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# Between moving backward and moving forward towards achieving SDG4

## Spotlight Report for the High-Level Political Forum

This report was written by Luis Eduardo Perez Murcia with the support of Vernor Munoz

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**Executive Summary**

This report aims to identify and characterise some of the critical barriers that children, youth, and adults encounter to enjoyment of their right to education and also aims to identify and characterise critical policy challenges that governments should address to reach Sustainable Development Goal 4 by 2030; which is, "to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote life-long learning opportunities for all'.

Drawing on reports from 41 countries which were provided by 44 GCE members, this report argues that despite the progress made worldwide towards achieving SDG4, critical challenges remain in every corner of the world, including in high income countries. The nature and magnitude of the challenges significantly vary amongst regions and countries. However, the report suggests that more comprehensive policies and financial efforts are needed in all countries to effectively respect, protect and fulfil the right to education for all, and therefore, to be on track for SDG4.

The report examines in detail the critical barriers children, youth, and adults encounter to enjoy their right to education in four main areas: equality and non-discrimination; transformative education; education in contexts of emergency; and financing education.

**Equality and non-discrimination:**

Discrimination and exclusion within and across education systems constitute a significant barrier for countries in achieving SDG4. Significant progress has been made in most world regions to improve the access of women to education but their salaries and access to directive positions remain a considerable challenge in all regions of the world. Gender diversity is still a significant challenge for education policies, especially in countries where homosexuality is punishable by law and countries where regressive measures against a person's right to freely express their sexual identity have been flourishing.

Furthermore, policies to secure a lifelong learning approach are still a dream in nearly all countries under examination, including high income countries. Education for children under 5 and the elderly have become a privilege rather than a basic right in many countries. People with disabilities, those living in rural and remote areas, those who belong to ethnic and religious minority groups, as well as migrants and displaced people, are at higher risk of exclusion and discrimination everywhere.

**Transformative education:**

There is a significant gap between the rhetoric used for education planning and what is effectively delivered on the ground. In most countries, SDGs plans acknowledge education as a basic human right but then tend to ignore the importance of making education systems compatible with national and international law in education.

In terms of quality, there is an excessive focus on using standardised tests and an implicit assumption that evaluation automatically improves education systems. When children and youth in different regions of the world show very low performance, rather than investing financial resources to deliver better quality education, a new assessment is planned. Students' ability to self-reflect and competence in basic skills, such as critical thinking,

reasoning, and solving problems, are either ignored or placed as secondary priorities in education planning.

Policies to improve the qualifications of teachers in universities and to better the training in their places of work are scarce. In the majority of countries under analysis, those areas are allocated very little funding and in some cases teacher training is being outsourced to private companies. Moreover, labour conditions for teachers are very precarious in low- and middle-income countries and there is neither social nor financial stimulus to motivate the most talented students to become teachers.

Education for sustainable development, including issues around global citizenship, peace education, and education to enhance democracy are still a dream in most countries, including high income countries.

In order to be compatible with the idea of transformative education, governments should open and protect spaces for democratic active participation of CSOs. Planning education policies without considering the views of students themselves, parents, communities, and CSOs as a whole is just incompatible with the idea of positive change that is inherent to the very meaning of education for sustainable development.

**Education in emergencies:**

Education in emergencies is a significant challenge for countries reaching SDG4. The report shows that education remains under attack in several regions of the world, including conflict and non-conflict areas.

Displaced people are consistently left behind by education systems in all corners of the world. The level of access to education facilities varies across countries and regions, but similar challenges in terms of school adaptation to respond to language needs and to offer psychosocial support for those affected by violence are largely missed in most contexts. Even where financial resources to secure the right to education for refugees could be easily available, politicians show little interest in promoting those policies largely to avoid being perceived by potential voters as pro-migrants/refugees in a context where anti-migrant/refugee parties are emerging.

**Education financing**

In terms of financing, the report shows that much more financial commitment from governments and international donors is needed to respect, protect and fulfil the right to education, and to put countries on track for achieving SDG4. Along with more financial resources, structural tax reforms and policies against privatisation are of urgent need in most countries to reach SDG4. As GCE (2019) has been advocating for several years, governments should consider a 4S approach to education financing: the Share of national budgets they spend on education; the Size of their budgets; the Sensitivity of their public spending on education, and the Scrutiny of their education budgets.

"Increasingly, education is recognized as one of the best financial investments States can make. But the importance of education is not just practical: a well-educated, enlightened and active mind, able to wander

## 1. Introduction

This report aims to identify and characterise some of the critical barriers that children, youth, and adults encounter to the enjoyment of their right to education and also aims to identify and characterise critical policy challenges that governments should address to reach Sustainable Development Goal 4 by 2030; which is, "to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote life-long learning opportunities for all'.

The report draws on a human-rights based approach to understand states' obligations on education. This means that education is primarily conceptualised as a fundamental civil and political right, while at the same time, it is an economic, social, and cultural right. Education expands one's opportunities to become a social and political actor and therefore our opportunities to actively take part in a moral and political community. The understanding of education as a fundamental human right implies that education is a critical and valuable element to enhance people's political voice and their opportunities to shape society. It expands the individual's freedom and opportunities to fully develop their personality and contributes to mutual understanding between different cultures and societies. As stressed by Adam Smith, education for all is necessary to create a prosperous society and is a key factor to overcome the unfair distribution of wealth that results from the division of labour (Thomas, 2017).

Drawing on reports from 41 countries which were provided by 44 GCE national and regional coalitions and partner organisations, this report argues that despite the progress made worldwide towards achieving SDG4, there are critical challenges that remain in every corner of the world, including in high income countries. As expected, the nature and magnitude of the challenges vary significantly according to regions and countries. However, the report suggests that more comprehensive policies and financial efforts are needed in all countries to effectively respect, protect and fulfil the right to education for all and, therefore, to be on track for SDG4.

An in-depth analysis of the data suggests that inequalities and exclusion are still a considerable barrier for millions of children, youth, and adults to enjoyment of their right to education. For instance, people with disabilities, people living in rural and remote areas, those who challenge heteronormative understandings of sexuality, and those living or fleeing areas affected by conflict and climate change, are often amongst those left behind by education systems.

Data also suggest that education systems are far beyond being positively transformed. Colonial heritage still predominates in some of the teaching and learning environments where children struggle to understand ideas of cultural identity and belonging. Not to mention that international organisations providing support to developing countries still reproduce colonial practices. Rather than enhancing the community's self-determination in choosing the education and education systems they consider best for their culture and way of life, western

models, which are largely based on the idea of education as a form of competition, are promoted. The ideas of cooperation and collective success in education, once promoted in some Asian countries, have often been replaced by education models in which students engage in all forms of competition. The quality of education in such a context is often reduced to the ability of students to pass tests. One's ability to self-reflect and competency in basic skills, such as critical thinking, reasoning, and problem-solving are often come second. All in all, education systems are often transformed for the worst largely due to lack of funding or rather lack of willingness on the part of governments to invest in education. There is indeed a massive gap between policy commitments and the reality on the ground. All human beings are entitled to the right to education but more than 250 million children worldwide still struggle to find their place in a school and enjoy their right to education.

This report is organised in 6 sections as follows: Section 1 - provides an introduction; Section 2 - provides a conceptual framework against which the empirical findings of the report are analysed; Section 3 - classifies and summarises some of the observations and recommendations made by UN treaty bodies and special procedures related to the right to education in recent years; Section 4 - discusses the methodological approach adopted for information and data collection and details the sources of the data used for the empirical analysis and their limitations; Section 5 - describes and examines the empirical material against the analytical framework developed in Section 2 and discusses the report's findings. The report concludes with Section 6 - which provides specific recommendations to make the people's dream to enjoy their right to education a reality.

## 2.    Analytical framework: Linking GCE Strategic areas and SDG4

This section links the content and structure of the right to education with both the GCE strategic areas and the SDG4 targets as well as the means of implementation.

To begin with, education within the Sustainable Development Agenda is recognised as a fundamental human right for all. The recognition of education as a human right has several implications for the 2030 agenda. It implies that education is intrinsically valuable for all human beings and that is one reason why education is a stand-alone goal (SDG4: Quality Education) within the agenda. It also implies that education plays a vital role in the realisation of the entire 2030 Agenda. This implication is explicitly considered in a number of education-related targets including SDG3 (health and well-being); SDG5 (gender equality); SDG8 (decent work and economic growth); SDG12 (responsible consumption and production); and SDG13 (climate change mitigation).

It is worth mentioning that within the 2030 Agenda, education is also acknowledged as a public good (UNESCO, 2017). This acknowledgement highlights that despite the fact that states are the main actors for the protection and fulfilment of the right to education, they are not the only actors that should be involved in the design, implementation, and assessment of education policies. Children, youth, and adults themselves, their families and communities, their teachers as well, and civil society as a whole, including, for example, NGOs and the private sector, are called to play an important role in the design, implementation, and assessment of education policies. As the Education and Academia Stakeholder Group (2019)

suggests, in many countries around the globe the progress in implementing the SDG4 agenda would not be possible without partners and the common efforts of various stakeholders to achieve the SDG4 targets.

Table 1 shows the seven (7) targets and the three (3) means of implementation of the SDG4.

| Table 1: SDG 4: the education goal and targets | |
| --- | --- |
| **Goal 4: Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all** | |
| **Target 4.1** | By 2030, ensure that all girls and boys complete free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education leading to relevant and effective learning outcomes |
| **Target 4.2** | By 2030, ensure that all girls and boys have access to quality early childhood development, care and pre-primary education so that they are ready for primary education |
| **Target 4.3** | By 2030, ensure equal access for all women and men to affordable and quality technical, vocational and tertiary education, including university |
| **Target 4.4** | By 2030, substantially increase the number of youth and adults who have relevant skills, including technical and vocational skills, for employment, decent jobs and entrepreneurship |
| **Target 4.5** | By 2030, eliminate gender disparities in education and ensure equal access to all levels of education and vocational training for the vulnerable, including persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples and children in vulnerable situations |
| **Target 4.6** | By 2030, ensure that all youth and a substantial proportion of adults, both men and women, achieve literacy and numeracy |
| **Target 4.7** | By 2030, ensure that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including, among others, through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and nonviolence, global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture's contribution to sustainable development. |
| **Target 4.a** | Build and upgrade education facilities that are child, disability and gender sensitive and provide safe, non-violent, inclusive and effective learning environments for all |
| **Target 4.b** | By 2020, substantially expand globally the number of scholarships available to developing countries, in particular least developed countries, small island developing States and African countries, for enrolment in higher education, including vocational training and information and communications technology, technical, engineering and scientific programmes, in developed countries and other developing countries |
| **Target 4.c** | By 2030, substantially increase the supply of qualified teachers, including through international cooperation for teacher training in developing countries, especially the least developed countries and small island developing States |
| **Source** | Agenda for Sustainable Development |

Diagram 1 displays the four strategic policy areas that GCE has adopted for the period 2019-2022: Equality and non-discrimination; Transformative education; Education in emergency contexts; and Financing education.

Diagram 1: GCE Strategic areas
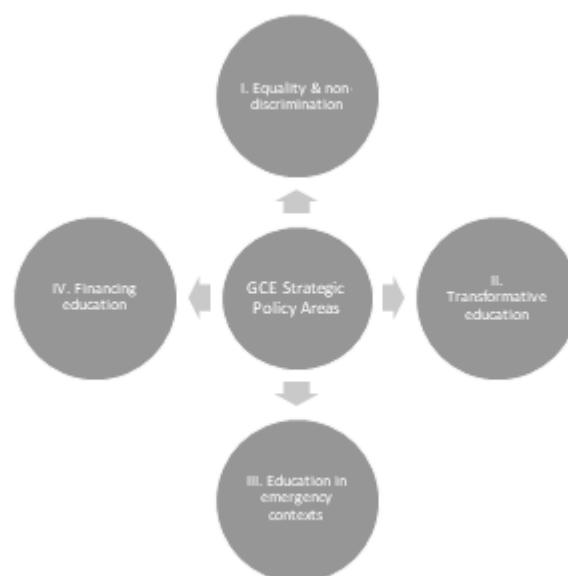


In order to frame the conceptual and empirical analysis of the report, the remaining part of this section explains the connections between the right to education, SDG4, and GCE strategic areas. Table 2 groups the seven (7) outcome targets and three (3) means of implementation of SDG4 in the four (4) GCE strategic policy areas.

