital transformation, displacement, and climate change, creating new forms of exclusion and deepening disparities in access, quality, and learning outcomes. In many respects, a widening gap has emerged between existing international human rights norms and the complexity of today's educational inequalities.

Evolving the 'grounds of discrimination' to protect other groups

The existing international conventions governing the right to education prohibit discrimination based on various groups, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national, ethnic or social origin, property, birth, or disability, though this list is non-exhaustive. General Comment No. 20 of the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (2009) considers how the nature of discrimination varies according to context and evolves over time. The Committee took the approach that 'other statuses' can be defined by other forms of differential treatment that 'cannot be reasonable and objectively justified and are of a comparable nature to the expressly recognized grounds' already listed. Other potential grounds the Committee suggested included disability; nationality; marital and family status (for example, adolescent mothers); sexual orientation and gender identity; health status (for example, HIV status); and place of residence. Age is another prohibited ground of discrimination in several contexts and has increased importance within the new conceptualization of a right to education throughout life, where older persons may find themselves unable to access training or education, for example.

Socio-economic disadvantages

In 2025, socio-economic disadvantage remains a defining factor in the enjoyment of the right to education, both between regions and within countries. Stark disparities in income, public investment and debt burdens leave low- and lower-middle income countries unable to allocate sufficient resources in education, resulting in overcrowded classrooms, shortages of trained teachers, and minimal per-student spending in comparison to high-income countries. Data shows that in low-income countries, 33% of school-aged children and youth are out

of school, compared to only 3% in high-income countries (UNESCO, 2024c). More than half of all out-of-school children and adolescents in the world are in the sub-Saharan African region (UNESCO, 2024c).

Within countries, poverty amplifies exclusion. For many families, schooling carries an opportunity cost: children from the poorest 20% of households are four times more likely to be out of school than those from the wealthiest 20%. As household income rises, the probability of being out of school steadily decreases (UNESCO and UNESCO UIS, 2012). This underlines the need to align the right to at least nine years of compulsory education with the minimum age of employment, and with other child rights that guarantee opportunities to learn, play and fully experience childhood. Achieving this, however, requires sustained investment and robust social protection measures that eliminate the economic pressures forcing children to work their way out of poverty.

Within countries, inequalities are also intersectional; compounded by poverty, geographical isolation, gender discrimination, and exclusion based on ethnicity, statelessness, language, or disability. These overlapping disadvantages leave marginalized groups disproportionately affected and further from realizing their right to education. Within OECD countries, an average of only 26% of young adults whose parents did not complete upper secondary education had obtained a tertiary qualification, compared to 70% of those with at least one tertiary educated parent (OECD, 2025a). As for students with an immigrant background, more than one-third of immigrants in the EU (35%) have a low level of education, almost twice the share observed among the native-born population (20%). This relatively high proportion is mainly due to non-EU migrants, 40% of whom achieve only a low level of education within the EU. (OECD, European Commission, 2023).

Statelessness provides a clear example of how these barriers operate in practice. Millions of children deprived of their right to a nationality face serious obstacles in accessing fundamental rights, particularly education. While international law guarantees education for all children regardless of nationality or statelessness, many national laws and policies continue to exclude stateless children. As a result, they often experience poor academic outcomes and limited future opportunities. These barriers reduce their chances of breaking free from cycles of poverty and social exclusion (ISI, 2025).

Gender disparities

Achieving gender equality remains a central challenge. In many parts of the world, particularly sub-Saharan Africa, deep-rooted social, economic, and cultural barriers continue to hinder girls' access to and completion of education (UNESCO, 2020e). In low-income countries, only 38% of girls complete lower secondary education, compared to 43% of boys (World Bank, n.d.). While the share of females among illiterate youth has declined globally since 2005, the proportion of women among illiterate adults has remained similar since 2000, at around 63%, underscoring the long-standing and intergenerational nature of gender disparities in literacy (UNESCO, 2020e). According to UNESCO HerAtlas data, as of early 2025, 63% of countries still lack legislation explicitly protecting girls' right to education in cases of pregnancy, while 33% have adopted such provisions, often detailed and strongly protective. In 2019, eight countries maintained legal restrictions on the education of pregnant, parenting, or married girls. Since then, four countries in the African region have repealed these prohibitions, leaving only four countries worldwide with explicit legal bans in place (UNESCO, HerAtlas).

At the same time, the discourse on gender inequality in education has expanded to include growing concern for boys' disengagement. Emerging evidence reveals that boys in many contexts are increasingly at risk of underachievement, grade repetition, and early dropout, especially at the secondary level (UNESCO, 2022g). It is of note also that, globally men are less represented in higher education, with 113 women enrolled for every 100 men (UNESCO, 2025). UNESCO's Global Report on Boys' Disengagement from Education (2022g) highlights how restrictive gender norms and societal expectations, such as pressure to enter the workforce or conform to traditional norms of masculinity, can lead boys to disengage from schooling altogether.

There is also growing awareness of the different forms and quality of education experienced by girls and boys experience. Both face bias and stereotypes that reinforce gender segregation in certain fields of study, with women still under-represented in STEM and men under-represented in caregiving fields of study (UNESCO, 2020e). Gender further shapes students' sense of safety, security, and well-being, with gender-based violence and bullying continuing to undermine learning.

Youth voices
(SDG 4 Youth and Student Network)

> If education is to remain a right, it must evolve into a right that prepares, protects, and empowers - especially the most vulnerable […] Preparing for this future must begin now - not with fear, but with intention and inclusion.
>
> MSB Syed, The Walkway Schools Pakistan

This evolving picture underscores that gender equality in education is not one-dimensional: it requires a nuanced, inclusive approach that addresses the distinct barriers facing all learners.

Indigenous Peoples and minorities

Indigenous Peoples continue to face significant barriers to accessing quality education, perpetuating their broader social marginalization. Across both rural and urban contexts, they remain less likely than non-indigenous populations to complete primary education or obtain formal qualifications. For example, in Latin America, completion rates decline sharply for afro-descendant students as early as the primary level. There is a 21% gap in completion between them and their non-afro-descendant peers, a disparity that widens to 32% at the secondary level and reaches 71% in tertiary education. (Freire et al., 2022).

In rural areas, inadequate infrastructure and shortage of teaching materials hinder access, while in urban systems education is often neither culturally relevant nor delivered in mother tongues (UNESCO, 2019d). Regarding digital education, inclusivity is often not guaranteed, with limited languages available and content that is not always culturally sensitive nor relevant. All these impact engagement, effectiveness of learning and sense of inclusion (UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2024).

Similarly, despite the commitments made under the Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities (UN, 1992), recent assessments indicate a troubling lack of progress. The former United Nations Special Rapporteur on minority issues observed that the use of minority languages in education showed little improvement during his mandate (Special Rapporteur on minority issues, 2023a). In 2022, the UN Secretary-General told the General Assembly that, thirty years after the Declaration's adoption, 'the world is falling short. Far short. We are not dealing with gaps, we are dealing with outright inaction and negligence in the protection of minority rights' (Special Rapporteur on minority issues, 2023a).

This stark warning reflects broader global trends: growing hostility towards minorities, mounting restrictions on the use of their languages in educational settings, and a surge in conflicts involving minority groups with long-standing grievances related to exclusion and discrimination, contributing to a landscape in which the number of conflicts involving minorities has reached its highest point since the Declaration was adopted (Special Rapporteur on minority issues, 2023b). At the seventy-seventh session of the General Assembly, the Special Rapporteur expressed hope that recognition of these failures would lead to concrete action, including renewed efforts to implement long-standing recommendations such as drafting a global treaty on minority rights and operationalizing the Secretary-General's 2013 guidance note on racial discrimination and the protection of minorities (Special Rapporteur on minority issues, 2023b).

Learners with disabilities

Disability-based discrimination and exclusion remain pervasive to the realization of the right to education. Many learners with disabilities continue to face segregated or inadequate schooling environments. As education digitalizes, limited access to assistive technologies can increase the sense of exclusion. An estimated 240 million children worldwide have disabilities, which is approximately 1 in 10 children (UNICEF, 2024a). Children with disabilities are 49% more likely to have never attended school, often due to inaccessible infrastructure, lack of trained teachers, and absence of inclusive policies. (UNICEF, 2024a). Stigma and negative social attitudes further marginalize children with disabilities, reinforcing cycles of inequality and

exclusion. Furthermore, the gap in academic achievement for learners with disabilities is significantly wider in lower-income countries. For instance, while the success rate declines by about 5% in countries such as the United States or Australia, it falls by an average of 10% in Latin America (UNESCO, 2020c).

Recognition of inclusion in national frameworks

Despite global recognition of inclusive education as a right for all as enshrined in the SDG 4 headline target, its definition remains uneven across national frameworks. Only 68% of countries include a definition of inclusive education in their laws or policies; of these, just 57% refer to multiple marginalized groups; while 25% define it solely in relation to persons with disabilities or learners with special needs (UNESCO, 2020e). Such a narrow framing risks reinforcing siloed approaches and excluding learners who face intersecting forms of marginalization, such as children with disabilities who also belong to minority groups.

B) Building a stronger legal foundation

This sub-section presents the core components needed to strengthen the international legal framework on the right to education. It identifies critical gaps in the existing international legal framework and highlights the need for a more comprehensive, inclusive, and resilient approach.

International human rights law creates binding duties for states to respect, protect, and fulfil their obligations. The right to education is no different. As a fundamental human right with its normative basis first established in the UDHR (1948) and further articulated in the UNESCO CADE (1960) and the ICESCR (1966), it has now been over half a century since many of its key provisions were drafted.

Since then, a wide range of instruments, including global and regional commitments,[4] have strengthened and extended the right to education. Besides, many countries have expanded access to education, provided free schooling (mainly at earlier levels), reduced out-of-school figures, recognized diverse forms of learning, and improved quality and accessibility, including through infrastructure adaptations for learners with disabilities and measures to include displaced learners (Special Rapporteur on the right to education, 2023; UNESCO and UNESCO UIS, 2025a; SDG4-Education 2030 High-level Steering Committee, n.d.; UNESCO, 2024g; UNESCO, 2024i; and International Commission on the Futures of Education, 2021). Yet major gaps persist. These educational gaps undermine individual development, economic growth, social justice, and sustainable development.

4 **KEY INTERNATIONAL INSTRUMENTS:** The right to education is anchored in a robust framework of international treaties and conventions, many of which UNESCO helped establish. Beyond the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, several binding instruments elaborate this right. The UNESCO **Convention against Discrimination in Education (1960)** was the first treaty devoted to education equality. Other United Nations treaties followed: the **International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1966)**, which in Article 13 commits states to free primary education and progressive introduction of free secondary and higher education; the **Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (1979)**, Article 10 of which ensures women's equal educational rights; the **Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989)**, Articles 28–29 affirming every child's right to free primary education and accessible secondary education; and the **Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006)**, Article 24 recognizing the right of persons with disabilities to inclusive. **KEY REGIONAL INSTRUMENTS: Africa:** the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (1981); the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (1990); the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (2003); and the African Youth Charter (2006). **Arab states:** Arab Charter on Human Rights (2004). **Asia:** ASEAN Human Rights Declaration (2012). **Europe:** Council of Europe Protocol 1 to the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (1950); Council of Europe revised European Social Charter 1996; Council of Europe European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages; Council of Europe framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities; Council of Europe European Convention on the Legal Status of Migrant Workers; and Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union. **Inter-American region:** Charter of the Organization of American States (1948); and Additional Protocol to the American Convention on Human Rights, Protocol of San Salvador. **KEY REGIONAL COMMITMENTS:** Agenda 2063 – The Africa We Want (2015); Continental Education Strategy for Africa (CESA) 2016–2025 (a successor strategy CESA 2026–2035 has been launched in 2025); Arab Regional Roadmap for Education 2030 (2015); ASEAN Work Plan on Education 2021–2025 (2021); Pacific Regional Education Framework (PacREF) 2018–2030; European Education Area Strategic Framework (2021–2030); Inter-American Education Agenda (IEA) (2017); CARICOM Human Resource Development 2030 Strategy (2017); and the Buenos Aires Declaration (2022).