In line with the 4A framework developed by Katarina Tomasevski, **equality and non-discrimination** looks at the dimensions of accessibility and adaptability. This strategic policy area specifically examines the social, economic, geographical and cultural barriers that limit people's opportunities to enjoy their right to education. Further explained in Section 5.2., these dimensions are captured by identifying critical barriers to enjoyment of the right to education related to inequality and discrimination within and across education systems. In doing so, local, national and regional coalitions of GCE have been asked to identify the most significant advances the state has made to achieve the SDG4 in the period 2017-2018 and then reflect on the most significant challenges governments are dealing with in achieving the SDG4 in terms of equality and non-discrimination. Coalitions were asked to specifically consider whether and how states have implemented education policies to promote inclusive education and how they have been able to adopt policies to secure a lifelong learning perspective in their education policies. As seen in Table 2, equality and non-discrimination are directly related to the six (6) targets and two (2) means of implementation of the SDG4.

The strategic policy area on **transformative education** is mainly related to the dimensions of acceptability and adaptability. Further discussed in Section 5.3., the idea of transformative education is related to what people learn and how people learn. From a human rights perspective, the content and the methodology used for teaching matter. Thus, the emphasis here is related to whether and how states are addressing the critical challenges to secure high-quality education for all and how their education systems are compatible with an education that promotes self-reflection and critical thinking, and prepares students to be social and political actors and to bring positive social change. As shown in Table 2, this strategic area resonates with four (4) targets and two (2) means of implementation of SDG4.

The strategic policy area on **education in contexts of emergency** relates to the dimensions of availability, accessibility, and adaptability. Section 5.4 illustrates further how in conflict and post-conflict scenarios, as well as in the context of climate-change related disasters, education should be available and accessible, and should respond to the needs of those living in such contexts. To name two (2) examples, securing the right to education in those contexts implies the provision of temporary facilities after a conflict or climate change-related disaster and teachers qualified to work with children who have experienced those emergencies and who may have gone through traumatic experiences. To address these areas of analysis, coalitions were asked to reflect on the most significant challenges states undergo in securing the right to education for people living in emergency situations, especially for people displaced due to natural disasters and conflicts, and including those who move within and across national borders. This area of analysis is directly linked to two (2) SDG4 targets (see Table 2).

The strategic policy area on **financing education** puts emphasis on the states' international legal responsibility of securing sufficient financial resources to respect, promote and fulfil the right to education for all. In line with the 4A framework, this strategy is related to all four (4) dimensions of education – availability, accessibility, acceptability and adaptability – and to all the SDG4 targets and means of implementation as detailed in Section 5.5.. To identify the progress made by states and the remaining critical challenges to achieve SDG4 by 2030, the report addresses issues such as privatisation of education, the use of public funds to provide private education, and the role of tax reforms in securing the right to education for all.

As the previous diagram and the next table illustrate, GCE strategic policy areas resonate with all the components of the right to education and all the targets and means of implementation of SDG4. Equality and non-discrimination are directly related to the component of accessibility and adaptability and resonates with six (6) targets and two (2) means of implementation. Transformative education is related to the component of accessibility and adaptability and resonates with four (4) targets and two (2) means of implementation of SDG4. Education in emergencies is related to the dimensions of availability, accessibility and adaptability and resonates with two (2) targets of SDG4; and finally, financing education is directly related to all components of the right to education and resonates with all targets and means of implementation. In summary, what is suggested here is that the 4A scheme, SDG4, and GCE's Strategic Plan share a common ambition: the protection and fulfilment of the right to education for all. These connections are explored in detail in Section 5 when analysing the empirical data.

| Table 2: GCE Strategic Policy Areas and SDG 4 | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| GCE Policy Strategic Areas | Aim | SDG 4 – Targets and means of implementation | | | | | | | | | | |
| | | 4.1 | 4.2 | 4.3 | 4.4 | 4.5 | 4.6 | 4.7 | 4.a | 4.b | 4.c |
| Equality and non-discrimination | By promoting a lifelong learning perspective to the right to education, GCE aims to contribute to overcome all forms of inequality, | | | | | | | | | | | |

| | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | exclusion and discrimination in education | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Transformative education | Through this strategic policy area GCE aims to advocate and campaign at all levels for education being considered a driver of social justice, sustainable development, individual and collective freedom and joy of learning together | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Education in emergencies | This strategic policy area aims to support access to quality education opportunities to all people affected by emergencies and protracted crisis | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Financing education | This strategic policy area aims to campaign for publicly-funded equitable and inclusive free quality education, including the need to improve domestic and international financing | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Source | The author based on GCE Strategic Plan and SDG 4 | | | | | | | | | | | |

### 3. UN Treaty Bodies and Special Procedures comments and recommendations

This section classifies observations and recommendations made by UN treaty bodies and special procedures in the SDG4 framework. This systematisation aims to inform the critical gaps and challenges faced by some countries in both achieving SDG4 and fulfilling the people's right to education[1].

*4.1. By 2030, ensure that all girls and boys complete free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education leading to relevant and Goal-4 effective learning outcomes*

This target is mainly related to the general obligation of accessibility of education and its link to learning processes in school contexts. Exclusion in school access continues to have familiar faces. It is common amongst inhabitants of rural areas, ethnic minorities, and children facing labour exploitation.

The exclusion of those living in rural areas has been highlighted by the Committee for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) when it expressed its concern over discrepancy of access to education in Cambodia, especially in remote areas. The Committee showed special

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[1] Please note that no specific observations or recommendations were identified for targets 4.4 and 4.6.

concern for the exclusion of children living in the provinces of Mondulkiri and Ratanakiri, which are mostly inhabited by indigenous people and minorities.[2] Regarding exclusion for ethnic reasons, the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR) has recommended the State of Israel to "take the necessary measures to address the serious shortage of classrooms in schools for Arab Israeli children and in the Occupied Palestinian Territory. The Committee also urges the State party to ensure that children living in East Jerusalem are able to be absorbed in the regular education system through the establishment of adequate infrastructures, and until such time to provide financial coverage for alternative educational frameworks as an interim solution, in line with the decision of the High Court of Justice of 6 February 2011"[3]. While noting the adoption of guidance on bullying and exclusion in Great Britain, CERD has emphasised its concern regarding "racist bullying and harassment in schools across the State party, as well as at the disproportionate rate of exclusion from school of pupils belonging to Gypsy, Traveller, Roma or Afro-Caribbean communities"[4]. In terms of child labour, CESCR raised the attention of El Salvador on the exclusion of children from education, especially those doing domestic service or hazardous jobs, and those living on the streets[5].

The Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC) recommended that the State of El Salvador establish a budgeting process that includes a child rights perspective by significantly increasing the budget allocations for education and other social rights, and encouraged the country to take action to reach minimum internationally accepted levels as soon as possible[6]. This Committee expressed concerns over the government of Lesotho on the hidden costs of public primary education, including transport, food expenses at school, especially in rural areas, and high school fees for secondary education[7]. The Committee further raised awareness about the process of commercialisation and privatisation of education within the country. The CRC committee recommended that the State of Nepal implement appropriate financing strategies, so as to ensure the effective and actual provision of free quality education to all without discrimination, and also take appropriate regulatory measures to ensure that private providers of education do not undermine social cohesion or exacerbate segregation and discrimination in particular, by effectively regulating fees, syllabus, admission criteria, diversity of student backgrounds, and other barriers to access. In the case of Pakistan, the CRC (2016) asked the state party to "prevent privatisation of schools and establish mechanisms to monitor the compliance of private schools with minimum educational standards, curriculum requirements and qualifications for teachers; and [to] allocate sufficient financial resources for the development and expansion of early childhood care and education, based on a comprehensive and holistic policy of early childhood care and development."

Finally, in the context of international development cooperation, CRC raised a concern on the government of Great Britain's policy to provide financial support to "low-fee, private and informal schools run by for-profit business enterprises in recipient States". CRC emphasised

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[2] CERD/C/KHM/CO/8-13 para. 20, 2010.

[3] E/C.12/ISR/CO/3, para.33, 2011.

[4] CERD /C/GBR/CO/21-23, para.34, 2016

[5] E/C.12/SLV/CO/2, paras. 23 and 42; see also para. 16, 2014.

[6] See document CRC/C/SLV/CO/5-68, para. 8, 2018

[7] See document CRC/C/LSO/CO/2, para. 53, 2018.

how "the rapid increase in the number of such schools may contribute to substandard education, less investment in free and quality public schools and deepened inequalities in the recipient countries, leaving behind children who cannot afford even low-fee schools"[8].

*4.2. By 2030, ensure that all girls and boys have access to quality early childhood development, care and pre-primary education so that they are ready for primary education*

In recent years, states have progressively integrated early childhood into the basic education scheme, so that Target 4.2 expands the framework of governmental obligations that treaty bodies unanimously recognise.

The Committee for the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), raised the attention of the government of Cameroon to the situation of early childhood education within the country. The Committee stressed that "many girls, in particular in the Bakassi zone, are not registered at birth owing to the lack of legal literacy, financial barriers and long distances to civil registration offices, which prevents girls from obtaining personal documents, from accessing social security, health-care and education"[9]. CEDAW also recommended the government of Eswatini to address costs associated with early childhood education and remove the indirect costs of primary education, including school uniforms[10].

CRC raised concerns on the limitations faced by children with disabilities in early childhood. The Committee recommended to Sierra Leone to "ensure that children with disabilities have access to inclusive early childhood care and education, early development programmes, health care and other services, and ensure that such services receive adequate human, technical and financial resources"[11].

*4.3. By 2030, ensure equal access for all women and men to affordable and quality technical, vocational and tertiary education, including university*

In line with the general comment sixteen (16) of the CESCR, equal access to all levels and modalities of education, including higher education, is an overarching aim of the SDG4's agenda[12].

CESCR recommended to the State of Indonesia to "educate men and women about equal career opportunities with a view to promoting their pursuance of education and training in fields other than those traditionally dominated by either sex"[13]. CESCR also urged the State of Serbia to: "undertake comprehensive reform to repeal legal provisions which may perpetuate gender discrimination, and empower women through gender-sensitive labour policies aimed at hiring women to non-traditional professions, enhancing their access to vocational and technical education and ensuring equal conditions of work"[14].

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[8] See document CRC/C/GBR/CO/5, para. 17, 2016
[9] CEDAW/C/CMR/CO/4-5, para. 24, 2014.
[10] CEDAW/C/SWZ/CO/1-2, para. 31, 2014.
[11] CRC/C/SLE/CO/3-5, para. 28, 2016.
[12] General comment No. 16 (2005), para. 16; see also E/C.12/GC/21, para. 25, 2009
[13] E/C.12/IDN/CO/1, para.14,2014.
[14] E/C.12/SRB/CO/2, para.16, 2014

*4.5. By 2030, eliminate gender disparities in education and ensure equal access to all levels of education and vocational training for the vulnerable, including persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples and children in vulnerable situations*

Gender disparities are usually linked to different capacities, social or ethnic belongings, and sexual orientation. Treaty bodies and special procedures have recommended several actions. In the case of Guatemala, CRC recommended that the state adopt a national legislation and strategy in areas such as education to address structural and multiple levels of discrimination against girls, indigenous and Afro-descendant children, children with disabilities, migrant, asylum-seeking and refugee children, and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex children[15]. In 2018, CESCR also showed concerns for the prevalence of segregated special education for children with disabilities and insufficient teacher-training programmes in Guatemala[16]. Similarly, in Lesotho, CRC expressed its concern for  the "limited access for children with disabilities to inclusive education, in particular at the secondary level, owing to the lack of assistive devices and well-trained specialised teachers"[17]. In the case of Pakistan, the CRC (2016) called on the government to "emphasise the importance of education for girls by overcoming deeply rooted attitudes preferring boys and their wellbeing to those of girls" and to "raise awareness and encourage communities and parents in particular to enrol children, especially girls, and those who reside in underrepresented provinces and rural areas in schools."

*4.7. By 2030, ensure that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including, among others, through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture's contribution to sustainable development*

Target 4.7. focuses on both the content of education and the teaching-learning process being delivered. In the case of Ivory Coast, CEDAW argued that violence in education settings and other barriers against gender equality, "include, but are not limited to, the persistence of sexual abuse and harassment of girls by some teachers and tutors, and the negative impact of harmful traditional practices, such as early and forced marriage, on girls' education". The Committee also raised a concern about "the lack of training of teachers with regard to, inter alia, the impact of gender on schooling and the education of girls". CEDAW recommended to the state party to "address harmful traditional practices such as female genital mutilation, forced and early marriage, levirate, sororate, polygamy and the granting of all decision-making power to men within the family, by expanding public education programmes"[18]. The CRC Committee recommended to the state of Nepal to ensure regulatory and enforcement framework to combat the phenomenon of schools and/or teachers subjecting children to hidden costs for attending schools.