Youth voices
(SDG 4 Youth and Student Network)

> There is a significant divide between the rich and the poor, as well as between developed and developing nations. This divide continues to grow, creating barriers for vulnerable communities and those living in the developing world to access the same standard of education available in developed countries. They often face a lack of financial resources for digital tools, along with overcrowded classrooms, which prevent them from getting the most out of their education.
>
> Jay Chew, UNESCO SDG4 Network

The world of 2025 is far removed from the one in which these legally binding international instruments on the right to education were conceived. Escalating crises – from climate change and disruptive technologies to democratic backsliding, widespread conflict, and deepening inequalities – demand urgent re-examination of the scope and substance of the right to education. With human rights under threat globally, reaffirming a rights-based approach and strengthening the international legal framework for education is not merely desirable; it is essential to securing a sustainable and resilient foundation for education worldwide (Shaheed, forthcoming 2025).

It is against this backdrop that the UNESCO Initiative on the Evolving Right to Education was initiated in 2021, and officially launched in 2024, to strengthen the global legally-binding framework on the right to education and make it more responsive to contemporary needs and challenges. Between 2021 and 2025, it has drawn on extensive research and policy analysis, complemented by wide-ranging consultations and events that brought together experts, educators, specialists, activists, and learners.

Adopting a lifelong learning principle in (re)shaping the right to education

Lifelong learning is deeply rooted in diverse cultural and educational traditions around the world (Elfert, 2015; Tam, 2015). It represents an enduring human aspiration to grow intellectually, socially, and emotionally throughout life. Rather than being confined to a particular stage, place, or purpose, it embraces the notion that learning is a continuous and dynamic process, integral to every phase of life (UNESCO, forthcoming c). As John Dewey (1938) emphasized, education is a continuous, dynamic process that extends across the entire lifespan, from early childhood to old age, and encompasses all dimensions of human experience.

Lifelong learning takes multiple forms. It occurs in formal settings guided by tutors, teachers and educators, but also in informal and non-formal contexts, for example through, radio and television programmes, or digital platforms that allow individuals to learn independently, without temporal or spatial boundaries (Schuller in UNESCO, forthcoming c). It serves both professional and personal purposes, empowering people to adapt to change, pursue curiosity, and cultivate creativity. As articulated by UNESCO UIL (2022b), lifelong learning encompasses all age groups, all levels of education, all learning modalities, all learning spaces, and a wide range of purposes.

UNESCO has long been at the forefront of advancing lifelong learning as a cornerstone of the right to education and a driver of human development. This commitment, first articulated in the 1972 Faure Report (International Commission on the Development of Education, 2013), was reaffirmed in 1997 in the Delors Report (International Commission on Education for the Twenty-first Century, 1999), further consolidated in the Incheon Declaration and Framework for Action (2016) and in the report Reimagining Our Futures Together: A New Social Contract for Education (International Commission on the Futures of Education, 2021). Taken together, these landmark documents underscore the imperative of building learning societies grounded in the principles of lifelong education. They highlight that, in a rapidly changing world of work and knowledge, lifelong learning is essential to meet changing demands, foster inclusion, and strengthen the connections between diverse learning spaces, modalities and stages of life.

Central to this vision is the creation of learning ecosystems that make lifelong learning a lived reality for all. Such ecosystems empower individuals to realize their potential, participate meaningfully in their communities, and contribute to sustainable economic, social, cultural, and environmental progress (UNESCO, forthcoming c). Building on these principles, the evolving right to education initiative seeks to foster a collaborative

dialogue on expanding and reinforcing the right to education framework, placing lifelong learning at its very centre. The aim is to ensure that this right is fulfilled not once in life, but continuously, across every stage of life, as societies and learning needs evolve.

Given this background, in the next section, this report will highlight the gaps and areas that require further attention and development; for instance, the emerging entitlements and directions vis-à-vis strengthening the international legal framework.

Identifying the gaps in the international legal framework

The UNESCO Initiative on the Evolving Right to Education recognizes that existing international legal instruments on the right to education, while foundational, lack the specificity needed to respond to today's educational realities, challenges and opportunities. While broad provisions remain essential, the international normative framework must evolve or be re-contextualized to support more resilient, inclusive, and equitable education systems that serve all learners throughout life. An evolution of the international normative framework is therefore needed to build more resilient, inclusive, and equitable education systems for all learners throughout life.

This requires a holistic view that acknowledges the profound interdependence of the right to education with other human rights, such as – *inter alia* – the rights to health, work, gender equality, and information (UNESCO, 2023b). Building on extensive global consultation, a stronger, legally binding framework should be constructed around several key pillars that address the most pressing substantive gaps in the international legal framework.

The table below highlights key gaps (but is not exhaustive) across education levels and themes and draws from a comparative legal analysis of international legally binding instruments. These gaps are subsequently analysed and then organized within a framework designed to guide future direction.

Table 1. Review of key learning entitlements across ages and settings in international human rights law

Theme/Level	International human rights law	Absence of specific legal obligations /or weak legal obligations
Early childhood education and care	IHRL recognizes the right of the child (anyone under the age of eighteen) to education. It also provides for the best interest of the child and the right to rest, leisure and play. Specific provisions are also made to support parents and legal guardians in fulfilling their child-rearing responsibilities, with States Parties required to ensure the development of institutions, facilities, and services for the care and development of children. See: CRC, articles 3, 24, 28 and 31. ICESCR, article 10.1	There are no explicit provisions on compulsory and free pre-primary education of at least one year nor on the right to child care and healthcare services and facilities. The right of parents to receive support in child-rearing is recognized but weakly articulated, and could be further strengthened, particularly regarding education and guidance on child health, nutrition, hygiene, and safety.
Primary and secondary education	While IHRL provides for the obligation of free and compulsory primary education, secondary education is required to be progressively free. See: CADE article 4(a); ICESCR article 13(2) ; CRC article 28 (1) ; CRPD article 24(2).	There is no clear obligation in IHRL providing for 12 years of free primary and secondary education of which 9 are compulsory. In addition, while there is a definition of 'progressively free' secondary education, there is no explicit time-bound period at this level.

Theme/Level	International human rights law	Absence of specific legal obligations /or weak legal obligations
Technical and vocational education and training (TVET)	Under the ICESCR, generally available and accessible TVET is only referred to as being part of secondary education. In relation to the right to work, technical and vocational guidance and training programmes are to be included. The ILO Convention No. 142 requires states to adopt comprehensive and coordinated policies on vocational guidance and training connected to employment for all sectors and skill levels. It also calls for continuing education and training to enable adaptation to technological and structural changes, thereby introducing a lifelong learning dimension to skills development. The UNESCO TVET Convention refers to establishing quality assurance mechanisms, ensuring the involvement of a wide range of public and private stakeholders in the governance of TVET systems and ensuring sufficient affordable TVET at tertiary levels. See: ICESCR articles 6 and 13(2)(b), ILO Convention No. 142, UNESCO TVET Convention.	There is no provision in IHRL that indicates that TVET should aim to achieve steady economic, social and cultural development and full and productive employment. Educational and vocational guidance and counselling are also not guaranteed under the right to education. There is also an absence of explicit rights to re-skilling, up-skilling and career transition.
Higher education	Free higher education is to be introduced on a progressive basis and shall be accessible on the basis of capacity. The UNESCO Global Convention on Higher Education covers, *inter alia*, the right of individuals to have their qualifications assessed to apply for admission to higher education/ employment opportunities, recognition of qualifications should be transparent, fair, timely and non-discriminatory with the establishment of an objective and reliable system for the approval, recognition and quality assurance of higher-education institutions. See: ICESCR articles 6 and 13(2)(b); UNESCO Global Convention on Higher Education.	IHRL does not provide for affordability of higher education (when it is not yet free) nor include financial incentives such as grants and scholarships for the most disadvantaged, marginalized and/or vulnerable groups. The grounds for admission into higher education based on capacity also need to be clarified.
Post-higher education and learning	Fundamental education for those who have not received or completed primary education is provided. See: CADE article 4(c); ICESCR article 13(2)(d); CEDAW article 10(e); CRC article 28(c).	Learning and training opportunities beyond higher education are not guaranteed under IHRL, nor are free quality and functional literacy including digital literacy, numeracy and fundamental education.

Theme/Level	International human rights law	Absence of specific legal obligations /or weak legal obligations
Lifelong learning	The CRPD refers to equality regarding lifelong learning and the Global Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education provides a definition of lifelong learning and aims to support lifelong learning opportunities for all, including refugees and displaced persons. See: CRPD article 24(5). Global Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education, article 1 and 2(9).	There is no binding recognition of the right to learn throughout life across five dimensions (ages, levels, spaces, modalities, purposes) and an absence of state duties to create integrated LLL systems and support individual agency through lifelong learning entitlements (including recognition, validation and accreditation of learning outcomes acquired in different contexts, and flexible and seamless learning pathways between formal and non-formal education and training). The right to academic freedom is also not explicitly guaranteed in a legally binding instrument.
Aims of education	The ICESCR and the CRC specify the aims of education. See: ICESCR article 13(1); CRC article 29(1).	There is no legal provision in IHRL that sets the right to learn about sustainable development, global citizenship, human rights, and health and well-being. Corporal punishment in education is not explicitly prohibited.
Quality of education	The international legal framework currently provides for equal quality of education through minimum standards, and quality teaching and supplies for teachers. For people with disabilities, the CRPD specifically mandates for access to quality primary and secondary education, and mandates that teacher training must include the use of educational techniques and materials to support people with disabilities. See: CADE article 1(2); ICESCR article 13(2)(e), 13(3) and 13(4); CRPD article 24.2.b and 24.4; CRC article 29.2; CEDAW article 10.b.	The international legal framework lacks clear provisions on the right to quality education for all learners and at all levels, which should encompass quality content and curriculum, pedagogy and infrastructure, quality standards, and adequate teacher training and qualified educators, including ECCE personnel and adult educators.
Inclusion	The CRPD is the only instrument that refers to inclusive education. See: CRPD article 24.	There is a lack of a comprehensive definition of inclusive education which goes beyond people with disabilities, and fosters cultural, religious and linguistic diversity, among other aspects. Guarantees for individualized support measures including remedial action, auxiliary assistance; ensuring learning environments free from stigmatization and stereotypes; and fostering cultural, religious and linguistic diversity in terms of educational content and delivery are lacking in IHRL.
Discrimination	Under the CADE, the term 'discrimination' includes 'any distinction, exclusion, limitation or preference which, being based on race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, economic condition or birth, has the purpose or effect of nullifying or impairing equality of treatment in education'. See: CADE article 1(1).	While at the international level the list of prohibited grounds of discrimination in education is and needs to remain open for other status, sexual orientation, gender identity, refugees, asylum-seekers, migrants and IDPs are not included.

Theme/Level	International human rights law	Absence of specific legal obligations /or weak legal obligations
People with disabilities	Persons with disabilities have the right to inclusive, quality education at all levels and in all forms, on an equal basis with others. States must ensure that they are not excluded from free and compulsory primary or secondary education on the basis of disability, and that education systems provide reasonable accommodation, individualized support, and accessible learning environments. Teachers should be trained in inclusive practices and communication methods such as Braille, sign language, and accessible digital formats. Education should foster respect for human diversity, strengthen self-esteem, and enable persons with disabilities to participate fully in society. States must also ensure equal access to higher, vocational, and lifelong learning opportunities. See: CRPD article 24.	There is no clear obligation in relation to ensuring access to or provision of digital tools, technologies, and online learning environments for persons with disabilities, nor explicit guarantees that digital education systems and resources must be accessible, affordable, and inclusive for all learners with disabilities.
Girls and women	Women and girls should be treated equally in education at all levels and forms, including access to curricular, examinations, teaching staff of the same quality, same opportunities for scholarships and continuing education (including functional literacy). States must take steps to reduce female drop-out rates and support women and girls who left school early to continue their studies. Equal access should also be ensured in vocational training, sports, and educational information on health and family well-being. Gender-stereotyped concepts of the roles of men and women should be eliminated throughout the education system. See: CEDAW article 10.	There is no clear obligation in relation to ensuring education re-enrollment and prohibiting any restrictions in education, of pregnant and parenting girls and women.
Indigenous Peoples and minorities	Under IHRL Indigenous Peoples and minorities have the right to education that respects and preserves their cultural identity, language, and values. States must ensure that education promotes understanding and tolerance among all groups while enabling Indigenous Peoples and minority communities to establish and manage their own educational institutions and facilities. Education should be delivered in a manner that respects their cultural heritage and, wherever possible, in their own languages. States are further encouraged to take measures ensuring equality of opportunity and outcomes while safeguarding their right to the establishment of their own educational institutions and facilities. See: Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention articles 26-31; CADE article 5(1)(c).	Mother tongue education and learning opportunities are not explicitly provided for in IHRL.