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[15] CRC/C/GTM/CO/5-6, para. 13, 2018
[16] CRC/C/GTM/CO/5-6, para.30, 2018
[17] CRC/C/LSO/CO/2, para. 53, 2018
[18] CEDAW/C/CIV/CO/1-3, para.36, 2011

In the case of Eswatini, CEDAW urged the State to "expand public education programmes on the negative impact of such stereotypes on women's enjoyment of their rights, in particular in rural areas, targeting traditional leaders who are the custodians of customary values in the State party"[19] and "; prohibit corporal punishment and adopt measures aimed at eliminating its use in all settings, especially schools, and promote the use of non-violent forms of discipline"[20].

CERD has recommended that Burkina Faso take measures to ensure that human rights education is offered in schools and in academic programmes[21]. In 2018, CRC urged Mauritania to repeal all legal provisions that discriminate against women and have a negative impact on their children, such as those relating to polygamy and repudiation, and to take all necessary legal, administrative, and educational measures to discourage polygamy, which can have adverse effects on children[22].

Means of implementation

The SDG4 means of implementation apply for all targets. Treaty bodies provided critical analysis and recommendations that thoroughly illustrate the kinds of actions States should develop for the implementation of such means.

*4.A. Build and upgrade education facilities that are child, disability and gender sensitive and provide safe, nonviolent, inclusive and effective learning environments for all*

CRC recommended that Mauritania:

(a) Strengthen bodies and mechanisms such as the Children's Parliament and the Children's Municipal Councils to ensure that children's views are heard and given due consideration in national and local decision-making processes for adopting laws, policies and programmes concerning children, and develop procedures for the participation of children in judicial and administrative proceedings concerning or affecting them;
(b) Conduct awareness-raising and education programmes to promote the meaningful and empowered participation of all children at all levels of society at the community level, in the family and in schools, paying particular attention to girls and children in disadvantaged or vulnerable situations[23].

In the case of Great Britain, CRC recommended that theState party "establish structures for the active and meaningful participation of children and give due weight to their views in designing laws, policies, programmes and services at the local and national levels, including in relation to discrimination, violence, sexual exploitation and abuse, harmful practices, alternative care, sexual and reproductive education, leisure and play. Particular attention should be paid to involving younger children and children in vulnerable situations, such as children with disabilities"[24].

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[19] CEDAW/C/SWZ/CO/1-2, para.19, 2014

[20] Ibidem, para. 31.

[21] CERD /C/BFA/CO/12-19, para. 16, 2013

[22] CRC/C/MRT/CO/3-5, para. 29, 2018

[23] CRC/C/MRT/CO/3-5, para.20, 2018

[24] CRC/C/GBR/CO/5, para. 31, 2016

Moreover, with regards to the right of the child to protection from corporal punishment and other cruel or degrading forms of punishment, the Committee urges the State party, in all devolved administrations, overseas territories, and Crown dependencies, to: "ensure that corporal punishment is explicitly prohibited in all schools and educational institutions and all other institutions and forms of alternative care"[25].

*4.B. By 2020, substantially expand globally the number of scholarships available to developing countries, in particular least developed countries, small island developing States and African countries, for enrolment in higher education, including vocational training and information and communications technology, technical, engineering and scientific programmes, in developed countries and other developing countries*

In the case of Chile (2013), CERD regretted "that Mapudungun is taught only in the first four grade levels in primary schools where there are a large number of indigenous students and that the number and size of scholarships for indigenous students are too small to allow recipients to cover educational expenses in institutions other than those located in indigenous communities or settlements"[26].

Concerning Mauritania, CESCR called on the State party "to continue to address the various obstacles to the enjoyment of the right to education, including the distance to school, the cost of education and the social and cultural factors involved such as girls' duties at home. The Committee also calls on the State party to intensify its efforts for the reintegration in school of children who have dropped out, to invest in the training of teachers, to improve the accessibility of secondary and higher education as well as vocational training, and to put into place scholarship schemes"[27].

*4.C. By 2030, substantially increase the supply of qualified teachers, including through international cooperation for teacher training in developing countries, especially least developed countries and small island developing states*

When examining the situation in the Philippines, CEDAW noted "the lack of operational guidelines and training for teachers on delivering age-appropriate education on sexual and reproductive health and rights"[28]. In the case of Mongolia, CESCR raised concern on the fact that "many schools are not accessible to children with disabilities, especially in rural areas, and that many of these children do not attend school. The Committee is further concerned about the lack of teachers trained in working with children with disabilities (arts. 2 (2), 13 and 14)"[29].

### 4. Methodology

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[25] CRC/C/GBR/CO/5, para. 41, 2016

[26] CERD C/CHL/CO/19-21, para.15, 2013

[27] E/C.12/MRT/CO/1, para.28, 2012

[28] CEDAW/C/PHL/CO/7-8, para.33, 2016

[29] E/C.12/MNG/CO/4, para. 29, 2015

This report primarily draws on data from 41 countries gathered by 43 local and regional GCE coalitions and partner organisations[30]. A short qualitative-oriented questionnaire was designed in early January 2019 and GCE members were invited to provide their inputs by May 30th, 2019[31].

Questions were focused on identifying the progress made by governments in securing the seven (7) SDG4 targets and means of implementation, and the critical challenges identified by local actors, mainly GCE members, to reach SDG4 by 2030. In more detail, the survey included questions for the following seven thematic areas:

- Equality, non-discrimination and inclusive education
- Lifelong learning education policies
- Education quality
- Transformative education
- Education in emergency situations
- Education financing
- Civil society challenges and opportunities to promote and defend the right to education

In Asia, Oceania, and Latin America, several coalitions were working on their own national spotlight reports to be submitted to the HLPF and kindly agreed to share their preliminary findings. The list of coalitions and people who provided inputs for this report are included in the acknowledgements section of the report. Appendix 2 provides the name of the countries where the data comes from.

Questionnaires were completed in five languages (Arabic, English, French, Portuguese and Spanish). Responses were translated by professional interpreters into English. Data for the above-mentioned thematic areas were classified following the four dimensions of the analytical framework explained in the previous section: equality and non-discrimination; transformative education; education in contexts of emergency; and financing education. Following this classification, common patterns and rare observations were identified to illustrate the critical challenges governments need to address to reach SDG4 by 2030. Due to the fact that Voluntary National Reviews - VNR prepared by governments tend to focus on the country's achievements, this report focuses on analysis of the challenges.

It is worth highlighting that rather than a comprehensive picture of what has been done or needs to be done for reaching the SDG4 worldwide, this report only illustrates some of the overarching critical challenges faced by governments to secure the right to education for all.

In order to maintain regional balance in the report, the selection of examples to illustrate the analysis follows two main considerations: firstly, and above all, if the information needed to develop an argument is available in the data provided by coalitions and partner organisations. Secondly, if data is available for more than one country, the report provides examples for

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[30] Despite coalitions and partner organisations reported information for 41 countries, over 50 countries are included in the analysis. Data for those countries not reported by coalitions and partner organisations was extracted from academic and policy-oriented research quoted in the report.

[31] The survey is included in appendix 2.

different regions of the world. The aim is to keep balance between the information provided for Africa, America, Asia, Europe, and Oceania. This geographical balance, however, was difficult to achieve largely because of data limitations. To address this limitation, the report also draws on secondary sources. Data provided by coalitions and partner organisations were therefore complemented and/or interpreted against contemporary academic and policy-oriented research on education. A preliminary version of the report was sent to all coalitions for comments and feedback.

Before moving into the analysis of the empirical material and the discussion of the report's findings, it is worth highlighting its main limitations. To begin with, the selection of the countries included in the analysis is primarily guided by the availability of data. As explained above, it makes it difficult to keep geographical balance. Secondly, the data provided by coalitions is often limited, largely because of lack of available updated statistics in the respective country in the coalition. Thirdly, data is presented in very different formats and for different periods of time. Although those issues make it difficult to compare countries and regions, the information is valuable to identify common trends and countries' singularities. Fourthly, data is often available only at national levels and that makes it difficult to properly explore the situation of the most disadvantaged and excluded groups. Lastly, data comes from a diverse range of sources and, as expected, every source uses different methodologies and time frames for data collection. Having identified the main limitations of the data, it is worth emphasising that rather than providing comparable figures for the SDG4 targets, the value of the report rests in providing a general picture of the overarching challenges that need to be addressed by governments in different regions of the world to reach the SDG4 targets by 2030.


### 5. Between moving backward and moving forward towards achieving SDG4

This section examines the empirical material against the analytical framework developed in Section 2 and discusses the main findings of the report. It begins by examining whether and how SDG4 is shaping education policies. Then, data is classified and analysed following the four GCE policy areas outlined in Section 2.

### 5.1. Is the SDG4 informing education policies across the world?

SDG4 acknowledges education as a fundamental human right. Its targets and means of implementation, especially its adoption of a lifelong learning perspective, from early childhood to tertiary and adult education, explicitly acknowledges the right of every human being to enjoy free and inclusive quality public education. Although SDG4 and its targets are highly coherent with the content of international human rights law, there is a significant gap between countries' rhetoric of respect, protection, and fulfilment of the right to education and what can be observed on the ground. The UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS) estimates that by 2014 over 263 million children and young people of ages 6-17 were out of school. This means that for at least one out of five children and youth the right to education was completely denied.

At the primary level, 63 million children (aged 6 to 11 years old) were out of school; at lower secondary school, 61 million adolescents (aged 12 to 14 years old) were out of school, and at upper secondary school, 139 million youth (aged 15 to 17 years old), or one in every three, were not enrolled in school. UIS (2016) highlights that these youth "are four times as likely to be out of school as children of primary school age, and more than twice as likely to be out of school as those of lower secondary school age".

SDGs, especially SDG4, are expected to influence education policies at local, regional, and global levels. The government's commitment to the 2030 Agenda, however, considerably varies amongst countries and regions. In the United States, the SDG framework has not been formally adopted, and in Brazil and Guatemala, the protection of the right to education has experienced a significant step back in recent years, while in countries such as Afghanistan, Australia, Bangladesh, India, and Spain, SDG4 is influencing education policies.

In Brazil, the economic reforms introduced during the last two years are putting the availability of financial resources for education for the next two decades at risk. The reform to the 95/2016 Constitutional Amend introduces a new fiscal regime in which financial resources for education could be frozen for two decades (Brazilian Campaign for the Right to Education, 2019). These reforms are not only stepping back the achievement of targets established in the National Education Plan but also limiting the opportunities to make significant progress towards the achievement of SDG4 and the whole 2030 Agenda. As the Brazilian Campaign for the Right to Education (2019) stresses, rather than enhancing public education in Brazil, these financial reforms are enlarging the space for profit-education which is not only against the spirit of SDG4 but also against some UN resolutions and CRC general observations[32].

Guatemala has also shown a significant setback in its education policies. While in 2010 the gross enrolment rate in primary education reached 115%, it accounted for only 101% in 2017. In net terms, this means that the rate plummeted from 97% to 84% in less than a decade. Worldwide, United Nations (2016) estimates the adjusted net enrolment rates at 91% for primary education, 84% for lower secondary education, 63% for upper secondary education, and 37% for tertiary education.

By contrast, the Australian government has established a high-level National Interdepartmental Committee to implement SDGs. The committee is co-chaired by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) and the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet (Australian Coalition for Education & Development -ACED, 2019). Likewise, the Afghanistan government has established a Sustainable Development Goals Executive Committee which includes a working group on Education, Health and Social Protection. Sectorial ministries and Civil Society Organisations - CSOs work together in this committee to design policies to effectively implement SDG4 (Afghanistan National Education Coalition – ANEC, 2019). In the Kyrgyz Republic, the government established a Coordination Committee on Adaptation, Implementation and Monitoring of the SDGs in 2015 (Education Coalition of Kyrgyzstan -ECK, 2019). In Mongolia, the Parliament has set up the Subcommittee on the SDGs under the Standing Committee on Social Policy, Education, Culture and Science. At the executive level, the newly established National Development Agency (NDA) under the Prime

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[32] See A/HRC/RES/38/9 and CRC/C/BRA/CO/2-4.