Theme/Level	International human rights law	Absence of specific legal obligations /or weak legal obligations
Refugees, migrants, internally displaced persons and asylum-seekers	IHRL provides for the right to education of refugees, migrants, IDPs, and stateless persons without discrimination and on terms no less favourable than those permitted to nationals. States must ensure that children and youth in these situations have access to free and compulsory primary education, and that secondary, technical, and higher education are made equally accessible, including through fair recognition of prior learning and qualifications (even when documentary evidence is incomplete). Education systems should facilitate inclusion, language support, and the continuity of learning across borders, while removing administrative or legal barriers that hinder enrolment. The Global Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education recognizes 'the importance of fair, transparent, and non-discriminatory recognition of qualifications' (preamble §10). See: ICPRMW article 30, UN Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees article 22; UN Convention Relating to the Status of Statelessness article 22; UN Convention on the rights of the child, article 22; Global Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education, article II(3) and article VII.	Asylum-seekers and IDPs (including climate displaced) do not have their right to education enshrined nor detailed. Elimination of administrative barriers, language classes, remedial classes, etc. is not explicated in IHRL.
Emergency and protracted crises	During emergencies and protracted crises, the right to education continues to apply and must be protected under international humanitarian law. States and parties to conflict are required to respect and ensure the proper functioning of educational institutions and to safeguard children's access to education even in times of war. Attacks on buildings dedicated to education, the use of educational facilities for military purposes, and any acts that impede children's learning constitute violations of international law. Education must be preserved as a space of protection, continuity, and stability for learners affected by conflict and displacement. See: Fourth Geneva Convention, articles 24 and 50x; Additional Protocols to the Geneva Convention, article 4(3)(a), and the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (1998) article 8(b)(ix) and (e)(iv).	The right to a safe learning environment and measures to ensure education resiliency and responsiveness are weak in IHRL.
Digital education		No legal provisions address inclusive access to digital inclusion, including the use of technology in education and the need for digital literacy skills, to prioritize connectivity and establish minimum standards. There is no legal provision on the right to online privacy in education nor international standards on data processing in education or online security in education.

Theme/Level	International human rights law	Absence of specific legal obligations /or weak legal obligations
Governance	For UN treaties, ratifying states are required to report on measures taken to implement the treaty.	IHRL does not refer to the inter-relatedness of human rights and the intersectoral, sector-wide and participatory approach required for education. No reference is made to ensure regular, transparent and participatory monitoring of the right to education and the need for a conducive judiciary.
Financing	The ICESCR mandates that states must provide their maximum available resources to realize the rights recognized in the Covenant. See: ICESCR article 2(1).	No legal obligation in IHRL has been specifically established for states to adequately and equitably finance the education system.
Teacher profession	IHRL states that the material conditions of teaching staff are to be continuously improved, training should be without discrimination and qualifications of teachers should be the same standard across separate education systems for all pupils, without distinction. The CRPD also refers to teachers in relation to people with disabilities. See: CADE articles 2(a) and 4(d); ICESCR 13(2)(e); CRPD article 24(4).	Working conditions and the social status of teachers (including contract teachers) and personnel in non-formal education as well as right to fair pay, pre-service and in-service training and standards are not provided for in IHRL.
Non-state actors	Non-state actors have a recognized role in delivering education, but their activities must fully respect and align with the principles of equality, non-discrimination, and quality established under international human rights law. States retain the primary obligation to regulate, monitor, and ensure that private institutions operate in conformity with the right to education and do not undermine its public nature or accessibility. Parents and communities have the freedom to establish educational institutions, provided they meet minimum standards set by the state to safeguard educational objectives consistent with human rights. See: CADE article 2(c), article 5 (1)(b); ICESCR article 13(4)	Clear regulatory frameworks are needed to balance educational freedom with accountability, inclusion, and equity in IHRL.

Source: UNESCO, 2023b.

As illustrated in the table above, these gaps are substantive. They comprise several aspects, including the lack of guarantee of access to education, inclusive and quality education for all throughout life, and the insufficient translation of global commitments into enforceable legal obligations. Although current international instruments set some minimum standards for quality teaching and learning – including accessible pedagogical support for learners with disabilities – they remain partial and fall short of articulating a comprehensive and system-wide guarantee of quality education for all learners. Furthermore, and while SDG 4 has positioned lifelong learning as a central principle of global education policy, its targets often remain aspirational in the absence of corresponding legal guarantees. Existing international instruments tend to emphasize access to basic education, with fewer binding provisions covering the broader learning continuum – from ECCE to secondary, higher and youth and adult literacy.

For instance, at national level, ECCE lacks a specific legal guarantee despite universal recognition of its foundational importance; secondary education remains only partially free and compulsory in many countries, with just one-third guaranteeing 12 years of free schooling; and higher education, while nominally accessible, faces growing inequities linked to affordability, discrimination, and opportunity costs. Similarly, the right to literacy – particularly adult and digital literacy – remains insufficiently codified despite its status as a

prerequisite for all other learning rights. ALE, in particular, continues to fall through the cracks of the international legal framework: it is addressed mainly through soft law, leaving states without clear, enforceable duties to guarantee access, financing, recognition of prior learning, or pathways to re-engagement for adults who missed out on schooling. This normative weakness perpetuates exclusion for hundreds of millions of adults worldwide who lack foundational or functional literacy, digital skills, or access to reskilling opportunities essential for active citizenship and decent work.

Addressing these gaps requires an evolved international legal framework that extends enforceable guarantees across all stages and dimensions of lifelong learning, from pre-primary to adult education, and across formal, non-formal, and informal learning spaces. It should codify free and compulsory pre-primary and immediate free secondary education, clarify affordability and equitable financing in higher education, and anchor literacy (including digital literacy) and adult learning as lifelong entitlements. Such a framework must also recognize the agency of learners by embedding lifelong learning entitlements, such as portable learning credits, personal learning accounts, and rights to recognition, validation, and accreditation of prior learning, as mechanisms enabling individuals to pursue learning throughout life, on their own terms. Digitalization is also reshaping education, yet international human rights law contains no explicit provisions guaranteeing digital inclusion or equitable access to technology-enabled learning. States have a duty to ensure that education systems evolve to promote digital literacy, connectivity, and access to safe, inclusive and affordable online learning environments. Strengthening the international legal framework to encompass the digital dimension of education is essential to uphold equality of opportunity and accountability in the use of digital tools for learning.

The international framework should integrate UNESCO's five lifelong learning dimensions (ages, levels, spaces, modalities, and purposes) into a coherent architecture linking education, labour, and social policy, ensuring that learning is both a right and a shared societal responsibility. Upholding the principle of non-retrogression as a core foundation for the development of any new legal framework would further ensure that hard-won achievements, such as free secondary education, adult literacy programmes, and continuing education schemes, are protected even in times of crisis or austerity. Ultimately, reaffirming the humanistic and transformative aims of education within a renewed international legal framework would not only align the right to education with SDG 4's vision of universal, inclusive, equitable, and lifelong learning opportunities, but also restore its foundational purpose: to advance human dignity, autonomy, and sustainability.

Towards a sustainable and resilient international legal framework for the right to education

The 5As approach – availability, accessibility, acceptability, adaptability, and the more recent inclusion of accountability – is a critical approach to strengthen the international legal framework on the right to education by addressing normative and implementation gaps. While instruments such as the CADE and ICESCR establish foundational principles, their often aspirational language limits enforceability. The 5As provide concrete markers to determine state obligations to respect, protect, and fulfil the right to education. By requiring that education be universally accessible, adequately resourced, culturally relevant, responsive to changing needs, and subject to legal accountability, the framework operationalizes the right to education and enables effective monitoring. It is particularly vital in tackling legal gaps related to digital learning, climate resilience, and the inclusion of marginalized learners, serving as both a diagnostic tool and a normative roadmap for evolving international human rights law (UNESCO and the Right to Education Initiative, 2019; Special Rapporteur on the right to education, 2002; see also UNESCO, 2018).

To build a more sustainable and resilient legal framework, the right to education must be reframed within a lifelong, life-wide, and interdependent human rights lens. This includes:

Availability

- **Recognizing ECCE as a legal right:** including a guarantee of at least one year of free and compulsory pre-primary education for all, and encompassing integrated care, health, and developmental services from birth. This reflects more recent global commitments as outlined in SDG 4.2 and the Tashkent Declaration. International law should guarantee quality ECCE for all children from infancy, with state obligations to provide inclusive, culturally sensitive, and adequately staffed and safe environments that serve the best interests of the child (UNESCO and UNICEF, 2024; UNESCO, 2023f; UNESCO, 2022d; UNESCO, 2021d; UNESCO and Right to Education Initiative, 2019).
- **Legally guaranteeing at least 12 years of free quality education:** including at least 9 years of compulsory education, to align with SDG 4.1 and Education 2030. This would fill a normative gap where secondary education is not yet universally guaranteed in law, despite being essential for learning continuity. Binding instruments should ensure uninterrupted, inclusive education through primary and secondary levels, with quality standards and targeted support for marginalized groups (Incheon Declaration and Framework for Action, 2016).
- **Creating legal entitlements for adult learning:** including reskilling, upskilling, and digital literacy, and the recognition of prior learning and seamless transitions between formal and non-formal settings. Legal reforms need to enshrine the right to adult education as a lifelong entitlement and obligate states to invest in inclusive, accessible and flexible pathways for foundational, digital, and community-based learning for all (UNESCO, forthcoming a: see also UNESCO UIL, 2022a).

Accessibility

- **Inclusive education and non-discrimination:** the principle of equality must be reaffirmed in stronger legal terms, including specific protection for groups still facing direct or indirect barriers – such as pregnant and parenting learners, children with disabilities, learners from minority communities, and those facing language-based, geographic or socio-economic exclusion. Regional instruments like the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (1990) offer models for this expanded legal vision (Shaheed, forthcoming 2025; UNESCO, 2023g; UNESCO and Right to Education Initiative, 2019).
- **Education in emergencies and protracted crises:** disruption caused by conflict, attacks on schools, displacement, pandemics, and climate disasters demand the legal recognition of continuity of learning as a binding obligation. Any revised framework should ensure legal protection for displaced learners – including refugees, asylum-seekers, and IDPs – and assign state responsibility to build system resilience, rapid recovery, and the integration of displaced learners in national systems without discrimination or documentation barriers (UNSG, 2022; see also Henderson et al., 2025; INEE, 2024; UNESCO and UNHCR, 2023; Special Rapporteur on the right to education, 2023.) In her 2025 policy brief, the Special Rapporteur on the right to education notably called for states to explicitly prohibit attacks and the military use of educational facilities in domestic law with a view to make this prohibition a customary international norm through state practice (Special Rapporteur on the Right to Education, 2025).
- **Ensuring affordable, inclusive and quality higher education for all:** with legal protection against exclusionary admissions and financial barriers. While ICESCR Article 13(2)(c) guarantees progressively free higher education, further strengthening of the international legal framework on the right to education needs to consider provisions for scholarships, student support (including psychosocial), and digital access (UNESCO and the Right to Education Initiative, 2022; see also UNESCO, 2019c).

Acceptability

- **Climate change and education for sustainability:** the right to education must include climate education and more broadly environmental issues as a legally protected aim of education. Learners displaced by climate-related events should also have reinforced legal guarantees to continue education, and national systems should be mandated to integrate environmental education and risk reduction strategies as part of education system resilience planning (UNESCO, 2023e; see also GPE et al., 2024; UNESCO, 2024b; Special Rapporteur on the right to education, 2023).

- **Ensuring TVET and lifelong learning as core to the right to education and not add-ons:** legal frameworks need to provide universal access to quality, inclusive, labour-relevant TVET, as well as legal guarantees for the recognition of non-formal and informal learning, including the up and/or re-skilling of youth and adults. The Marrakech Framework and CONFINTEA VII recommendations affirm the need for legal recognition of adult learning and skills development throughout life (UNESCO UIL, 2023a).

Adaptability

- **Digital transformation and artificial intelligence (AI):** as education increasingly moves online, international law must respond. Strengthening the international legal framework should include guaranteeing equitable access to technology, regulating the ethical use of AI, and protecting learners' data and privacy. It should also ensure the establishment of minimum quality standards for EdTech providers and require accessible digital platforms for all learners, including those with disabilities (UNESCO, 2025a; see also Holmes, forthcoming 2025; Special Rapporteur on the right to education, 2024; UNESCO, 2024a; UNESCO, 2023a).
- **Strengthening and safeguarding the aims of education:** the international legal framework should be strengthened to explicitly reflect transformative aims of education for the twenty-first century and beyond. These include fostering human dignity, social cohesion, and sustainable development. Building on existing principles (UDHR art. 26(2); CRC art. 29), revised treaty language could mandate the integration of human rights education, global citizenship education, education for sustainable development, gender transformative education, and education for health and well-being. Curricula should support, among other things, the development of critical thinking, and values such as empathy, resilience, and solidarity to address hate speech, climate anxiety, and all forms of discrimination (Shaheed, forthcoming 2025; UNESCO, 2023b; UNESCO, 2023f; UN Special Rapporteur on the right to education, 2023; UNSG, 2022).

Accountability

- **Governance, financing and enforcement:** the right to education requires robust public systems underpinned by strong governance, sustainable financing, and enforceable accountability. Existing norms on financing – such as the 'maximum available resources' clause in ICESCR – should be clarified to include minimum benchmarks (e.g. 4–6% of GDP), prioritization of marginalized learners, and progressive taxation, as well as ensuring transparency in resource allocation. Minimum quality standards should be clearly articulated in law, including obligations around curriculum content, safe learning environments, and adequate support for teachers and learners. Governance responsibilities should reflect the intersectoral nature of the right to education – recognizing that education outcomes depend on cross-ministerial coordination in areas such as health, finance, digital infrastructure, environment, and social protection. Non-state actors' interventions must be regulated through binding rules that ensure education remains a public responsibility, with oversight mechanisms that prevent commercialization and uphold quality and equity across all providers. Legally binding instruments need to also uphold teacher rights, including fair compensation, professional development, and institutional respect (Sevilla Commitment, 2025; Berner, 2025; Grau Callizo, 2025; Fortaleza Declaration, 2024; UNESCO & TTF, 2024; UNESCO, 2023f; Incheon Declaration and Framework for Action, 2016).
- **Justiciability and access to remedies**: Judicial and quasi-judicial mechanisms are essential to ensuring that the right to education is enforceable and effective, as well as clarifying the normative content and scope of the right to education. Once recognized as a justiciable right within domestic legal orders, courts and tribunals can determine whether states and other duty-bearers have complied with their human rights obligations, assign responsibility for violations, and order appropriate corrective and remedial measures. These may include injunctions, compensation, administrative or criminal sanctions, or the revision or repeal of laws and policies that violate the right to education. Therefore, judicial action can benefit not only the claimant, but also generate structural change, benefiting broader groups of learners affected by systemic discrimination or neglect (UNESCO and Right to Education Initiative, 2019).

Conclusion: Towards a renewed commitment to the right to education

A possible new global framework

Across all pillars examined, there is a clear need for a more inclusive, forward-looking, and binding global legal framework capable of filling substantive gaps, addressing lack of implementation in some contexts and responding to emerging challenges.

Building on existing guarantees, a new or strengthened global instrument on the right to education would present an opportunity to embed the advancements and emerging consensus articulated above: consolidating and expanding the scope of the right to education by enshrining new dimensions such as lifelong learning, digital inclusion, and continuity of learning in crisis contexts, while introducing stronger enforcement, accountability, and monitoring mechanisms to make existing commitments more justiciable in practice.

As the world approaches 2030, the right to education stands at a pivotal juncture. Strengthening its legal foundation, through an instrument that is inclusive, comprehensive, and resilient, is essential to safeguard this right for current and future generations. By enshrining both new rights and the means to make them enforceable, such a renewed legal commitment would help ensure that education, as a fundamental human and 'enabling' right, is realized in practice, empowering every individual to learn and thrive throughout life. In doing so, it would contribute directly to the fulfilment of all other human rights and advance sustainable development, ensuring a more just and equitable future for all. Such an instrument could explicitly guarantee lifelong learning opportunities for all, mandate inclusion,[5] and CRPD), and address complex issues such as education in emergencies, digital governance, and financing obligations.

At the same time, it could establish more robust mechanisms for implementation and review, reinforcing states' accountability through clearer duties, periodic reporting, and independent monitoring. Above all, it could strengthen accountability by further clarifying states' duties to implement these rights in national law and policy, bridging the gap between global goals (such as SDG 4 targets) and legally binding commitments.

A strengthened framework could also underscore the expanding role of the right to education as an enabling right essential to the exercise of a wide range of rights, while anchoring a human rights based approach to education in the post-2030 landscape. In a context marked by the digitalization of education, the impacts of climate change, shifting skill demands, and recurrent crises affecting the continuity of learning, lifelong and life-wide learning should be recognized as essential conditions for accessing decent work, engaging meaningfully in civic life, exercising cultural, social, and economic rights, and upholding rights in relation to communication in increasingly complex information environments. Embedding this interdependence of rights firmly would ensure that the right to education functions as a coherent, mutually reinforcing pillar within the broader human rights architecture.

Political, legal, and financial requirements

Closing education gaps requires more than legal commitments; as shown throughout the report, progress also depends on other factors such as political will, adequate financing, and effective implementation.

Achieving a strengthened and effective right to education requires strong and coordinated political will at national, regional, and global levels. Governments must commit to embedding the right to education, within a lifelong

5 See for example, OHCHR, n.d. b.

learning perspective, into national constitutions, policies, and legislative and regulatory frameworks, while ensuring alignment with international standards. This includes recognizing that education is a continuous process throughout life, encompassing early childhood, primary, secondary, higher education, vocational, and adult learning opportunities. This could also include recognizing learning across life in all its forms, for example artistic, cultural, community-based and informal learning occurring beyond formal institutions, thereby contributing to the ongoing reflection on the right to education as a cultural right.

Legally, this entails clear institutional mechanisms for justiciability and enforceability, coupled with monitoring systems that hold states accountable for providing education at all stages of life and in all learning spaces.

Policies should explicitly guarantee access to adult learning and continuous skills development, ensuring that learners can return to education and learning at different points in their life.

Financially, sustained and equitable investment in education systems is critical. This includes funding not only for traditional schooling infrastructure, teacher training, and inclusive materials, but also for continuous learning programmes such as digital learning, informal learning, adult literacy, vocational training, and upskilling initiatives. Mechanisms to reduce barriers faced by marginalized learners, including social protection measures to mitigate opportunity costs, are essential, so that all individuals, regardless of age, can fully participate in learning throughout their lives.

Critical enablers

Several enablers are essential to translate the right to education from abstract principle into tangible practice.

Normatively, the right to education requires evidence-based, inclusive, and accountable systems that guarantee access, equity, and quality for all learners. In practice, this entails robust data and evidence mechanisms to identify gaps, inform policies, and monitor progress, particularly through disaggregated data that captures intersecting inequalities.

Participatory and inclusive governance, actively engaging civil society, educators, learners, and communities, is critical to design policies that are relevant, responsive, and equitable.

Cross-sectoral collaboration strengthens the capacity of education systems to be resilient to crises and integrated with interventions in social protection, health, culture, sports and technology. Finally, sustained political leadership and public advocacy are necessary to drive implementation, mobilize resources, and reinforce education as a fundamental human right across all levels of decision-making.

UNESCO's role

UNESCO is uniquely positioned to guide, support, and steward this foundational transformation to the normative framework of the right to education. As the United Nations' specialized agency for education and co-chair of the SDG4 High Level Steering Committee (HLSC), UNESCO carries a clear and long-standing mandate to advance the normative and standard-setting agenda in education. This mandate is reinforced by the complementarity between the CADE, the CRC, and the ICESCR, which all together are framing the backbone of the international, legally binding normative framework on the right to education. Through its global legitimacy, technical expertise and convening power, UNESCO can ensure coherence across the different multilateral spaces where the right to education is being discussed and shaped, including the HLSC. UNESCO's strengthened normative action will contribute to human rights mechanisms and processes in Geneva and further political commitments in New York. The current momentum demands strategic alignment and synergy across UN organizations to prevent duplication, reinforce complementarity, and ensure that the right to education evolves as a single, coherent framework underpinned by international law and shared responsibility.

The urgency to move forward on this agenda cannot be overstated. The right to education stands at a decisive

crossroads: while global challenges, from technological disruption to climate crises and deepening inequalities, are transforming learning needs and contexts, the legal and normative foundations of this right have not evolved at the same pace. Without renewed momentum, there is a risk of fragmentation, dilution of standards, and widening disparities in access, quality, and recognition of learning throughout life. Now is the time for the international community to act collectively and decisively to redefine and reinforce this right for the twenty-first century and beyond.

Through its standard-setting function in its fields of competence, UNESCO can help shape global frameworks, provide authoritative guidance to states, and build the necessary bridges between legal instruments, policy frameworks, and implementation practice. It can support the translation of legal commitments into actionable policies, facilitate capacity-building and knowledge-sharing, and track progress toward a strengthened and resilient right to education.

Several options could be considered to formalize this evolution. One approach would be to revise the Convention against Discrimination in Education to better reflect contemporary realities and entitlements. Another would be to develop a new legally binding instrument encompassing the right to education throughout life.

Alternatively, Member States could consider adopting a Declaration on the Right to Education Throughout Life to reaffirm and broaden global consensus.

Moving forward requires resolute, sustained, and coordinated action. Strengthened legal frameworks, unwavering political will, equitable and efficient investment, and robust practical enablers, are essential to translate principles into reality. A renewed global commitment, anchored in inclusivity, lifelong learning, equity, and accountability, must be operationalized through coherent multi-level action: embedding rights in national law and policy, ensuring fair and adequate financing, leveraging rigorous data and evidence, fostering inclusive governance, and maintaining high-level and sustained political and moral leadership and advocacy.

UNESCO's leadership is critical to ensuring that the right to education remains at the core of international law, not as an abstract aspiration, but as a living and modern right that empowers learners, transforms societies, and sustains peace, justice, and human dignity. By combining normative clarity with decisive implementation, the international community can ensure that education is not merely recognized as a fundamental human right but fully realized for all, securing a just, equitable, and sustainable future for generations to come.