Minister has been designated to coordinate planning and implementation of the SDGs across the different agencies of the government (National Civil Society Coalition-AFE, Mongolia, 2019). To name an additional example, in Bangladesh, the government has formed a 20-member High Level SDGs Committee to coordinate, implement and monitor progress on SDG[33]. Under the general coordination of the Bangladesh Prime Minister Office, the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Primary and Mass education, have developed a first draft of a SDG4 Strategic Framework for the country (Campaign for Popular Education-CAMPE, 2019). It reaffirms education as a human right and develops comprehensive policies to achieve SDG4, including strategies for equity, inclusion, and gender equality, and education in the context of emergencies. Furthermore, the Bangladesh Bureau of Educational Information and Statics (BANBEIS) has developed a National Indicator Framework to measure progress on SDGs. A set of 43 indicators was designed to specifically monitor SDG4[34].

Embracing the SDGs framework for education and demonstrating political commitment to design national plans, does not imply however that more financial resources for education are allocated. The cases of India, Bangladesh, Honduras, and El Salvador illustrate well this tension. In India, the country has delegated the coordination role for SDGs to the National Institution for Transforming India (NITI Aayog), but this decision has not been accompanied with additional financial resources to implement policies (National Coalition for Education, NCE India, 2019: 7). In Bangladesh, as mentioned above, the government has shown political commitment at the highest level to work for the SDG4 agenda. The share of education budget and share of GDP, however, have remained at nearly the same level in the last ten years; around 12% and 2%, respectively. The government of Honduras has designed a Strategic Plan for Education 2018-2030 but has reduced the investment in education; those already excluded or at higher risk of exclusion from the education system are amongst the most affected (Dakar Forum Honduras, 2019). El Salvador, which is indeed one of the SDGs pilot countries, has also shown commitment to adopt SDG4 framework for action but has not made significant progress on resources allocation. Although the country has signed a national agreement to invest 6% of its GDP in education, the shared GDP for education is still halted at 3.4% (Salvadorian Network for the Right to Education – RESALDE, 2019).

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**Box 1: Spain: Political commitment with 2030 Agenda at the Very High Political Level**

One of the main advances of Spain towards the achievement of SDG4 and the 2030 Agenda as a whole is the political commitment expressed by the current Government, which is reflected in the creation of a solid governance structure for the implementation of SDGs. The government has established various coordination instruments and institutional mechanisms, including the Office of the High Commissioner of the 2030 Agenda, which reports directly to the Presidency. The creation of this figure largely responds to the requests of the Spanish civil society that, since the adoption of the 2030 Agenda in 2015, demanded that it be endowed with the highest political level coordination.

In line with this political commitment, Spain presented a Voluntary National Review -VNR at the HLPF 2018 and developed an Action Plan for its implementation. Specifically related to SDG4, in February 2019 the government presented a bill for the new education of the XXI century. The bill includes part of the claims led by CSOs such as the inclusion of education for citizenship in educational curricula, specifically through a

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[33] A SDGs Implementation Review Conference was held on 4th to 6th July 2018 involving around 2000 participants from Government, NGOs, DPs, Private sector, Academia, media, and CSOs.

[34] Similar institutional arrangements to plan and deliver SDGs at the high political level can be found in countries such as Nepal,

subject on sustainable development, human rights and Agenda 2030. If the bill is approved, education on sustainable development, human rights and Agenda 2030 will be compulsory in at least one of the elementary courses and at least one of the secondary ones. The bill also includes provisions for teachers being trained in those contents.

The political commitment with SDG4 is also accompanied by new but still insufficient financial commitment. Spain is currently spending only 4.25% of its GDP in education, when the minimum expected is 6%. The bill for the new education of the XXI century contemplates a minimum of 5% of the GDP to be invested in education.

Source: Spanish Coalition Global Campaign for Education (2019). Survey for the HLPF 2019.

The possibility to reach SDG4 by 2030 depends on both the progress a particular country has already made to fulfil the people's right to education before adhering to the 2030 Agenda and the level of political and financial commitment to design and implement education policies which respect, protect, and promote the right to education. Spain and Australia, for example, seem to be in a good position to reach SDG 4.1., largely because they both have already achieved significant progress during the Millennium Development Goals – MDGs time. They both have nearly achieved universal access to primary education (98.46% and 96.66% by 2016, respectively) and are making substantial progress to universal secondary education (96.27% and 93.28%, respectively). However, it is worth noting that the net enrolment rate in primary school was slightly higher in 2015 for both countries (98.86% and 96.99%, respectively).

Afghanistan and Bangladesh are far beyond reaching SDG 4.1., by 2030. In Bangladesh, the net enrolment rate for primary school reached 90.5% by 2017, but the secondary net enrolment rate only reached 61.5% by 2017. The net enrolment rates in primary school for Afghanistan are not available for the last nine years and the net enrolment rate for secondary school only reached 49.52% in 2017. Lack of statistics for the same year makes it difficult to compare the level of progress made by all countries towards achieving SDG4. However, those figures illustrate the significant differences between those four countries and the magnitude of the challenges that countries such as Bangladesh and Afghanistan are dealing with to reach SDG4 by 2030[35].

By highlighting the challenges faced by low-and middle- income-countries, this report does not ignore that wealthy nations also havesignificant challenges to achieve SDG4. As the Spanish Coalition Global Campaign for Education (2019) states, despite the fact that Spain has managed to reduce the early educational drop-out rate for students aged 18-24, going from 26.3% in 2011 to 17.9% in 2018, the country accounts for the highest rate of early school-leaving in Europe where the average for 28 countries is 10.6%[36].

Economic development is one of the critical components in explaining such massive differences. While Australia's GDP accounted for 1,323 billion US$ in 2017, Afghanistan's GDP only accounted for 19 billion and Bangladesh's GDP for 249 billion. Thus, while Australia's GDP

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[35]     See   UIS   UNESCO   http://uis.unesco.org/   and   World   Development   Indicators   database   https://databank.worldbank.org

[36]     Eurostat,     mayo     2019     (datos     2018).     https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=File:2018data_Early_school_leavers-02.jpg

seems to be sufficient to secure funding for education across the country, Afghanistan has recently announced that due to lack of funding, implementation of SDGs will be started in 2020. Bangladesh has just finalised the SDGs Financing Strategy. The strategy estimates that an additional amount of US$ 928.48 billion will be required from financial years 2017 to 2030, which is 19.75% of the accumulated GDP. The annual average investment for SDGs will be US$ 66.32 billion (constant prices) for this period.[37]

GCE local and regional coalitions identified a number of factors that contribute to the lack of financial resources for public education. An overarching pattern identified in all countries, further detailed in Section 5.5, is the use of public resources to finance private education. There are also factors that seem to be much more significant in some regions than others. Corruption, centralization of decision-making processes, and regressive financial reforms were commonly stressed by Latin American and South Asian coalitions. In Spain, financial problems were closely linked to the 2008 financial crisis and in Denmark, the lack of public resources to attend to the needs of specific groups, refugees in particular, were linked primarily to the politicians' fear of being perceived as pro-refugee in contexts where migrants and refugees are portrayed by right-wing parties as a threat to the 'host' society.

## 5.2. Equality and non-discrimination

The 2030 Agenda's principle of 'leaving no one behind' has become a common discourse in national, regional, and international development policy. In terms of SDG4, putting this principle in practice entails the design and implementation of a comprehensive education policy that places inclusive education at its hearth. This section discusses whether and how governments are addressing inequality and discrimination in their education systems in order to make them effectively inclusive.

Before going into the analysis of the data, it is worth highlighting that 'inclusive education' is a very loaded term. In some countries, such as Kyrgyzstan, Mongolia, and Nepal, to name but three examples, inclusive education is mainly used to refer to education for people with disabilities. This understanding of the term largely puts the focus on the individual characteristics that makes an individual vulnerable rather than the social structures and barriers that make people vulnerable. Instead, in this report, the notion of inclusive education denotes a dynamic process in which individual characteristics are placed against a set of social, political, financial, and cultural barriers. The term inclusive education therefore refers to 'a transformational process of constant change and improvement within schools and the wider education ecosystem to make education welcoming and participative  achievement oriented for all students' (GPE 2018; 2). As UNESCO (2016; 20) clearly states, inclusive education is 'an overall principle that should guide all educational policies and practices,

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[37] Keynote Speech on "Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and Human Rights: Perspective Bangladesh" by Mr Md. Abul Kalam Azad, Principal Coordinator (SDGs Affairs), Prime Minister's Office, Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh on 1st November 2018. Retrieved from http://webcache.googleusercontent.com/search?q=cache:B7JagQj91wkJ:nhrc.portal.gov.bd/sites/default/files/files/nhrc.portal.gov.bd/download/cd205865_858d_43a7_a3a9_47734322bd27/Paper_SDGs_Human%2520Rights_NHRC_PCSir_31_10_2018_Final%2520for%2520Speech.docx+&cd=9&hl=en&ct=clnk&gl=bd on 6 May 2019

starting from the belief that education is a basic human right and the foundation for a more just society'.

Making inclusive education a reality for all, therefore, entails the identification and removal of social, cultural, political, and financial barriers that exclude individuals from their right to education. Making inclusive education is, thus, a very context-specific process. Depending on the context in which individuals and communities are immersed, they may need to deal with a different set of barriers, including different forms of exclusion and discriminatory practices. What is central is that the application of the principle of inclusive education entails the state's obligation to protect individuals from all forms of exclusion and discrimination. Making education and societies inclusive means to embrace all human beings regardless of their personal, social, cultural, or political differences; and regardless of their gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, age, ethnicity, country of origin, talents, abilities, disabilities, or any other consideration.

More specifically, and in line with the general comment 4 of the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities - CRPD (2016), the term inclusive education is used to refer to "the full and effective participation, accessibility, attendance and achievement of all students, especially those who, for different reasons, are excluded or at risk of being marginalized". This approach is largely consistent with the notion of inclusive education proposed by UNESCO (2016) and the notion that will be used by UNESCO in its Global Education Monitoring Report (2020) on inclusion (see UNESCO 2018)[38].

Against the principle of 'leaving no one behind', different forms of exclusion, discriminatory practices, and inequalities, including income-related and gender-based inequalities, are leaving millions of children, youth, and adults without the opportunity to enjoy their right to education. "Across sub-Saharan Africa one in every three children, adolescents and youth are out of school - with girls more likely to be excluded than boys. For every 100 boys of primary school age out of school, there are 123 girls denied the right to education" (UIS, 2016). There is also a "gulf between out-of-school rates in the world's poorest and richest countries, with an upper-secondary out-of-school rate of 59% across the world's low-income countries, compared to just 6% in high-income countries"[39].

Exclusion and discrimination do not magically disappear over time. They are, indeed, cumulative. As the recent report presented by OECD (2018: 1) suggests, "those people with low-educated parents, a proxy for low socio-economic status, are less likely to participate in early childhood education programmes, complete upper secondary school and advance to higher levels of education than those with at least one tertiary-educated parent. [] These inequalities are then reflected in the labour market: those who have attained only upper

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[38] International Bureau of Education and UNESCO (2016: 25) identify 4 performance indicators which help to understand when an education system is becoming inclusive. They are: (i) inclusion is seen as an overall principle that guides all educational policies and practices; (ii) the curriculum, instructional materials and its associated assessment systems are designed to take account of all learners; (iii) all agencies that work with children, including the health and social services, understand and support the policy aspirations for promoting inclusive education; and (iv) systems are in place to monitor the presence, participation and achievement of all learners.
[39] http://uis.unesco.org/en/news/education-data-release-one-every-five-children-adolescents-and-youth-out-school

secondary education are less likely to be employed and earn 65% as much as their tertiary-educated peers".

The corollary of exclusion and discrimination being cumulative is that countries must adopt specific policies to address them and make progress towards achieving SDG4. The reference to the need to fight against exclusion and discrimination in education systems is an overarching pattern but how to achieve that is rarely addressed in national plans for education. The National Education Strategic Plan 2017-2021 in Afghanistan, for example, calls into attention the issue of exclusion and discrimination but only includes plans for three areas: management, quality, and access. The lack of specific actions and budgets to make the education system inclusive within the country disproportionately affects the most disadvantaged groups of the Afghan society. As ANEC (2019) stresses, most of public schools within the country have no disability friendly environments. As expected, this increases the risk of leaving people with disabilities behind.