Bibliography

International frameworks

Abidjan Principles on the human rights obligations of States to provide public education and to regulate private involvement in education (2019). *Global Initiative for Economic, Social and Cultural Rights*. https://www.abidjanprinciples.org/

African Union. (1990). African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child. https://au.int/sites/default/files/treaties/36804-treaty-african_charter_on_rights_welfare_of_the_child.pdf

African Union. (2006). African Youth Charter. https://au.int/sites/default/files/treaties/7789-treaty-0033_-_african_youth_charter_e.pdf

Dakar Framework for Action: Education for All – Meeting our Collective Commitments. Adopted by the World Education Forum. (2000). UNESCO. https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000121147

Fortaleza Declaration: Unlocking the transformative power of education for peaceful, equitable and sustainable futures. 2024. UNESCO and Ministry of Education of Brazil. https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000391862

Incheon Declaration and Framework for Action. (2016). UNESCO et al. https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000245656

Jakarta Declaration on the Right to Basic Education as a Fundamental Human Right and the Legal Framework for Its Financing. (2005). UNESCO and the Republic of Indonesia. https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000145333

Marrakech Framework for Action. (2022). UNESCO UIL and CONFINTEA VII. https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000382306

Paris Declaration: A Global Call for Investing in the Futures of Education. (2021). UNESCO. https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000380116

Safe Schools Declaration. (2015). Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack (GCPEA). https://ssd.protectingeducation.org/safe-schools-declaration-and-guidelines-on-military-use/

Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education - Adopted by the World Conference on Special Needs Education. (1994). UNESCO and Ministry of Education and Science of Spain. https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000098427

Santiago Consensus. (2025). UNESCO, World Summit of Teachers, Government of Chile. https://www.unesco.org/sites/default/files/medias/fichiers/2025/08/world-summit-teachers-final-santiago-consensus-en.pdf

Sevilla Commitment Fourth International Conference on Financing for Development. Adopted at the Fourth International Conference on Financing for Development. (2025). United Nations. https://financing.desa.un.org/document/ffd4-outcome-booklet-spread

United Nations. (2000). Millennium Development Goals. https://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/

United Nations. (2015). Sustainable Development Goals. https://sdgs.un.org/goals

UNDRR. (2015). Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction (2015–2030). https://www.undrr.org/media/16176/download

UNESCO. (1960). Convention against Discrimination in Education. https://www.unesco.org/en/legal-affairs/convention-against-discrimination-education

UNESCO. (1997). Recommendation concerning the Status of Higher-Education Teaching Personnel. https://www.unesco.org/en/legal-affairs/recommendation-concerning-status-higher-education-teaching-personnel

UNESCO. (2015b). Recommendation on Adult Learning and Education. https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000245179

UNESCO. (2019a). Beijing Consensus on Artificial Intelligence and Education. https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000368303

UNESCO. (2019c). Global Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education. https://www.unesco.org/en/legal-affairs/global-convention-recognition-qualifications-concerning-higher-education?hub=70286

UNESCO. (2021c). Recommendation on the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence. https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000380455

UNESCO. (2022j). Tashkent Declaration and Commitments to Action for Transforming Early Childhood Care and Education. https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000384045

UNESCO. (2022k). The RewirEd Global Declaration on Connectivity for Education. https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000381482

UNESCO. (2023f). Recommendation on Education for Peace, Human Rights and Sustainable Development (Revised). https://www.unesco.org/en/legal-affairs/recommendation-education-peace-and-human-rights-international-understanding-cooperation-fundamental?hub=87862

United Nations General Assembly. (1948). Universal Declaration of Human Rights. https://www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights

United Nations General Assembly. (1966). International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/international-covenant-economic-social-and-cultural-rights

United Nations General Assembly. (1990). Convention on the Rights of the Child. https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/convention-rights-child

United Nations General Assembly. (1992). Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities. https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/declaration-rights-persons-belonging-national-or-ethnic

United Nations General Assembly. (2006). Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. https://www.un.org/disabilities/documents/convention/convoptprot-e.pdf

United Nations General Assembly. (2007). United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. New York, United Nations. https://social.desa.un.org/issues/indigenous-peoples/united-nations-declaration-on-the-rights-of-indigenous-peoples

UN General Assembly. (2016). New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants. UN. Doc. A/RES/71/1. https://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/migration/generalassembly/docs/globalcompact/A_RES_71_1.pdf

United Nations General Assembly (2019). Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration. UN. Doc. A/RES/73/195. https://docs.un.org/en/A/RES/73/195

UNHCR. (2018). Global compact on refugees. https://www.unhcr.org/media/global-compact-refugees-booklet

United Nations Security Council. (2021). Resolution 2601 (2021). UN. Doc. S/RES/2601. https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/s_res_2601.pdf

World Declaration on Education for All. Adopted by the World Conference on Education for All. (1990). UNESCO. https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000127583

National legal framework

Brazil. (1988). Constitution of the Federative Republic of Brazil *(in Portuguese)*. https://www.planalto.gov.br/ccivil_03/Constituicao/Constituicao.htm

Bulgaria. (2016). Pre-school and School Education Act. https://lex.bg/bg/laws/ldoc/2136641509

Equatorial Guinea. (2007). General Law on Education of 2007, No. 5 *(in Spanish)*. https://boe.gob.gq/files/Ley%20General%20de%20Educaci%C3%B3n.pdf

Ghana (2008). Education Act. https://ghalii.org/akn/gh/act/2008/778/eng@2009-01-09

India (2009). Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act. https://dsel.education.gov.in/sites/default/files/rte/rte.pdf

Indonesia (1945). Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia. https://en.mkri.id/library/constitution

Japan. (2006). Basic Act on Education. Act No. 120 of 2006. Provisional translation. https://www.uil.unesco.org/

sites/default/files/medias/fichiers/2023/05/japan-basic-act-on-education.pdf

Lao People's Democratic Republic. (2020). Prime Minister's Decree on Lifelong Learning. https://www.uil.unesco.org/sites/default/files/medias/fichiers/2023/05/lao_pdr_decree_on_lll_english.pdf

Panama. (2023). Law No. 362, amending Law No. 47 of 1946, "Organic Law on Education *(in Spanish)*. https://natlex.ilo.org/dyn/natlex2/r/natlex/fe/details?p3_isn=118074

General Comments/Reports by UN Committees, High Commissioners and Special Rapporteurs

UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1990). General Comment no. 3. The nature of States parties' obligations (art. 2, para. 1, of the Covenant). UN. Doc. E/1991.23 https://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/general-comments-and-recommendations/e199123-committee-economic-social-and-cultural

UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (2009). General Comment no. 20. Non-discrimination in Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. UN Doc. E/C.12/GC/20. https://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/general-comments-and-recommendations/general-comment-no-20-2009-non-discrimination

UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2016). General Comment No. 4 (Article 24: Right to Inclusive Education*)*. UN Doc. CRPD/C/GC/4. https://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/general-comments-and-recommendations/general-comment-no-4-article-24-right-inclusive

UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) (2005). General Comment No. 7: Implementing Child Rights in Early Childhood. UN Doc. CRC/C/GC/7/Rev.1. https://www.refworld.org/legal/general/crc/2006/en/40994

UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) (2021*)*. General Comment No. 25 on children's rights in relation to the digital environment. UN. Doc. CRC/C/GC/25. https://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/general-comments-and-recommendations/general-comment-no-25-2021-childrens-rights-relation

UN High Commissioner for Human Rights. (2024*)*. Solutions to promote digital education for young people and to ensure their protection from online 28. threats. UN. Doc. A/HRC/57/28. https://docs.un.org/A/HRC/57/28

Special Rapporteur in the Field of Cultural Rights. (2025). Digitalization of Cultural Heritage: Preserving Cultural Rights. UN Doc. A/HRC/58/60. https://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/thematic-reports/ahrc5860-digitalization-cultural-heritage-preserving-cultural-rights

Special Rapporteur on minority issues. (2023a). Report of the Special Rapporteur on minority issues, Fernand de Varennes . UNGA. UN. Doc. A/78/195. https://docs.un.org/A/78/195

Special Rapporteur on minority issues. (2023b). Strengthening and mainstreaming the protection of the rights of minorities at the United Nations: an assessment of the implementation of the Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities. UN. Doc. A/HRC/52/27. https://docs.un.org/en/A/HRC/52/27

Special Rapporteur on minority issues. (2025). Recommendations of the Forum on Minority Issues at its seventeenth session on the theme "Minority representation and self-representation in public spaces and discourses". Report of the Special Rapporteur on minority issues, Nicolas Levrat. UN. Doc. A/HRC/58/69. https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/4073251?v=pdf

Special Rapporteur on the Right to Education. (2002). Annual report of the Special Rapporteur on the Right to Education, Katarina Tomasevski, submitted pursuant to Commission on Human Rights resolution 2001/99. UN doc. E/CN.4/2002/60. https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/457788?ln=en&v=pdf

Special Rapporteur on the Right to Education. (2012). Report of the Special Rapporteur on the Right to Education, Kishore Singh: Normative Action for Quality Education. UN Doc. A/HRC/20/21. https://docs.un.org/en/A/HRC/20/21

Special Rapporteur on the Right to Education. (2016). Report of the Special Rapporteur on the right to education. UN. Doc. A/71/358. https://www.right-to-education.org/sites/right-to-education.org/files/resource-attachments/UNSR_lifelong_learning_%20and_right_to_education_2016.pdf

Special Rapporteur on the Right to Education (2023). Securing the right to education: advances and critical challenges. UN doc. A/HRC/53/27. https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/4029495?ln=en&v=pdf

Special Rapporteur on the Right to Education. (2024). Right to education - Artificial intelligence in education. UN doc. A/79/520. https://docs.un.org/en/A/79/520

Special Rapporteur on the Right to Education. (2025). Policy Brief on Protecting the Right to Education in Armed Conflict. UN doc. A/80/479. https://www.ohchr.org/en/special-procedures/sr-education/annual-thematic-reports

Other references

Archer, D. and Muntasim, T. (2020). Financing SDG 4: Context, Challenges, and Solutions. In: Wulff, A. (ed.) Grading Goal 4: Tensions, Threats, and Opportunities in the Sustainable Development Goal on Quality Education. https://brill.com/view/title/57471

Archer, D. (2025). Delivering the Financing Needed to Progressively Realise the Right to Education. Frontiers in Education Journal, Vol. 10. https://www.frontiersin.org/journals/education/articles/10.3389/feduc.2025.1674739/abstract

Bates, A., Choi, T. and Kim, Y. (2021). Outsourcing education services in South Korea, England and Hong Kong: a discursive institutionalist analysis. London, Routledge. https://ueaeprints.uea.ac.uk/id/eprint/71085/1/Accepted_Manuscript.pdf

Berner, A. (2025). Examining "Privatization" and Protecting Equal Rights. Frontiers in Education Journal, Vol. 10. https://www.frontiersin.org/journals/education/articles/10.3389/feduc.2025.1621331/full

Bray, M. (2025). Regulatory gaps in private supplementary tutoring: international patterns and implications for social protection. Frontiers in Education Journal, Vol. 10. https://www.frontiersin.org/journals/education/articles/10.3389/feduc.2025.1602842/full

Broadband Commission, ITU, UNESCO and UNICEF. (2020). The digital transformation of education: connecting schools, empowering learners. International Telecommunication Union. Geneva. https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000374309

Broadband Commission, ITU and UNESCO. (2020). The State of Broadband: Tackling digital inequalities. A decade for action. International Telecommunication Union. Geneva. https://www.itu.int/dms_pub/itu-s/opb/pol/S-POL-BROADBAND.21-2020-PDF-E.pdf

Calvel, C.; Chareyron, V. (2023). Le Financement de l'Enseignement Supérieur en France. https://www.right-to-education.org/node/1576

Centre For International Governance Innovation (CIGI). (2023). Supporting Safer Digital Spaces. Waterloo, Canada. https://www.cigionline.org/static/documents/SaferInternet_Special_Report.pdf

Dewey, J. (1938). Experience And Education.

Elfert, M. (2015). UNESCO, the Faure Report, the Delors Report, and the political utopia of lifelong learning. European Journal of Education, 50(1), 88–100. https://unesco.sharepoint.com/sites/EDTeam/Shared%20Documents/PLS/03%20-%20Right%20to%20Education/Thematic%20research%20&%20projects/Report%20conference%202025/Global%20report%20RtE/doi.org/10.1111/ejed.12104

European Association for the Education of Adults (EAEA). (2024). The Power and Joy of Learning: Manifesto for Adult Learning in the 21st Century. Brussels. https://eaea.org/our-work/influencing-policy/manifesto-for-adult-learning-in-the-21st-century/

European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (CEDEFOP), European Training Foundation (ETF), UNESCO, and UNESCO UIL. (2019). Global inventory of regional and national qualifications frameworks – Volume I. Italy. https://www.uil.unesco.org/sites/default/files/medias/fichiers/2021/12/03%20P221543_Volume%20I%20-%20PROOF%202_IC%20-%20080519%20-%20x%20copies%20%281%29.pdf?hub=270

Foka, A.; Griffin, G. (2024). AI, Cultural Heritage, and Bias: Some Key Queries That Arise from the Use of GenAI. Basel, Heritage 2024, 7, 6125–6136. https://

uu.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2%3A1908930/FULLTEXT01.pdf

Fredman, S. et al. (2022) Recognizing Early Childhood Education as a Human Right in International Law in Human Rights Law Review, Volume 22, Issue 4, December 2022. https://doi.org/10.1093/hrlr/ngac024

Freire, G; Schwartz Orellana, S; Carbonari, F. (2022). Afro-descendant Inclusion in Education: An anti-racist agenda for Latin America. Washington, DC, World Bank. https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/099039105022317731/pdf/IDU0050118ce08776043e7080aa0797837fbffea.pdf

Geneva Global Hub for Education in Emergencies. (2024). Unlocking Futures: Seven key insights on financing for education in emergencies. [Accessed on 11 July 2025]. https://eiehub.org/news/unlocking-futures-seven-key-insights-on-education-in-emergencies-an-updated-look-at-financing-of-education-in-emergencies

Global Alliance for Disaster Risk Reduction & Resilience in the Education Sector (GADRRRES). (2022). Comprehensive School Safety Framework 2022–2030. https://inee.org/sites/default/files/resources/The-Comprehensive-School-Safety-Framework-2022-2030-for-Child-Rights-and-Resilience-in-the-Education-Sector.pdf

Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack (GCPEA). (2024). Education Under Attack 2024. New York. https://protectingeducation.org/wp-content/uploads/eua_2024.pdf

Global Partnership for Education (GPE), Save the Children, UNESCO, UNESCO IIEP. (2024). Climate smart education systems initiative. https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000391503

Grau Callizo, I. (2025). The right to education in a pluralistic world: balancing the pluralistic approach of the right to education and minimum requirements. Frontiers in Education Journal, Vol. 10. https://www.readcube.com/articles/10.3389/feduc.2025.1616074

Grover, S. (2004). Secondary Education as a Universal Human Right. Education and the Law, 16(1), pp.21–31. https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/0953996042000231098

Giannini, S. (2023). Reflections on generative AI and the future of education. UNESCO. Paris. https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000385877

Haleem, A., et al. (2022). Understanding the role of digital technologies in education: A review. Education and Information Technologies, Vol. 3. pp. 275-285. https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2666412722000137

Henderson, C., Faul, M.V. and Joyner, A. (2025). Prioritising the 'Right to Education' in Emergencies: Reducing the Distance Between Human Rights Mechanisms and Rights Holders. Frontiers in Education Journal, Vol. 10. https://www.frontiersin.org/journals/education/articles/10.3389/feduc.2025.1621082/full

Holmes, W. (2025). AI, Education, and Children's Rights. Frontiers in Education Journal, Vol. 10. https://www.frontiersin.org/journals/education/articles/10.3389/feduc.2025.1656736/full

Institute for Economics and Peace (IEP). (2024). Global Peace Index. https://www.economicsandpeace.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/GPI-2024-web.pdf

Institute of Education Sciences. (n.d.). Program for International Student Assessment (PISA): Participating Countries. [Accessed on 30 July 2025]. https://nces.ed.gov/surveys/pisa/participation.asp

Institute on Statelessness and Inclusion (ISI). (2025). Leaving no Child Behind: childhood statelessness and the fight for inclusive education. Rotterdam. https://files.institutesi.org/Leaving_No_Child_Behind_Report.pdf

Inter-agency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE). (2020). 20 Years of INEE: Achievements and Challenges in Education in Emergencies. New York. https://inee.org/resources/20-years-inee-achievements-and-challenges-education-emergencies

Inter-agency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE). (2024). Minimum Standards for Education: Preparedness, Response, Recovery. https://inee.org/sites/default/files/resources/INEE%20Minimum%20Standards%202024%20v2.7%20Web.pdf

Inter-agency Task Force on Financing for Development and UNESCO. (2025). Closing the Global SDG4 Financing Gap: Accelerating Sustainable Financing Solutions for Education. [Accessed on 24 September 2025]. https://www.unesco.org/sdg4education2030/en/knowledge-hub/closing-global-sdg4-financing-gap-accelerating-sustainable-financing-solutions-education

Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). (2023). Climate Change 2023: Synthesis Report. Contribution of Working Groups I, II and III to the Sixth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. Geneva. https://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar6/syr/

Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC). (2025a). Countdown to 2030: Achieving global targets on disaster displacement. https://api.internal-displacement.org/sites/default/files/publications/documents/idmc-2025-countdown-to-2030-achieving-global-targets-on-disaster-displacement.pdf?_gl=1*nk4q3e*_ga*MTcxOTcwMjkzNi4xNzQ0Mjg3ODcx*_ga_PKVS5L6N8V*czE3NTIwNTI2MTYkbzMkZzEkdDE3NTIwNTMyNzIkajYwJGwwJGgw

Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC). (2025b). Global Report on Internal Displacement *2025*. https://api.internal-displacement.org/sites/default/files/publications/documents/idmc-grid-2025-global-report-on-internal-displacement.pdf?_gl=1*15y0i5q*_ga*MTcxOTcwMjkzNi4xNzQ0Mjg3ODcx*_ga_PKVS5L6N8V*czE3NTI0OTU1MzAkbzYkZzAkdDE3NTI0OTU1MzAkajYwJGwwJGgw

International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA). (n.d.). TIMSS and PIRLS international studies. [Accessed on 12 September 2025]. https://www.iea.nl/

International Bar Association's Human Rights Institute (2017). The Obligation to mobilize resources: Bridging Human Rights, Sustainable Development Goals, and Economic and Fiscal Policies. https://www.right-to-education.org/sites/right-to-education.org/files/resource-attachments/IBA_Obligation_to_Mobilise_Resources_SDG_2017_En.pdf

International Commission on Education for the Twenty-first Century. (1999). Learning: the treasure within. Second edition. Paris, UNESCO. https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000115930

International Commission on the Development of Education. (2013). Learning to be: the world of education today and tomorrow. Second edition. Paris, UNESCO. https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000223222

International Commission on the Futures of Education. (2021). Reimagining our Futures Together: A new social contract for education. Paris, UNESCO. https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000379707

International Energy Agency. (2025). Energy and AI. [Accessed on 24 September 2025]. https://www.iea.org/reports/energy-and-ai

International Labour Organization (ILO). (2018). World Employment and Social Outlook 2018: Greening with jobs. Geneva. https://www.ilo.org/sites/default/files/wcmsp5/groups/public/%40dgreports/%40dcomm/%40publ/documents/publication/wcms_628654.pdf

International Labour Organization (ILO). (2024). Transforming the teaching profession: Recommendations and summary of deliberations of the United Nations Secretary General's High-Level Panel on the Teaching Profession. Geneva. https://www.ilo.org/sites/default/files/wcmsp5/groups/public/%40ed_dialogue/%40sector/documents/publication/wcms_912921.pdf

International Labour Organization (ILO). (2025a). *One in four jobs at risk of being transformed by GenAI, new ILO–NASK Global Index shows*. [Accessed on 28 August 2025]

International Labour Organization (ILO). (2025b). World Employment and Social Outlook: Trends 2025. Geneva. https://www.ilo.org/sites/default/files/2025-01/WESO25_Trends_EN_WEB5.pdf

International Labour Organization (ILO) and United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). (2025). Child Labour: Global estimates 2024, trends and the road forward. ILO and UNICEF, Geneva and New York. https://www.ilo.org/publications/major-publications/child-labour-global-estimates-2024-trends-and-road-forward

International Labour Organization (ILO) and UNESCO. (2024). Sectoral Policies Department, Final Report: Fifteenth Session – Report for the Joint ILO–UNESCO Committee of Experts on the Application of the Recommendations concerning Teaching Personnel. Geneva, ILO. https://www.ilo.org/sites/default/files/2025-02/Final%20report%20-%20CEART%2015th%20session.pdf

International Task Force on Teachers for Education 2030. (2025). Promoting and protecting teacher agency in the age of artificial intelligence: Position paper. Paris, UNESCO. https://teachertaskforce.org/knowledge-hub/promoting-and-protecting-teacher-agency-age-artificial-intelligence

International Telecommunication Union (ITU). (2022). Global Connectivity Report 2022. Geneva. https://www.itu.int/hub/publication/d-ind-global-01-2022/

Kandala, Ngianga-Bakwin, Ezejimofor, Martinsixtus C., Uthman, Olalekan A. and Komba, Paul Nzinga. (2018). Secular trends in the prevalence of female genital mutilation/cuttings among girls: a systematic analysis. BMJ Global Health, 3 (5). https://wrap.warwick.ac.uk/id/eprint/109554/

Kos'myna, N. et al. (2025). Your brain on ChatGPT: accumulation of cognitive debt when using an AI

assistant for essay writing task. https://www.media.mit.edu/publications/your-brain-on-chatgpt/

Li, R. and Yao, M. (2022). What Promotes Teachers' Turnover Intention? Evidence from a Meta-Analysis. Educational Research Review, Vol. 37. https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S1747938X2200046X

Liang, O. (2025). Teachers' Rights and the Right to Education: Perspectives from the UN Secretary-General's High-Level Panel on the Teaching Profession. InspirED – L'éducation en débats: analyse comparée (October 2025) – available only in French. https://educoop.org/inspired/opinion1/liang/

Lin, J.Y. (2012). Youth Bulge: A Demographic Dividend or a Demographic Bomb in Developing Countries? World Bank Blogs. [Accessed on 21 July 2025]. https://blogs.worldbank.org/en/developmenttalk/youth-bulge-a-demographic-dividend-or-a-demographic-bomb-in-developing-countries

Luana Marotta and Mercedes Mateo Diaz. (2025). Not Business as Usual: Innovative Ways to Fund Education. Fund Education Blog Series, UNESCO. [Accessed on 17 September 2025]. https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/not-business-usual-innovative-ways-fund-education

Marina Dreux Frotté. (2025). Bridging the Finance Gap in Education: Is Innovative Financing the Solution? Fund Education Blog Series, UNESCO. [Accessed on 17 September 2025]. https://www.unesco.org/sdg4education2030/en/articles/bridging-finance-gap-education-innovative-financing-solution

Mary, K., Nafaa, N., Giband, D. and Delage, A. (2025). The New Frontiers of Education: Exponential Growth in Privatization and the Emergence of Edupreneurs. InspirED – L'éducation en débats: analyse comparée (October 2025) – available only in French. https://educoop.org/inspired/opinion1/mary-nafaa-giband-delage/

McAuliffe, M. and Oucho, L.A. (eds.) (2024). World Migration Report 2024. International Organization for Migration (IOM), Geneva. https://publications.iom.int/books/world-migration-report-2024

Meyer-Bisch, P. (2025). The cultural substance of the right to education: its principle and its power. InspirED – L'éducation en débats: analyse comparée (October 2025) – available only in French. https://educoop.org/inspired/opinion1/meyerbisch/

Migration Data Portal. (2024). Labour Migration. [Accessed on 14 November 2025]. https://www.migrationdataportal.org/themes/labour-migration-statistics

Narushima, M., Lui, J. and Diestelkamp, N. (2018). 'Lifelong Learning in Active Ageing Discourse: Its Conserving Effect on Wellbeing, Health and Vulnerability'. Ageing and Society, 38(4), pp. 651–675. https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/ageing-and-society/article/lifelong-learning-in-active-ageing-discourse-its-conserving-effect-on-wellbeing-health-and-vulnerability/11AFC1CEF86DE712513A97FC9FDF2D63

National Center for Missing & Exploited Children (NCMEC). (2024). *2024 CyberTipline Report*.