The remaining part of this section provides examples of individuals, groups and communities who are often left behind by education policies. The list is not exhaustive; it only provides examples of the multiple forms of exclusion and discrimination some groups are dealing with in their path to enjoying their right to education. The selection of the groups is guided by both international human rights law that protects people who are in a disadvantaged position and data availability. Migrants and displaced people are included in this list but for analytical purposes, this analysis is included in section 5.4., education in emergency contexts.

*Children, youth, and adults with disabilities*

Legal measures and policies have been adopted to protect the right to education of people with disabilities in different regions of the world. In Cape Verde, the decision to provide free of charge education at all levels for people with disabilities, in Mongolia, a law on the rights of persons with disabilities approved in 2016, and in Burkina Faso, a National Strategy for the Development of Inclusive Education for the period between 2018-2022, are just three examples of these measures.

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**Box 2: Burkina Faso: Making progress but huge challenges remain**

With the aim of contributing to the inclusion of people with disabilities and marginalized groups, Burkina Faso has adopted a National Strategy for the Development of Inclusive Education for the period 2018-2022. The strategy, which was inspired by the rights of people with disabilities and designed through a constructive dialogue between school authorities and CSOs, includes policies to promote equity and inclusive education; practices to support the creation of positive learning spaces for all students; and accountability and transparency mechanisms.

Some of the most significant challenges to implement the strategy include the training of teachers on the psychological and pedagogical needs of people with disabilities; including sign language and Braille; the provision of teaching materials adapted to the educational needs of different learners; the reasonable adjustment of school infrastructure and public spaces for people with disabilities, and the provision of specific funding for inclusive education.

Source: Coalition Nationale pour l'Education Pour Tous du Burkina Faso (2019)

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Although legal measures and policies have been adopted to protect the right to education of people with disabilities in different regions of the world, data collected for this report clearly shows that they are often excluded from educational opportunities. In fact, children, youth, and adults with disabilities are frequently left behind by national, regional, and global strategies to target out-of-school children and youth, as well as excluded from literacy programmes for adults. The World Report on Disability evidences that both women and men with a disability have considerably lower opportunities to complete primary school when compared to those without a disability, 46% and 57%, respectively. Indeed, as the International Disability and Development Consortium (IDDC) and Light for the World (2016; 13) stresses, people with disabilities consistently deal with multiple educational disadvantages. Children, in particular, are often amongst those "most likely to be poor, to face social isolation, discrimination and abuse, to be underweight or stunted, to live in rural areas and/or in countries affected by conflict or humanitarian crises".

The exclusion of children with disabilities from educational opportunities is significant across most of the low- and middle-income countries. The Education Commission (2016; 33) estimates that 65 million primary and lower secondary school aged children in low- and middle-income countries have disabilities and half of them are out of school[40]. The magnitude of the problem varies considerably across regions. In Jordan, only 10% of children with special education needs are enrolled in the public education system. Within the country, women with a disability have even less opportunity to access education than men with a disability (42% compared to 51%). Data from African countries shows that the majority of children with disabilities are deprived of their right to education (Light for the world, 2019). In Burkina Faso, Malawi, and Tanzania, for example, children with disabilities are 2.5 times more likely to be excluded from education (GCE, 2013). What is more critical, in countries such as Ethiopia, it is estimated that over 98% of children aged 4-18 with special education needs are out of school. To be precise, the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (2015: 26) estimates that only 77,850 out of the estimated 5 million children with special education needs in the country are enrolled in school.

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**Box 3: Working together for an inclusive society**

I am Solomon, a 24-years-old man from Ethiopia. I am a person with disabilities but I believe people with disabilities can achieve what they want when societies are aware of the specific needs of people with disabilities. This means, when we all work together to make societies inclusive.
When I was a child, I asked the school's director for teaching all students in inclusive classrooms. The director said "You are deaf so you should attend classes with other deaf students". I never accepted that view and asked him several times to teach people with and without disabilities in the same classroom. I was aware we needed a common language so I decided to teach sign language to my fellow students without disabilities. We just started to communicate among each other. Then, I faced similar challenges in my university and place of work. Thus, I encouraged teachers to learn sign language and a three months course was undertaken by many of them.
I believe that communication is a significant barrier for deft people but if we find ways to sort out this and other barriers, we can make our societies more inclusive.

Source: Extracts from an online interview with Salomon Shiferaw (April, 2019), Light for the World.

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[40] http://report.educationcommission.org/download/891/, p. 33

The right to education of children, youth, and adults with disabilities is the facto acknowledged in most countries. There are, however, significant gaps between legal frameworks and policy design and implementation. To illustrate, despite the adoption of a domestic law in Jordan which protects the rights of people with disabilities (Law No. 20, 2017), there are still considerable issues regarding the lack of diagnostic centres, professionals specialised in supporting people with disabilities, curricula, and appropriate learning environments (Jordan, Strategic Plan of the Ministry of Education 2018-2022; 24).

Similar challenges for making inclusive education a reality can be observed in Romania. As Save the Children Romania (2019) states, Romania continues to face challenges in ensuring inclusive education for children and youth with special education needs. Data for the academic year 2017/2018 provided by the Romanian Institute of Statistics show that 16.881 children are enrolled in segregated special education institutions and 33.748 students are enrolled in mainstream education. Inclusive education in the context of Romania is still largely an aspiration.  Most teachers have not been trained to work with people with special education needs and the number of support teachers is extremely low. There are only 1,385 for the whole country, which means a ratio of about 1 support teacher for 50 pupils with special education needs.

As already stressed, there are similar challenges to full protection of the right to education of people with disabilities across the world, but there are also significant differences between regions that are worth highlighting. While most countries of North and Sub-Saharan Africa, Asia, Latin America, and the Caribbean still struggle to provide access to schools and adapt them to the special needs of those students with disabilities, in North America, and most countries in Europe and Oceania, the issue of infrastructure and access to education has been largely addressed. To illustrate, a recent study in Maputo (Mozambique) shows that after 10 years of the adoption of a decree-law 53/2008, which ordered the municipality to make infrastructure accessible for people with disabilities, all types of barriers remain in the school's infrastructure. Schools' main doors, classrooms, libraries, playgrounds, and toilets, to name but a few examples, are largely inaccessible for those with limited mobility. The study also shows that those barriers deter families from sending their children to school (MEPT Mozambique, 2018).

Similarly, in India, despite the government's passage of the Rights of Persons with Disability Act in the year 2016, most schools are not equipped or adapted to address the needs of people with disabilities. To illustrate, the National Coalition for Education reported that less than 20 percent of the primary schools have toilets adapted to the needs of children with disabilities, and only 28.6% of secondary schools where children with special needs are enrolled have adapted these facilities. The coalition highlights that there is no provision for separate toilets for girls and boys with disabilities, while that is considered a basic provision for children without disabilities in education policies. The multiple barriers found in Jordan, Mozambique, and India, were also a common trend in countries such as Romania, Nepal, Mongolia, Kyrgyzstan, El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Bangladesh, to name but a few examples.

By contrast, in countries such as Canada, Spain, the UK, and Australia, the issue of making schools adaptable to the needs of people with disabilities has been long receiving policy

attention and funding. It does not mean however that all the conditions for inclusive education have been successfully sorted out in those countries. In these countries, for example, significant challenges remain in terms of students with disabilities receiving opportunities to achieve their maximum academic potential in the education system and opportunities to truly engage in active political participation related to the problems that affect them. In Australia, for example, the Melbourne Declaration on Education Goals for Young Australians[41] stresses that disadvantaged groups, including students with disabilities, must be granted support to access educational opportunities and achieve equitable outcomes. The insufficient distribution of financial resources amongst schools, however, limits the children's and youth's rights to get this support. Moreover, the voice of those with disabilities is often ignored in policy scenarios. Organisations such as Children and Youth with Disability Australia and Disabled People's Organisations claim that there was minimal inclusion of them in consultations to produce Australia's Voluntary National Report on the SDGs in 2018.

While some countries have adopted progressive laws and policy measures to protect the right to education of people with disabilities, there are some significant setbacks in other countries. In the context of regressive education policies during the ongoing administration in Brazil, for example, President Bolsonaro has decreed the closure of the Secretariat of Continuing Education, Literacy, Diversity and Inclusion of the Ministry of Education. This Secretariat was responsible for ensuring inclusive education and the provision of specialised modalities of education which aimed at special education without the inclusion of people with disabilities into regular classes. As the Brazilian Campaign for the Right to Education (2019) stresses, this action threatens the people with disabilities' right to education and is against the National Policy on Special Education and the Brazilian Inclusion Law, which regulates the International Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

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**Box 4: Research looking at how disability and inclusive education are included in education sector plans**

A recent report commissioned by the Global Partnership for Education – GPE (2018) looking at how disability and inclusive education are included in education sector plans, shows that in only 24 of the 51 countries, education sector plans consider the needs of children with disabilities. Nineteen countries are in the process of integrating the needs of people with disabilities in sectorial plans and eight do not make any reference to their educational needs. Moreover, the report shows that 33 out of 51 developing countries under analysis have a national disability law or policy; nine have an inclusive education policy specifically addressing the education of children with disabilities; three have an established policy on inclusive education, and six have drafted one.

Despite in 48 out of 51 countries under analysis there is a formal inclusion of the right to primary education for all children, including those with disabilities, the exceptions are (Burundi, Djibouti, and Papua New Guinea, see GPE 2018: 12), significant challenges remain on the ground to make inclusive education a reality. Indeed, the report highlights the need to improve the government's consideration of issues around disability and inclusion in education sector analysis and sector planning processes. To put this in other words, to 'ensuring that girls and boys with disabilities are not only able to access their right to a quality education in a nurturing environment, but also, through education, become empowered to participate fully in society, and enjoy full realization of their rights and capabilities' (GPE, 2018: vi), inclusive education for people with disabilities should be explicitly considered in government policies and financial resources allocated.

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[41] The Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australian 's full text is available here.

One of the most significant findings of the GPE's (2018: vii) report is that the majority of countries under analysis (41 out of 51) "are implementing a segregated or special education approach for children with disabilities, and are investing in developing specialized facilities to address student needs. Seventeen countries are planning to adopt both special education and integration, sometimes referred to as a the twin-track approach, mainstreaming disability in education as well as investing in actions and services to specifically address the needs of children with disabilities".

There are several barriers to education for people with disabilities identified in the report. Lack of robust data on disability and extensively held negative attitudes toward people with disabilities, and discriminatory attitudes toward children with disabilities were amongst the most commonly mentioned by those who took part in the report. Lack of qualified teachers, infrastructure, learning materials, and strategies on inclusive education, along with lack of financial resources, inter-ministerial coordination and economic barriers were also commonly highlighted (GPE, 2018: vii).

Lack of data on disability is not only a significant barrier for understanding the magnitude of the challenges in terms of education for people with disabilities but also for planning. One of the most concerning evidence provided by GPE's (2018: viii) report is the very little data available in most of the 51 countries under analysis. "Across all countries in the study, there is very limited data on the total number of children with disabilities, the proportion enrolled in school and out-of-school children (OOSC), the type of school children with disabilities are enrolled in (special school, boarding schools, mainstream schools), and the range of provisions available. Additionally, GPE developing country partners use different definitions, classifications, categorizations, and methods of measuring disability, thus limiting the ability to compare data across countries or regions".

Source: Global Partnership for Education. (2018).

*Gender inclusion*

In several parts of the world, especially in rural areas, parents often privilege boys when investing in education. In these contexts, as Boly-Barry (2017: 7) stresses, one of the most significant challenges faced by girls and women to enjoy their right to education is poverty. The government of Bangladesh has acknowledged the significance of this problem and consequently has extended the policy of free of charge education for girls from primary to secondary level in all rural areas. Partly because of the positive impact of this policy, the country achieved gender parity at the primary and secondary level during the Millennium Development Goals era (CAMPE, 2019). The government of Nepal has introduced an equity strategy in education which largely supports and maintains gender parity in school. However, gender inclusion is still a challenge in most marginalized and deprived communities. Girls from this background still face and experience discrimination and different forms of violence in schools (NCE Nepal, 2018).

The gender imbalance adds complexities to the already very concerning barriers children and young people with a refugee background encounter in the enjoyment of their right to education. Girls and women with a refugee background are 2.5 times more likely to be out of school than boys and men (Boly-Barry, 2017). A recent report published by UNHCR (2017) suggests that more than 50% of refugees of school age are unable to attend school. Data based on the 19.9 million refugees under UNHCR protection reveal that only 61% of refugee children attend primary school. The access to education for refugees becomes more critical in further education levels: only 23% of refugee children are enrolled in secondary school and 1% in higher education (UNHCR, 2017). These figures strikingly contrast with the global

average of 92% of children receiving primary education, 84% of children receiving secondary education, and 37% of youth and adults receiving higher education.

The idea of gender inclusive education in this report includes education for straight and gay women and men, including bisexual, transgender, intersex, and those who are questioning their sexuality. With regards to those who do not show conformity to a heteronormative understanding of sexuality, it is important to highlight that they are often subjected to various forms of discrimination, and even violence, in different parts of the world; Brazil being just one example.

According to International Human Rights Law, all human beings, regardless of their sexual orientation and gender identity, are entitled to the right to education. The rise of conservative parties in many contexts of the world, have, however, enhanced barriers for those whose sexual preferences and identities do not conform with heteronormative understandings of family and sexuality. In Brazil, for example, the recently elected government claims for liberal reforms for the economy and conservative habits for families and society. To illustrate further, the "School Without a Party" project, a fundamentalist religious initiative that seeks to prohibit education professionals from discussing issues with students such as democracy, racial equality, gender equality and identity, claim that students are at risk of being indoctrinated politically and ideologically by their teachers and mentors. The project also suggests that by engaging students in those issues, teachers usurp the parent's right to provide moral and religious education for their children.

Following the promotion of the "School Without a Party" project by all levels of government (federal, state, district and municipal), with legislative proposals in progress, the terms "gender equality" and "sexual orientation" have been withdrawn from the text of the National Curricular Common Base, which is the main policy implemented in recent years in the country. Since 2015, the Brazilian Campaign for the Right to Education has made several international denunciations about the "No Party School" and the violations that affect the theme of gender equality in education. The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child; the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) of the Organization of American States (OAS); the National States, through the UN Universal Periodic Review (SPS); and the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights and various special rapporteur;, have already made recommendations against the project and for policies to promote gender equality in Brazil (Brazilian Campaign for the Right to Education, 2019). Even after so many recommendations, the government remains engaged in this discriminatory attitude.

Conservative parties in Brazil have been increasing support for the regulation of home education, under the pretext that children and adolescents are being indoctrinated - through pluralist ideas and teaching of politics and history - and / or threatened in schools - by classes such as sex education. As the Brazilian Campaign for the Right to Education (2019) and CLADE (2019) have highlighted, in a country that still sees high rates of sexual and domestic violence against children and adolescents, where the majority of children and adolescents in urban child labour situations work in a domestic environment, where school meals are one of the only daily food sources for some children and adolescents, and in which there is still a lack of basic sanitation, electricity, and other housing conditions, a policy in favour of 'home education' is a threat to the protection and safety of millions of children and adolescents.

*Lifelong learning perspective in education policies*


A lifelong learning perspective has been formally introduced in SDG4. The effective protection of the right to education for certain groups of age, especially for children under five, youth, and adults, however, represents a significant challenge for reaching SDG4 in many places of the world.


*Early childhood care and development*


There are still countries where early childhood care and development – ECCD -  has not received formal legal protection. This is the case inIndia, where financial resources allocated for this level of education are still very insufficient. Largely because of the lack of funding, over 50% of pre-school children are not enrolled in ECCD and salaries for caregivers are considerably low (NCE India, 2019).

In Spain, ECCD for children under three years old does not have legal protection either[42] and, partly because of this legal gap, more than 60% of children at this age are out of school (Spanish Coalition Global Campaign for Education, 2019)[43]. There are, however, important differences in the enrolment rates of children aged 0-3 years within the country: while in Autonomous Communities such as the Canary Islands and Ceuta, less than 15% of children are enrolled in ECCD, while in the Basque Country, this figure accounts for more than 50%[44]. For children aged 4-6, Spain has made significant progress in the last five years. The enrolment rate for this age group accounts for 97.3%, which is a higher rate than the average for the EU (95.3%)[45].

Some countries with legal protection to ECCD also show significant backwardness. In El Salvador, ECCD only reaches 6% of children aged 0 – 3 years. Despite the very low performance in this area, CSOs in El Salvador highlight that the government is making progress in this area because, by 2014, only 3% of children from this age were enrolled. Moreover, the government has developed a more comprehensive policy for early childhood education. According to the new policy, children aged 0 – 9 years can benefit from early childhood education programmes.

Romania has made significant advances in ECCD. The gross enrolment rate in early childhood education of children aged 3-5 accounts for 81.9%. There is, nonetheless, a significant gap of more than 18 percent between the rural and urban areas 93.9% vs. 75.3% (Ministry of Labour

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[42] The bill for the new education of the 21st Century in Spain includes an additional provision that foresees a plan for the extension of the first cycle of early childhood education (from 0 to 3 years). See http://www.educacionyfp.gob.es/dam/jcr:e32a6f69-d976-4585-a581-727a93b4fe97/proyecto%20de%20ley.pdf

[43] https://elpais.com/sociedad/2018/10/12/actualidad/1539360565_077095.html

[44] Construyendo el futuro. La infancia y la Agenda de desarrollo sostenible 2030 en España. UNICEF Comité español, junio 2017. https://www.unicef.es/publicacion/infancia-y-agenda-desarrollo-sostenible-2030-espana

[45]        Eurostat,        https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=File:Pre-primary_education_2016-01.jpg

and Social Justice, 2019) and a very significant gap between formal enrolment and effective access. Only 51% of children formally enrolled in ECCD are effectively attending school (Eurostat, academic year 2017-2018). Save the Children Romania (2019) suggests that many of the children enrolled in pre-primary education do not regularly attend classes, mostly because of the family's inability to cover associated costs, like school supplies, transport, clothes, and shoes.

Overall, approximately 250 million children under age five living in low and middle-income countries will fail to meet their "developmental potential" because of avoidable deficiencies in early childhood development. While in countries such as Cape Verde one of the main challenges to expand early childhood education is related to the parents' inability to pay tuition fees, in countries such as Guinea-Bissau, the construction of pre-school centres is an overarching barrier. In both countries children with disability are amongst those facing the most exclusion from early childhood education. As Baboo (2019) stresses, early childhood is a critical time for all children, but it can be a particularly critical time for children with disabilities.


*Youth education*

Progress has been made in the inclusion of the youth in the public education agenda in some areas of the world. Nevertheless, the implementation of policies still is a critical issue and in some countries, policies adopted to expand the youth educational and labour opportunities have shown some negative effects.

In terms of implementation, the Australian schooling strategy for the period 2009–2018 adopted a lifelong learning perspective for education but any national strategy has yet to be designed to implement this principle. As a result, initiatives such as the Skills Reconnect Program, which targets young people who face barriers to learning and find it difficult to make a transition into the workplace, lacked an implementation plan and the allocation of financial resources at the federal level (Yarraville Community Centre, 2018). Overall, as ACED (2019) stresses, despite an inclusive discourse targeting all learners, education policies in Australia are primarily focused on funding formal compulsory schooling.

Education for the youth is also a significant challenge in reaching SDG4 in countries such as Spain and Japan, but for very different reasons. Spain is the European country with the highest rate of early school abandonment (17.9% among young people aged 18-24), with a rate much higher than the European average (EU 10.6%)[46]. Furthermore, the percentage of young people aged 20-34 who neither study nor work is 19.6%; a figure which is above the EU average (16.5%)[47]. The financial crisis of 2008 has resulted in the reduction of funding for all levels of education, and many youth who belong to families severely affected by the crisis have opted for low-paid unskilled jobs rather than enrolling in university. In Japan, the Japan NGO Network for Education - JNNE (2019) has raised the issue that the high rate of suicide

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[46] Eurostat, mayo 2019 (datos 2018). https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=File:2018data_Early_school_leavers-02.jpg
[47] Eurostat mayo 2019, https://www.abc.es/economia/abci-mapa-ninis-europa-espana-entre-paises-mas-reducido-tasa-desde-2014-201905311836_noticia.html

amongst the youth in the country suggests that school may not always be safe for students. The youth suicide rate in Japan is the highest amongst G7 countries and the government of Japan has already developed plans for mitigating bullying-related suicides. Those plans, however, are not linked to Japan's SDGs Action Plan.

In terms of possible negative effects of policies addressing educational and job opportunities for the youth, India is a worthwhile example. The country has been implementing skill development programmes to create livelihood opportunities for the youth. However, these skill development courses are skewed towards industry employment only, without much focus on entrepreneurship. Furthermore, the policies of skill development for youth are also leading to negative consequences as they are leading to children dropping out of secondary education to take up skill development. The policy aims to improve the living conditions and opportunities for the youth and their families, but they are also bringing about negative impacts on the youth's right to higher education (NCE India, 2019). In the long term, the risk to these youth of being trapped by poverty is a significant source of concern.

*Tertiary education*

Access to tertiary education is a true privilege in several regions of the world. In Bangladesh, only 5 years of primary education are free of charge in governmental schools and students must pay fees for secondary and tertiary school. As a result, those living in low-income households struggle to achieve secondary school and only a lucky few have the financial capability to attend technical training and universities. The government of Bangladesh has given special emphasis to technical and vocational education, especially for girls whose participation at this level is relatively low, and the Ministry of Education has recently established two divisions named the Secondary and Higher Education Division (SHED) and the Technical and Madrasah Education Division (TMED).

Investment in technical and vocational education is aligned with SDG4 targets, especially Target 4.4, but when it is perceived as the only option for tertiary education, it often raises concerns amongst students, families, and CSOs. In Guatemala, for example, CSOs have questioned the government policy on higher education, especially for students who belong to low-income families, because it is largely focused on developing work skills. As in the case of India, which was mentioned in the previous section, this aspect raises concerns over the real possibilities of low-income families of moving out of poverty and their possibility of social mobility. Indeed, it is worth highlighting that the youth's lack of opportunities for social mobility can be one of the critical motivations for many children, youth, and young adults migrating across borders, very often in perilous journeys, to reach the United States (*Colectivo de Educación para todas y todos,* Guatemala, 2019).

Tuition fees are a major challenge to achieve SDG4 in many regions of the world, including wealthy nations. The Danish Education Coalition (2019) has stressed how while the wide majority of local students can attend tuition-free universities, migrant students from non-EU/EEA countries still need to pay very high tuition fees. This includes students with refugee backgrounds who have temporary protection status and therefore are not entitled to free

education[48]. Furthermore, students from non-EU/EEA countries encounter many legal barriers to remaining in the country after graduation, forcing many of them to return to their countries after living in Denmark for an extended period of time.

Education pathways are still highly gendered in most countries, including European countries with a high percentage of women attending university. In Denmark, women have much higher enrolment rates in health-related programmes (71%), humanities (67%) and arts (66%) while men still have much higher enrolment rates in technical sciences (67 %)[49]. In Spain, only 20% of students enrolled in engineering are women.

Gender inequalities in the distribution of academic positions are still an issue across the world. In Denmark, while 56% of students at universities are women, the majority of positions such as associate professor or professor are occupied by men. Only 31% of lecturers are women, and this percentage drops to only 18% when considering professors (Danmarks Statistik and the think tank Perspektiv, 2019, quoted by Danish Education Coalition, 2019). In Spain, there are significantly more women with academic titles than men (38.4% vs. 33% amongst those aged 25-64,) but women only take 21% of academic positions in universities. Only 8 out of 100 deans in public universities in Spain are women (Spanish Coalition Global Campaign for Education, 2019: 3). Data for other OECD countries shows similar trends. On average, there are considerably more men teaching at a higher level (OECD, 2018).

The data provided for Denmark illustrate the tendency in Europe and most OECD countries. On average women are achieving better educational attainment, but still have worse employment outcomes and salaries. 'On average across OECD countries, 80% of tertiary-educated young women are employed, compared with 89% of young men with the same education […] Tertiary-educated women also earn 26% less than tertiary-educated men, on average across OECD countries' (OECD, 2018: 1).

The Danish Education Coalition (2019) has stressed how in recent years, levels of stress among students have reached concerning levels. Structural governmental reforms related to students' performance have increased the pressure that students experience at universities. A recent survey conducted by the Ministry of Higher Education among 100,000 students shows that nearly 1 out of 5 students (18.2%) who answered the survey experienced strong stress symptoms in connection with their daily study life[50].