Nyitray, Z. (2024). The evolving human right to education from the aspects of pre-primary and secondary education. Budapest. https://www.ajk.elte.hu/dstore/document/4128/Tezisek_Angol_Nyitray%20Zsuzsanna_2024.pdf

Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR). (n.d. a). 2025 Social Forum: The contribution of education to the respect, promotion, protection and fulfilment of all human rights for all. [Accessed 5 Nov. 2025]. https://www.ohchr.org/en/events/forums/2025/2025-social-forum

Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR). (n.d. b). Open-ended intergovernmental working group on an optional protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the rights to early childhood education, free pre-primary education and free secondary education. [Accessed on 4 August 2025]. https://www.ohchr.org/en/hr-bodies/hrc/wg-opcrc-education

Organisation for economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). (2020). Making the Most of Technology for Learning and Training in Latin America. Paris, OECD Skills Studies, OECD Publishing. https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/making-the-most-of-technology-for-learning-and-training-in-latin-america_ce2b1a62-en.html

Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). (2025a). Education at a Glance 2025. OECD Publishing, Paris. https://www.oecd.org/content/dam/oecd/en/publications/reports/2025/09/education-at-a-glance-2025_c58fc9ae/1c0d9c79-en.pdf

Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). (2025b). OECD Employment Outlook 2025: Can we get through the demographic crunch? OECD Publishing, Paris. https://www.

oecd.org/content/dam/oecd/en/publications/reports/2025/07/oecd-employment-outlook-2025_5345f034/194a947b-en.pdf

Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). (2025c). What are the key trends in international student mobility? OECD Publishing, Paris. https://www.oecd.org/content/dam/oecd/en/publications/reports/2025/03/what-are-the-key-trends-in-international-student-mobility_495dcfac/2a423a76-en.pdf

Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), European Commission. (2023). Indicators of Immigrant Integration 2023: Settling In. OECD Publishing, Paris. https://doi.org/10.1787/1d5020a6-en

Østby G. & Aas Rustad, S. (2024). 473 Million Children Live in Conflict Zones. Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO). [Accessed 24 September 2025]. https://www.prio.org/comments/1152

Our World in Data. (2024). Teenage pregnancy rates have fallen across the world. [Accessed 5 November 2025]. https://ourworldindata.org/data-insights/teenage-pregnancy-rates-have-fallen-across-the-world?utm_source=chatgpt.com

Papa Reo. (n.d.). Enabling a Sovereign Digital Future for Indigenous Languages. [Accessed on 19 September 2025]. https://papareo.nz/

Plan International. (2020). Free to be online? Girls' and young women's experiences of online harassment. Woking. https://plan-international.org/uploads/2022/02/sotwgr2020-commsreport-en-2.pdf

SDG4-Education 2030 High-level Steering Committee. (n.d.). UNESCO. [Accessed on 22 September 2025]. https://www.unesco.org/sdg4education2030/en/high-level-steering-committee

SDG4-Education 2030 High-level Steering Committee. (2020). Making Higher Education More Inclusive. https://media.unesco.org/sites/default/files/webform/ed3002/Making%2520Higher%2520Education%2520more%2520inclusive.pdf

SDG4-Education 2030 High-Level Steering Committee. (2024). The future at risk: Why investing in education is critical. Paris, UNESCO. https://www.unesco.org/sdg4education2030/en/knowledge-hub/future-risk-why-investing-education-critical

Shaheed, F. (forthcoming, 2025). *The Right to Education: Progress, Challenges and the Road Ahead*. Frontiers in Education Journal, Vol. 10.

Sheppard, B. (2022). It's Time to Expand the Right to Education. Nordic Journal of Human Rights, 40(1), pp.96–117. https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/18918131.2022.2071401

Snene, M. (2024). Artificial Intelligence, Cultural Rights and Right to Development. Statement at the 10th session of the Expert Mechanism on the Right to Development. https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/issues/development/emd/session10/Statement-item5-Mehdi-Snene.pdf

Statista. (2025). Share of Households with a Computer at Home Worldwide from 2005 to 2019. [Accessed on 24 September 2025]. https://www.statista.com/statistics/748551/worldwide-households-with-computer/

Tam, A. C. F. (2015). The role of a professional learning community in teacher change: A perspective from beliefs and practices. Teachers and Teaching, 21(1), 22–43. https://doi.org/10.1080/13540602.2014.928122

Twombly, S. (2024). 'Critiques of student learning outcomes assessment', in Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education: A Practical Guide. https://opentext.ku.edu/assessmentevaluationhighered/chapter/chapter-10-critical-perspectives-on-student-learning-outcomes-assessment/

UNCTAD. (2025). A world of debt. Report 2025. It Is time for reform. https://unctad.org/publication/world-of-debt

UNESCO. (n.d. a). Convention against Discrimination in Education. [Accessed on 15 July 2025]. https://www.unesco.org/en/right-education/convention-against-discrimination?hub=70224

UNESCO. (n.d. b). Education in Emergencies – Ensuring the right to education in emergencies and building resilience in the face of crisis. [Accessed on 11 July 2025]. https://www.unesco.org/en/emergencies/education

UNESCO. (n.d. c). HerAtlas: Monitoring the Right to Education for Girls and Women. [Accessed 12 September 2025]. https://heratlas.org/

UNESCO. (n.d. d). UNESCO Initiative on the Evolving Right to Education. [Accessed on 4 August 2025]. https://www.unesco.org/en/right-education/evolving

UNESCO. (2000). World Education Report 2000: The Right to Education – Towards Education for All Throughout

Life. Paris, UNESCO. https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000119720

UNESCO. (2005). Education for All Global Monitoring Report 2005: Education for All – The Quality Imperative. Paris, UNESCO. https://www.right-to-education.org/sites/right-to-education.org/files/resource-attachments/EFA_GMR_Quality_Imperative_2005_en.pdf

UNESCO. (2010). World Conference on Early Childhood Care and Education: Building the Wealth of Nations. UNESCO and Government of the Russian Federation. https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000187376

UNESCO. (2013). The Global Learning Crisis: Why every child deserves a quality education. Paris, UNESCO. https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000223826

UNESCO. (2015a). EFA Global Monitoring Report 2015: Education for All 2000–2025; Achievements and Challenges. Paris, UNESCO. https://www.right-to-education.org/sites/right-to-education.org/files/resource-attachments/EFA%20Global%20Monitoring%20Report%202015.pdf

UNESCO. (2015c). Towards Inclusive and Equitable Quality Education and Lifelong Learning for All. Paris, UNESCO. https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000233137

UNESCO. (2018). Global Education Monitoring Report, 2017/18: Accountability in Education – Meeting Our Commitments. Paris, UNESCO. https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000259338

UNESCO. (2019b). From access to empowerment: UNESCO strategy for gender equality in and through education 2019-2025. Paris, UNESCO. https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000369000

UNESCO (2019d). Indigenous Peoples' right to education. Paris, UNESCO. https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000369698

UNESCO. (2020a). A Practical Guide to Recognition: Implementing the Global Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications Concerning Higher Education. Paris, UNESCO. https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000374905

UNESCO. (2020b). Crisis-Sensitive Educational Planning. Paris, UNESCO. https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000373272?posInSet=21&queryId=N-646b1318-22bf-4fa3-b863-7a715dc21411

UNESCO. (2020c). Disability and education: A fact sheet based on findings from the 2020 Global Education Monitoring Report Latin America and the Caribbean –Inclusion and education: All means all. Paris. https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000375011

UNESCO. (2020d). Global education monitoring report, 2020: Inclusion and education: all means all. Paris, UNESCO. https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000373718

UNESCO. (2020e). Global Education Monitoring Report – Gender Report: A new generation: 25 years of efforts for gender equality in education. Paris, UNESCO. https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000374514

UNESCO. (2021a). Global Education Monitoring Report, 2021/2: Non-State Actors in Education: Who Chooses? Who Loses? Paris, UNESCO. https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000379875

UNESCO. (2021b). Inclusion in early childhood care and education: brief on inclusion in education. Paris, UNESCO. https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000379502

UNESCO. (2021d). Right to Pre-Primary Education: A Global Study. Paris, UNESCO. https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000375332

UNESCO. (2021e). The Right to Education in the 21st Century: Background Paper for the International Seminar on the Evolving Right to Education. https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000381317

UNESCO. (2021f). When schools shut – Gendered impacts of Covid-19 school closures. Paris, UNESCO. https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000379270/PDF/379270eng.pdf.multi

UNESCO. (2022b). Analysis of Transforming Education Summit National Statements of Commitment. https://media.unesco.org/sites/default/files/webform/ed3002/Analysis_of_TES_National_Statements_of_Commitment_23.10.2022_FINAL.pdf

UNESCO. (2022c). Beyond Limits: New Ways to Reinvent Higher Education. Paris, UNESCO. https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000389912

UNESCO. (2022d). Building and Strengthening the Legal Framework on ECCE Rights: Achievements, Challenges and Actions for Change; Thematic Report. Paris, UNESCO. https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000383594

UNESCO. (2022e). Guidelines for ICT in Education Policies and Masterplans. Paris, UNESCO. https://

unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000380926/PDF/380926eng.pdf.multi

UNESCO. (2022f). K-12 AI Curricula: A Mapping of Government-Endorsed AI Curricula. Paris, UNESCO. https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000380602

UNESCO (2022g). Leave no child behind: global report on boys' disengagement from education. Paris, UNESCO. https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000381105

UNESCO. (2022h). Minding the Data: Protecting Learners' Privacy and Security. Paris, UNESCO. https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000381494

UNESCO. (2022i). Protect her rights, strengthen your laws: Her Atlas: status report on girls' and women's right to education. Paris, UNESCO. https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000382158

UNESCO. (2022l). What You Need to Know About the Comprehensive School Safety Framework 2022–2030. [Accessed on 24 September 2025]. https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/what-you-need-know-about-comprehensive-school-safety-framework-2022-2030?hub=67607

UNESCO. (2023a). An Ed-Tech Tragedy? Educational Technologies and School Closures in the Time of COVID-19. Paris, UNESCO. https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000386701

UNESCO. (2023b). Bringing into Focus the Future of the Right to Education - Policy-Oriented Research Paper as Part of the Initiative on the Evolving Right to Education. Working paper. Paris, UNESCO. https://www.unesco.org/sites/default/files/medias/fichiers/2025/03/Future-of-right-to-education-working-document-en.pdf?hub=70224

UNESCO. (2023c). Global Education Monitoring Report. Policy Paper 49: Can Countries Afford Their National SDG 4 Benchmarks? Paris, UNESCO. https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000385004

UNESCO. (2023d). Global Education Monitoring Report, 2023: Technology in Education – A Tool on Whose Terms? Paris, UNESCO. https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000385723

UNESCO. (2023e). Learning at Risk: The Impact of Climate Displacement on the Right to Education; Global Report. Paris, UNESCO. https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000387895

UNESCO. (2023g). The Right to Education of Minorities: Overview of States' Measures Reported in the 10th Consultation on the 1960 Convention and Recommendation against Discrimination in Education. Paris, UNESCO. https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000385259

UNESCO. (2024a). Global Education Monitoring Report. Advocacy Brief: Learners with Disabilities and Technology. Paris, UNESCO. https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000389161

UNESCO (2024b). Greening Curriculum Guidance: Teaching and Learning for Climate Action. Paris, UNESCO. https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000390022

UNESCO. (2024c). Global Education Monitoring Report 2024/5: Leadership in Education – Lead for Learning. Paris, UNESCO. https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000391406

UNESCO. (2024d). Mainstreaming social and emotional learning in education systems: policy guide. Paris, UNESCO. https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000392261

UNESCO. (2024e). Regulating non-state actors in education: findings from a collaborative research project. Paris. https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000390064

UNESCO. (2024f). Safe to Learn and Thrive: Ending Violence in and Through Education. Paris, UNESCO. https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000391797/PDF/391797eng.pdf.multi

UNESCO. (2024g). The Salamanca Statement Anniversary: 30 Years of Progress? Paris, UNESCO. https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000390459

UNESCO. (2024h). UNESCO Qualifications Passport: Inclusive Pathways to Education and Employment. Paris, UNESCO. https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000390787/PDF/390787eng.pdf.multi

UNESCO. (2024i). UNESCO Strategic Framework for Migration, Displacement, Emergencies, and Education (2024–2029): Protecting and Prioritizing Education in Times of Crisis. Paris, UNESCO. https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000392259

UNESCO. (2024j). Why the World Needs Happy Schools: Global Report on Happiness in and for Learning. Paris, UNESCO. https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000389119

UNESCO. (2025a). AI and Education: Protecting the Rights of Learners. Paris, UNESCO. https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000395373

UNESCO. (2025b). Banned from Education: a review of the right to education in Afghanistan. Paris, UNESCO. https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000393229/PDF/393229eng.pdf.multi

UNESCO. (2025c). Digital Leap in East Asia: A Regional Synthesis on Higher Education Transformation. Beijing. https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000393828

UNESCO. (2025d). Global Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education: operational guidelines. Paris, UNESCO. https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000395680

UNESCO. (2025e). Global Education Monitoring Report: Gender Report - Women Lead for Learning. Paris, UNESCO. https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000393701

UNESCO. (2025f). Global Education Monitoring Report. Policy Paper 50: Aid to Education – Time for Tough Decisions. Paris, UNESCO. https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000394153

UNESCO. (2025g). Higher education: figures at a glance. Paris, UNESCO. https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000394112.locale=en

UNESCO. (2025h). Homeschooling through a human rights lens. Paris, UNESCO. https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000395671

UNESCO. (2025i). Languages Matter: Global Guidance on Multilingual Education. Paris, UNESCO. https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000392477

UNESCO. (2025j). Nurturing Safe Learning Environments to Realize the Right to Education. Paris, UNESCO. https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000396302

UNESCO. (2025k). Record number of higher education students highlights global need for recognition of qualifications. [Accessed on 6 November 2025]. https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/record-number-higher-education-students-highlights-global-need-recognition-qualifications

UNESCO. (2025l). The right multilingual education policies can unlock learning and inclusion: advocacy brief. Paris, UNESCO. https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000392744

UNESCO. (2025m). What You Need to Know About Education in Emergencies. [Accessed on 24 September 2025]. https://www.unesco.org/en/emergencies/education/need-know?hub=84615

UNESCO. (forthcoming a). *Lifelong learning entitlements: From design to impact. Cases of Australia, Canada, France, Ireland, Singapore and Republic of Korea*. Paris, UNESCO.