The study progress reform, which does not allow students to take flexible learning paths, is not only increasing pressure among higher education students in Denmark but also increasing the drop-out rates of vulnerable students (Danish Education Coalition, 2019). Vulnerable students include youth with disabilities (physical and mental), students who experience loss of family, or those who are dyslexic or have other issues which act as a barrier to study full time. A report made by the Danish Evaluation Institute shows that twice as many students

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[48] https://studentrefugees.dk/en/status-and-possibilities/refugee/fees-4/, retrieved on June 11 2019.
[49] https://ufm.dk/uddannelse/statistik-og-analyser/sogning-og-optag-pa-videregaende-uddannelser/2018/notat-13-kon.pdf, retrieved on June 11 2019.
[50]https://ufm.dk/aktuelt/pressemeddelelser/2019/filer/notat-om-stress-og-trivsel-i-uddannelseszoom.pdf Retrieved on June 11 2019.

with very bad health drop out during their first year of studies than students with good mental health (29% compared to 15%).

*Education for the elderly*

Designing and implementing a lifelong learning perspective in education, especially for the elderly, seems to be perceived as a luxury in contexts where a significant percentage of children and youth are out of school. In Afghanistan, for example, the National Education Strategic Plan 2017-2021 does not include a strategy to secure a lifelong learning approach. Although the illiteracy rate for those over 65 years reached 79.7% in 2011 (UIS UNESCO, Afghanistan), literacy programs are still scarce and receive very little funding (ANEC, 2019). In India, the illiteracy rate for people over 65 years of age accounts for 58.4% in 2011 with huge differences between male and female rates: 43% and 73%, respectively, (UIS UNESCO, India) and the design and implementation of policies to combat this do not correspond with the magnitude of the problem (NCE India, 2019). In Bangladesh, where the illiteracy rate accounted for 60.53% in 2017 (49% for men and 73% for women), there was no adult literacy programme for more than a decade (UIS UNESCO, Bangladesh) and only recently the government has launched a new literacy programme (CAMPE, 2019). Although a programme to fight against illiteracy has been designed for the government, the illiteracy rate remains considerably high at 49.3% for 2014 (UIS UNESCO, Guatemala). CSOs have shown concern for the low investment in education for adults and the low impact of online education in a country where only 16% of the population has internet installed in their houses (*Colectivo de Educación para todas y todos Guatemala*, 2019).

It is worth mentioning countries that have made significant progress to reduce illiteracy rates in the last 20 years have recently adopted regressive measures on this matter. In Brazil, CSOs have shown concern about the dismantling of illiteracy programmes all around the country. The Brazilian Campaign for the Right to Education (2019) has stressed how the closure of illiteracy programs is particularly affecting the North Eastern region of the country where illiteracy rates are higher. The illiteracy rate for Brazil still is considerably high (26% by 2015), especially when compared with countries from the same region such as Cuba (1%) or Argentina (2%).

*People living in rural and remote areas*

Children, young people, and adults living in rural and remote areas consistently experience greater obstacles to ensure their right to education. Even when children and young people are able to access school in these areas, classes repeatedly lack the continuity needed to secure high-quality education. As ACED (2019) highlights, education outcomes in Australia are less favourable for students from low socio-economic background (Australian Education Union, 2016) and those living in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders (Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, 2019).

The United Nations (2018) estimates that over 617 million children and adolescents of primary and lower secondary school age worldwide are not achieving a minimum proficiency

in reading and mathematics. UNESCO (2016a) reports that children and young people living in rural areas consistently score lower than their peers living in urban settings.

Several obstacles need to be removed to guarantee free, inclusive quality public education for all, including children, young people, and adults at all academic levels, living in rural and remote areas. In El Salvador, the government has implemented a programme called 'School Package'. It brings students uniforms, school supplies, and food. It seems the programme has shown some positive impact in the reduction of the dropout rate in rural areas (RESALDE, 2019). It seems that this package is complementing the financial efforts made by families living in rural and remote areas to send their children to school. As the National Campaign for Education - NCE Nepal (2019) stresses, sending children to school in low income regions is a privilege for many people. "The groups of people living below the poverty line are still struggling to solve their hand to mouth problem and thus education is not a priority agenda for them. The opportunity cost of education is very high for them and thus their access to education is a significant challenge for the nation in achieving SDG4" (NCE Nepal, 2019; 2).

*Class, ethnicity and religion*

Children and youth are often left behind by school systems because of their ethnic belonging, class, and among other aspects, religion. The cases of Bangladesh, Romania, and India as explained below provide just three of the many examples of exclusion from education faced by minority ethnic groups.

To begin with, equal access and opportunities in education for ethnic minority groups remain a considerable challenge in most countries with ethnic diversity. Bangladesh has a large number of students belonging to ethnic communities who are still out of the education system. As CAMPE (2017) reported, some of them have simply dropped out because there were no education opportunities in their mother tongue. In January 2017, the government developed textbooks for indigenous children in five languages (Chakma, Garo, Marma, Sadri, and Tripura) at the pre-primary level. About 50,000 textbooks were printed and distributed among approximately 25,000 indigenous students. However, many indigenous children have yet to receive textbooks in their mother-tongue and teachers with expertise in those languages are yet to be employed.

Roma children continue encountering several obstacles to enjoy their right to education within and beyond Romanian borders. In some European countries, they are either put together in special classes designed for disadvantaged children or placed in "separate facilities next to regular school premises" (UNESCO, 2018:5). As the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights (2017: 8) stresses, in some European countries "the chances of Roma children being enrolled in a special school have been 27 times higher than for non-Roma children". Segregation for Roma children also occurs within their country of origin. It often starts from the very first stages of their education. The general participation rate in pre-primary education (for children between 4 and the compulsory school age) reaches 88%, but for children belonging to Roma minority, the rate only accounts 38% (European Union Agency

for Fundamental Rights, 2018). The gap between Roma children and the general population in terms of participation in education can be observed at all academic levels. For the segment of the school-aged population, participation in compulsory education reaches 89% for the general population and only 78% for Roma children. Furthermore, segregation persists in the Romanian education system, with 10% of Roma children attending classes in schools where all classmates are Roma.

Multiple forms of discrimination can overlap in a single context. The Indian National Coalition for Education – NCE-India (2019) highlights that although the country has established a coordinating agency for SDGs, discrimination and exclusion within the society is a significant barrier to achieve SDG4. Along with being the country with the largest number of children out of school in the world (statistics range between nearly four million and 30 million children out of school), the dropout rate has been increasing in recent years, especially for the most marginalised groups in society, including children from the Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, and religious minorities. According to the data estimated by the District Information System in India – DISE, the total dropout rate for marginalised children at the Elementary and the Secondary education levels are as follows: Scheduled Castes children: 30.56%; Scheduled Tribes children: 35.85%; Other Backward Classes children: 25.69%; and Muslim children: 25.12%. The Indian NCE stresses that the caste/religion/ethnicity and gender-based discrimination in schools is leading to the drop-out of children from historically marginalised groups. Children with disabilities face both social and systemic discrimination leading to exclusion.

5.3. Transformative education

Transformative education is a concept which has gained popularity in the education policy arena. Murray (2019), for example, uses the notion of gender transformative education to largely refer to the need of transforming the root causes of gender inequalities in education. Similarly, Simms (2019) introduces the notion of gender transformative education to highlight the differences between gender sensitive approaches and transformative gender approaches. While the first are only aware of gender inequalities and take them into consideration when planning education policies (they do not aim to transform gender inequalities); the second approach explicitly aims to transform unequal gender power relations. Thus, the transformative gender approaches go beyond improving the condition of women and girls to improve their position in the society.

The notion of transformative education is used here as an alternative framework for understanding the purposes of education and in particular the ways education quality is conceptualised and assessed. As GCE (2019) stresses, the concept of transformative education primarily refers to the emancipatory notion of change. Envisioned as a catalyst for change, education aims to challenge unfair social structures such as structural inequalities based on gender, ethnicity, class, or origin, to name but a few; and, at the same time, to promote the access to different forms of knowledge as a way to expand individual and collective freedoms, opportunities to enjoy their human rights and contribute to a democratic and fairer society. The notion of transformative education is also inspired by the SDG4, especially SDG 4.7., in relation to the role of education promoting sustainable development

practices, global citizenship and the respect and promotion of human rights within and beyond education systems (GCE, 2019:20).

In short, the concept of transformative education is used here to understand whether and how governments are designing and implementing education policies that, rather than reducing the value of education to an instrument for economic development, emphasize the centrality of education for expanding individuals' capabilities and freedoms (Sen, 2000). As CESCR (1999: paragraph 1) stresses "increasingly, education is recognized as one of the best financial investments States can make. But the importance of education is not just practical: a well-educated, enlightened and active mind, able to wander freely and widely, is one of the joys and rewards of human existence".

The notion of transformative education has several implications for education policies. It shifts attention from solely quality assessments and the interplay between education and growth to a variety of topics that matter in terms of content of education and how the teaching-learning process takes place. Special attention is given therefore to discussing the extent to which governments are promoting sustainable development practices through education and whether and how education is promoting global citizenship and the respect and promotion of human rights within and beyond education systems, as established in target 4.7.

Without necessarily using the concept of transformative education, the policy agenda in some countries contain strategies to bring about positive change through education. In Australia, for example, goals 1 and 2 of the education strategy for all young Australians envisaged in the Melbourne Declaration seem to be aligned with the notion of transformative education. According to goal 1, Australian schooling promotes equity and excellence, and according to goal 2, all young Australians become successful learners, confident and creative individuals, and active and informed citizens. However, as (ACED, 2019) suggests, critics of the system note that Australian school students are frequently tested in National Assessment Program Literacy and Numeracy and too many schools focus on boosting test scores to the detriment of a transformative, quality education.

There are significant challenges to making the idea of transformative education meaningful on the ground. In Madagascar, for example, the National Coalition for Education CONAMEPT (2019) suggests that the country's education system is currently not compatible with the idea of transformative education because the military budget is prioritised over the education budget. Furthermore, education is often politicised and used as propaganda, and the regional needs, especially in rural areas, are not purposefully considered in education planning. In Guatemala, CSOs have drawn attention to how the rise of conservative views on education policies leaves little room for positively transforming the education system. Constitutional reforms related to the protection of the indigenous communities' rights, as well as legal initiatives such as a gender law and the protection of the rights of people with diverse sexual orientation and gender identity have been consistently rejected by conservative sectors of society (Colectivo de Educación para todas y todos, Guatemala, 2019).

*Students performance in standardised tests*

As explained in section 2, SDG target 4.1 not only expands the focus on universal access to primary education to include secondary education. It also explicitly highlights the importance of education to people achieving relevant and effective learning outcomes. Although the student's performance in international standardised tests should be considered neither a sufficient nor the only way to assess the quality of education, it is worth mentioning here that the OECD Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) provides a useful way to compare students' learning outcomes across countries. By setting PISA Level 2 as the "minimum proficiency level", as suggested by OECD (2018a), we can unveil significant difference in students' performance in mathematics and reading across countries. For example, less than 30% of 15-year-old students achieve at least PISA Level 2 in mathematics in Brazil (28%) and Indonesia (29%) while in most European countries (with the exception of Portugal) over 70% of students achieve this level (OECDa, 2018: 33).

Rather than improving, in some countries, students' performance is declining. In Bangladesh, for example, students' performance has declined since 2011. In that year, 68% and 50% students enrolled in third grade performed at their levels or above on Bangla and mathematics. In 2015, the percentage of students reaching these targets only accounted for 65% and 41%, respectively. Students' performance was even lower for those enrolled in grade five. In 2011, 25% and 32% of students performed at their levels or above on Bangla and mathematics and in 2015, this percentage dropped to 23% and 10% (CAMPE, 2019).

It seems that there is an unstated assumption that by testing students, education quality improves. Many countries regularly invest in applying standardised tests, but then, they do not necessarily implement policies to improve the conditions in which students learn. In Afghanistan, for example, the government has adopted quantitative indicators to assess quality but has not allocated financial resources for hiring professional teachers and providing technical training to those already hired. Furthermore, CSOs have stressed that the country's curriculum is outdated and does not respond to what is needed to enhance the student's ability to learn. CSOs have also called into attention that although the government provides 12 years of primary and secondary free education to all citizens, a significant percentage of the population is not satisfied with the quality of education. The Afghanistan National Education Coalition (2019) has noted that the government's decision to spend public funding for private education indirectly affects the quality of public education. It reduces the investment in training teachers and improving the conditions in which children with very low income learn.

Although policies to address quality problems detected through standardised tests are not always implemented, performing badly in such tests shapes people's opportunities for higher education. In El Salvador, for example, RESALDE (2019) reported that those who do not perform well at standardised tests struggle to find a place in a university. This is an overarching concern for families with little income considering that those tests could shape their children and youth's opportunities to access to the only public university available in the country.