UNESCO. (forthcoming b). *Monitoring Education Rights Worldwide: Results of the Eleventh Consultation of Member States on the 1960 Convention and Recommendation against Discrimination in Education*. Paris, UNESCO.

UNESCO. (forthcoming c). *2026 Global Report on Teachers. Supporting the Lifelong Learning Journeys of Educators*. Paris, UNESCO.

UNESCO-UNEVOC. (n.d.). The impact of migration on TVET. [Accessed on 14 November 2025]. https://unevoc.unesco.org/home/Migration+and+TVET

UNESCO-UNEVOC. (2020). Boosting gender equality in science and technology – A challenge for TVET programmes and careers. Paris, Bonn, Germany. UNESCO and UNESCO-UNEVOC. https://unevoc.unesco.org/home/Migration+and+TVET

UNESCO IBE. (1985). A Summary Statistical Review of Education in the World: 1960–1982. Paris, UNESCO. https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000061512

UNESCO IIEP. (2025). Renewing the Promise of Development Effectiveness for Transforming Education. Paris, UNESCO. https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000394264

UNESCO UIL. (n.d). UNESCO Global Network of Learning cities. [Accessed on 19 September 2025]. https://www.uil.unesco.org/en/learning-cities

UNESCO UIL. (2022a). Fifth Global Report on Adult Learning and Education: Citizenship Education; Empowering Adults for Change. Hamburg, Germany. https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000381666?posInSet=1&queryId=5a398c02-0407-4fcb-8ff5-6b6dbded2d90

UNESCO UIL. (2022b). Making Lifelong Learning a Reality: A Handbook. Hamburg, Germany. https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000381857

UNESCO UIL. (2023a). CONFINTEA VII Seventh International Conference on Adult Education: Final Report; Adult Learning and Education for Sustainable Development: A Transformative Agenda. UNESCO. Hamburg, Germany. https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000386113

UNESCO UIL. (2023b). Japan: Basic Act on Education, issued in 2006. [Accessed on 14 October 2025]. https://www.uil.unesco.org/en/articles/japan-basic-act-education-issued-2006

UNESCO UIL. (2023c). Lao Peoples' Democratic Republic: Prime Minister's Decree on Lifelong Learning, issued in 2020. [Accessed on 14 October 2025]. https://www.uil.unesco.org/en/articles/lao-peoples-democratic-republic-prime-ministers-decree-lifelong-learning-issued-2020

UNESCO UIL. (2023d). Recognition, Validation and Accreditation in Norway. [Accessed on 24 September 2025]. https://www.uil.unesco.org/en/articles/recognition-validation-and-accreditation-norway

UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS). (n.d.). Data Browser. [Accessed on 24 September 2025]. https://databrowser.uis.unesco.org/

UNESCO and International Task Force on Teachers for Education 2030 (TTF). (2024). Global Report on Teachers: Addressing teacher shortages and transforming the profession. Paris, UNESCO. https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000388832

UNESCO and the Right to Education Initiative. (2019). Right to Education Handbook. Paris, UNESCO. https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000366556

UNESCO and the Right to Education Initiative. (2022). Right to Higher Education: Unpacking the International Normative Framework in Light of Current Trends and Challenges. Paris and London. https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000382335

UNESCO and UNESCO IESALC. (2021). Women in higher education: has the female advantage put an end to gender inequalities? Paris and Caracas. https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000377182/PDF/377182eng.pdf.multi

UNESCO and UNESCO IESALC. (2022). The Right to Higher Education: A Social Justice Perspective. Paris and Caracas. https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000381750

UNESCO and UNESCO IIEP. (2017). Six Ways to Ensure Higher Education Leaves No One Behind. https://inee.org/sites/default/files/resources/UNESCO_Six_Ways_Ensure_no_left_behind_2017_en.pdf

UNESCO and UNESCO UIS. (2012). Reaching out-of-school children is crucial for development. Factsheet n°18. https://uis.unesco.org/sites/default/files/documents/fs18-reaching-out-of-school-children-is-crucial-for-development-en.pdf?utm

UNESCO and UNESCO UIS. (2024). Investing in girls' and women's education: A smart investment to accelerate development. https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000388934/PDF/388934eng.pdf.multi

UNESCO and UNESCO UIS. (2025a). SDG4 Scorecard Progress Report on National Benchmarks: Focus on the Out-of-School Rate. Montreal, UNESCO UIS. https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000393833

UNESCO and UNESCO UIS. (2025b). The Out-of-School Population Is Higher Than Previously Thought – and Rising. UNESCO GEM Report Blog. [Accessed on 24 September 2025]. https://world-education-blog.org/2025/06/09/the-out-of-school-population-is-higher-than-previously-thought-and-rising/?mc_cid=4a8ab7aec5&mc_eid=eba8d93218

UNESCO and UNHCR. (2023). Paving Pathways for Inclusion: Towards Evidence-Based Policy-Making for Refugee Education. Paris. https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000387957

UNESCO and UNICEF. (2024). Global Report on Early Childhood Care and Education: The Right to a Strong Foundation. Paris and New York. https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000390215

UNESCO, UNICEF, the World Bank and OECD. (2021). What's Next? Lessons on Education Recovery: Findings from a Survey of Ministries of Education amid the COVID-19 Pandemic. Paris, New York, Washington D.C., UNESCO, UNICEF, World Bank. https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/server/api/core/bitstreams/858db8b0-e183-5b07-b90e-17b67ff8ef2d/content

UNHCR. (2021). Connected Education for Refugees: Addressing the Digital Divide. https://www.unhcr.org/sites/default/files/legacy-pdf/61b743ef4.pdf

UNICEF. (2020). How Many Children and Young People Have Internet Access at Home? [Accessed on 24 September 2025]. https://data.unicef.org/resources/children-and-young-people-internet-access-at-home-during-covid19/

UNICEF. (2021a). Policy Guidance on AI for Children. New York. https://www.unicef.org/innocenti/media/1341/file/UNICEF-Global-Insight-policy-guidance-AI-children-2.0-2021.pdf

UNICEF. (2021b). UNICEF Gender Action Plan, 2022–2025. New York. https://www.unicef.org/executiveboard/documents/UNICEF-Gender-Action-Plan-2022%E2%80%932025-SRS-2021

UNICEF. (2023). Is an End to Child Marriage Within Reach? Latest trends and future prospects. 2023 update.

New York. https://data.unicef.org/resources/is-an-end-to-child-marriage-within-reach/

UNICEF. (2024a). Seen, Counted, Included: Using Data to Shed Light on the Well-Being of Children with Disabilities. New York. https://data.unicef.org/resources/children-with-disabilities-report-2021/?_gl=1*n-3hlit*_gcl_au*Nzg2NzU3MjIzLjE3NTIyMjg4Mzg.*_ga*NDYwMDY0NDgyLjE3MzY0NDE0NTk.*_ga_P0DMSZ8KY6*czE3NTIyMzE0NTAkbzE3JGcxJHQxNzUyMjMxODY1JGo2MCRsMCRoMA..*_ga_ZEPV2PX419*czE3NTIyMzE0NTEkbzE3JGcwJHQxNzUyMjMxNDUxJGo2MCRsMCRoMA..

UNICEF. (2024b). The State of the World's Children 2024: The Future of Childhood in a Changing World. Florence, UNICEF Innocenti. https://www.unicef.org/media/165156/file/SOWC-2024-full-report-EN.pdf

UNICEF. (2025). Learning Interrupted: Global Snapshot of Climate-Related School Disruptions in 2024. [Accessed on 24 September 2025]. https://www.unicef.org/reports/learning-interrupted-global-snapshot-2024?utm_source=chatgpt.com

UNICEF and ITU. (2021). The Climate Crisis is a Child Rights Crisis: Introducing the Children's Climate Risk Index. New York, UNICEF. https://www.unicef.org/reports/climate-crisis-child-rights-crisis

UNICEF, UNESCO and World Bank. (2022). Where Are We on Education Recovery? New York, UNICEF. https://www.unicef.org/media/117626/file/Where%20are%20we%20in%20Education%20Recovery?.pdf

United Nations. (2022). Transforming Education Summit. [Accessed on 19 September 2025]. https://www.un.org/en/transforming-education-summit

United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA). (2019). World Urbanization Prospects: The 2018 revision. ST/ESA/SER.A/420. https://population.un.org/wup/assets/WUP2018-Report.pdf

United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs. (2024). World Population Prospects 2024: Summary of results. UN DESA/POP/2024/TR/NO. 9. https://population.un.org/wpp/assets/Files/WPP2024_Summary-of-Results.pdf

United Nations Secretary General (UNSG). (2022). Transforming Education: An Urgent Political Imperative for Our Collective Future. Vision statement. [Accessed on 24 September 2025]. https://www.un.org/en/transforming-education-summit/sg-vision-statement

UNTC. (n.d.). United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. [Accessed on 24 September 2025]. https://treaties.un.org/pages/viewdetails.aspx?src=treaty&mtdsg_no=iv-15&chapter=4&clang=_en

UN Women. (2020). Gender equality: Women's rights in review 25 years after Beijing. New York. https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2020/03/womens-rights-in-review

UN Women and UNICEF. (2021). A Guide for Women and Girls to Prevent and Respond to Cyberviolence. UN Women. https://eca.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2022-02/ONLINE%20cyberV%20women%20ENG.pdf

World Bank. (n.d.). Girls' Education. [Accessed on the 19 September 2025]. https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/girlseducation

World Bank. (2024). Poverty, Prosperity, and Planet Report 2024: Pathways Out of the Polycrisis. Overview booklet. Washington, DC. https://www.worldbank.org/en/publication/poverty-prosperity-and-planet

World Bank and UNESCO. (2024). Education Finance Watch 2024. Washington D.C., Paris. https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000391641

World Economic Forum (WEF). (2021). These Are the Degrees That Will Earn You the Most Money When You Graduate – and the Ones That Won't. [Accessed on 30 July 2025]. https://www.weforum.org/stories/2021/10/stem-degrees-most-valuable/

World Economic Forum (WEF). (2023). Global Risks Report 2023. Geneva. https://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_Global_Risks_Report_2023.pdf

World Economic Forum (WEF). (2025). Future of Jobs Report 2025. Geneva. https://reports.weforum.org/docs/WEF_Future_of_Jobs_Report_2025.pdf

World Health Organization (WHO). (2016). Multisectoral Action for a Life Course Approach to Healthy Ageing: Draft global strategy and plan of action on ageing and health. A69/17. https://iris.who.int/handle/10665/252671

World Health Organization (WHO). (2025). Policy and education: ways to end child marriage and prevent adolescent pregnancy. [Accessed on 5 November 2025]. https://www.who.int/news-room/feature-stories/detail/policy-and-education--ways-to-end-child-marriage-and-prevent-adolescent-pregnancy

unesco
United Nations
Educational, Scientific
and Cultural Organization

The right to education

Past, present and future directions

Amid accelerating global change, education faces profound challenges. Climate disruption, technological transformation, and deepening inequalities are reshaping how societies learn, work, and live together. This report calls for a renewed understanding of the right to education as a foundation for justice, sustainability, and peace. It examines how this right has evolved over the past twenty-five years and explores what must change to ensure it remains protective and transformative for all in the decades ahead.

9 789231 008368

4 QUALITY EDUCATION

Sustainable Development Goals