Save the Children Romania (2019) reported that the education system often fails to compensate for socio-economic disadvantage and perpetuates inequality. Parents' socio-economic status greatly affects school outcomes. Latest PISA results indicate that low

performance among students from the most disadvantaged quarter is almost three times higher than students in the most advantaged quarter. Moreover, the transition to upper secondary education is very challenging for students from vulnerable groups and for students living in rural areas. Indeed, most high schools and professional schools are located in urban areas and the financial costs of studying in these areas and of commuting, represent a significant financial burden for low-income families and are not entirely covered by the state.

Light for the World (2019) suggests that the so-called learning crisis, which means that a significant percentage of students do not acquire basic reading and numeracy skills or drop out from school early, is disproportionately affecting children with disabilities. For instance, gaps in primary school completion between children with and without disabilities has increased to 17.6 points for boys and 15.4 points for girls in recent years and the same trend can be observed in secondary school completion (Mala and Wodon, 2017: 3).

The number of students per class also matters for students' performance. In low-income countries, the student-teacher ratio remains considerably high (40:1) as compared to the average in high-income countries (14:1), (UNESCO, 2017). In Bangladesh, the student-teacher ratio is extremely high and CSOs have drawn attention to its possible negative impacts on quality. Indeed, 77.4% of the schools are running on double shift and the average teaching-learning hours per year are less than half of the international average (CAMPE, 2019). In India, the norm of pupil-teacher ratio to be 30:1 at primary level and 35:1 at upper primary level is being fulfilled at national level. However, in states like Bihar and Uttar Pradesh, the student-teacher ratio is as high as 1:60 and a recent assessment in Assam shows that more than 70 percent of schools do not have the prescribed number of teachers. Data also reveals that there are 85,743 single teachers' schools in the country which is against the local norms (NCE India, 2019). Along with the insufficient number of teachers in some regions of the country, a recent study shows that on average, government school teachers in the country spend only 19.1% of their working hours teaching. The remaining hours are devoted to election duties, support polio campaigns and maintaining mid-day meal registers. The startling findings were released after a study conducted in select states by the National University of Education Planning and Administration (NUEPA), an autonomous body under the Ministry of Human Resource Development[51].

*Teachers*

As the Australian Education Union (2016) stresses, quality education largely relies on quality teachers. Securing quality teachers demands the design and implementation of policies and the investment of financial resources. Specifically, policies are needed to encourage high performing graduates to enter teaching, improve initial teacher education and to address career dissatisfaction, including salaries, professional autonomy, and secure employment, among other factors (ACED, 2019a).

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[51]     https://data.gov.in/catalog/involvement-teachers-non-teaching-activities-and-motivation-levels-based-sample-survey Accessed on June 22 2019

In Bangladesh, quality remains one of the biggest challenges to secure high-quality education for all. However, as CAMPE (2019) highlights, there are no incentives to attract the most talented students into the teaching profession. A person recruited as teacher assistant often retires working in the same position. There are over 235,000 teachers working in non-government secondary schools but 41,203 (18%) do not receive government support namely Monthly Payment Order. In the context of Bangladesh, this payment represents mostly the basic salary and token money for housing and medical allowance (BANBEIS, 2018). In Jordan, part of the very low performance of primary and secondary students in international standardised tests is associated with low qualification of teachers and lack of training. The examination results in secondary schools show that no student has passed in one-third of the schools in the Kingdom (Ministry of Education 2016. Jordan 2025. Evaluation of education). Policies to improve the quality of teachers, training and living conditions remain insufficient. Both, Jordan and Bangladesh seem urgently need to develop a comprehensive policy for hiring and training teachers and to align this policy with UNESCO-ILO recommendations on the teaching profession. This policy will not only need competitive salaries but social recognition for the vital role teachers play in these societies. More time is needed to allow teachers to prepare lessons and to support students with special needs.

Low and extremely low salaries for teachers are an overarching barrier to achieving SDG4. In countries such as Cape Verde, Madagascar, and El Salvador, teachers' salaries are considerably low in relation to both the cost of living within the country and the average salary in other professions. In Madagascar, for example, the National Coalition for Education reported monthly salaries below US$10. In El Salvador, teachers often work double shifts to be able to afford their family's living expenses. Another significant source of concern amongst teachers in this country, is that their retirement salary is often less than US$210, which is less than the minimum legal salary and often just a third of the already low monthly salary that a teacher can reach after working 20 or 30 years in the education sector. This aspect should be a priority for the whole education system. As RESALDE (2019) stresses, the teacher's low retirement rate makes difficult to recruit new teachers. The lack of intergenerational replacement also makes it difficult to bring new ideas and new teaching techniques to the country's education system.

Along with low salaries, teachers are paid differently depending on the type of contract. In India, for example, teachers on temporary contracts are paid far less than teachers in permanent positions. In states such as Jharkhand and Uttar Pradesh, the difference is almost 5 to 1 (NCE India, 2019). While those employed by temporal contracts can earn the equivalent of US$100 monthly, those with permanent contracts may earn US$ 550[52].

There is also a strong correlation between funding and quality which deserves policy attention. In India, for example, low public funds for teacher's education have brought about significant negative impacts on quality. Funds for the teacher training component declined by 87% over six years, which is an indicator of its low priority in education policy. Indeed, less than 10% of teachers training colleges in India are publicly funded and privatisation of teachers training institutes has become the ordinary practice. NCE India (2019) stresses that

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[52]Figures are calculated based on the statistics reported by Teachers Associations and Officials from States and published at https://scroll.in/article/846589/in-uttar-pradeshs-botched-effort-at-regularising-contract-teachers-a-lesson-for-other-states. Retrieved on June 22 2019.

more than 90 percent of teachers training colleges are privatised and the monitoring systems for the quality of education in these institutions are very weak. The performance of training college graduates and diploma-holders in the central and state teacher eligibility tests has been abysmal which confirms the allegations of sub-standard private teachers training colleges. Only 17% and 15 % of applicants passed the Central Teachers Eligibility Test for primary and middle schools respectively, in 2018. Similar problems can be found in Romania. The European Commission (2019) reports that teachers' ability to apply a learner-centred approach is sufficiently developed. Initial teacher education insufficiently focuses on challenges in the classroom, including supporting children with learning difficulties or children at risk of dropping out. Overall, what reports provided by coalitions from all corners of the world, especially in low- and middle-income countries show, is that teachers do not get the required training and recognition they deserve. However, they have the responsibility to address all possible problems and students' needs in a classroom and then, be creative enough for paying their bills, feeding themselves and their families with very little income.

*Education for Sustainable Development*

A transformative education system should give priority to education for sustainable development. Romania has been making significant progress on this matter in recent years. The country has introduced policies that aim at supporting children to develop social skills and opportunities for democratic citizenship. At the beginning of 2017, The Ministry of Education approved the curriculum for Social Education as part of the compulsory curriculum for lower secondary education. The Social Education has been introduced gradually: starting with the school year 2017-2018 when all pupils in the 5th grade started to study "Critical thinking and the rights of the child", continuing in the 2018-2019 school year with the introduction of "Intercultural Education" for pupils in the 6th grade. It is expected that in the academic year 2019-2020 students in grade 7 enrol in "Education for democratic citizenship" and children at grade 8th engage in "Economical and financial education" in the academic year 2021-2022[53].

In countries such as Spain and Korea, CSOs have been pushing their governments to prioritise education on sustainable development in the education system. With the notable exception of education on climate change, which is explicitly included in current curricula of Compulsory Secondary Education (ESO) and vocational training, education for promoting sustainable development practices, global citizenship and human rights has been losing space in Spanish curricula. Currently, the discussion of these cross-cutting issues is largely at the discretion of the teaching staff, whose initial and ongoing training has not included these topics so far. To overcome this gap, the current government expressed its political commitment to promote education for sustainable development as a fundamental pillar to reach the goal 4.7 in the year 2025. The government political will is also reflected in the Bill for the New Education of the XXI Century, by virtue of which education for global citizenship would materialise in a subject of "Education in Civic and Ethical Values", which would be mandatory in at least one of the elementary courses and in at least one of the secondary ones, although not in the baccalaureate.

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[53] Romanian National Institute for Education Sciences, http://programe.ise.ro/Portals/1/Curriculum/2017-progr/28-Educatie%20sociala.pdf

While welcoming this political commitment, the Spanish Coalition Global Campaign for Education (2019) has drawn attention to the lack of financial resources allocated for the Spanish government to achieve SDG4.7. "The financial commitment is negligible: the percentage of resources dedicated to education for development has been reduced significantly since 2010, when more than 60 million euros were invested, up to less than 30 million euros in 2016, a figure that represents only 1.5% of the total Official Development Assistance".

As box 5 explains, the Civil Alliance for Social Transformation through Education (CIATE Korea, 2019) is also pushing its government to show more commitment on education for sustainable development.

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**Box 5: Placing SDG 4.7 at the heart of education for the Sustainable Development Goals**

The Civil Alliance for Social Transformation through Education (CIATE Korea) provides a comprehensive analysis of critical challenges faced by Korea to make progress on SDG 4.7. Specifically, the report discusses the progress and remaining challenges for the Korean society to implement peace education, democratic citizenship education, and global citizenship education. The report also discusses the interlinks between education equality, equity, and gender. This box quotes some of the key aspects addressed in the report, especially those who are relevant for supporting the CIATE Korea's claim of placing SDG 4.7., at the heart of Korea's education policy and practice.

**Education and Peace**

Following the 2018 inter-Korean summit, regional offices of Education are adopting peace education policies. CIATE Korea has raised concern for the lack of conceptual discussion amongst regional offices of what peace education means. In some regions, peace education means education for reunification while in others means education on human rights or education for global citizenship.

Furthermore, the report raises concern about how education for peace and democratic citizenship can be effectively implemented in the Korean education system given that it promotes competition among students and "has naturally accepted that student's rights and freedoms are suppressed or infringed until they pass the most important stage in their life, university entrance exam" (CIATE Korea, 2019: 4).

**Democratic Citizenship Education - DEC**

CIATE Korea (2019:18) conceptualises DEC as the education which aims to support individuals' opportunities to "(i) obtaining the fundamental knowledge to live the democratic society as a citizen; (ii) cultivating the capacity to live as a responsible citizen; (iii) respecting the rights of others as accountable democratic global citizen". Departing from this definition, CIATE Korea highlights that CSOs in the country have been struggling for over 30 years for including DEC as a core value of the Korean's education system. CSOs have proposed six Democratic Citizenship Education Support Bills between 1997 and 2015 but all of them have been abolished by the Standing Committee of the National Assembly.

In 2018, however, the Ministry of Education established a Citizenship Education Division and announced a Master Plan for Vitalizing Democratic Citizenship Education in schools. The Ministry of the Interior and Safety has been also working in establishing consensus for DEC beyond the school system.

CIATE Korea (2019) welcomes the government acknowledgement of the CSOs' efforts for introducing DEC in the Korean education system during the last 30 years and sees this as an opportunity for reaching social consensus on the concept of DEC and enacting a new Democratic Citizenship Education Support Bill.

**Global Citizenship Education**

In this utterly compelling part of the report CIATE Korea calls into attention of how, depending on their country of origin and ethnicity, refugees and migrants can be either welcome or discriminated against by their peers. What is call *scene 2* in the report shows how, according to the National Human Rights Commission, 45.5% of the North Korean refugees alleged to be discriminated against just for being from North Korea. *Scene 3* illustrates how a 14-old-years boy of multicultural background was discriminated against because of his dark skin. Fellow students 'cut their classmate's hair and stabbed his head with needles. This is just an example of the multiple forms of abuse children with multicultural background may face in Korean schools. A National Survey on Multicultural Families in 2018 reveals that from 57% to 80% of children with multicultural background struggle to adapt to school "because they did not get along well with their friends" (CIATE Korea, 2019: 23). *Scene 1* is kept to close this summary of the report because it illustrates how despite discriminatory attitudes against migrants and refugees is a common trend in contemporary societies, there is still hope. In this particular case, a third-year middle school student petitioned refugee status for his Iranian classmate. The claim raises the country's authority's awareness that if the child's right for asylum is denied, his personal integrity will be at risk because the Iranian government may punish him for changing his faith.

The report concludes by recommending to the Korean government to effectively incorporate SDG4.7., into the national education system and more specifically, to place peace education, democratic citizenship education, gender equality, and global citizenship education as core values of the country's education policy and practice.

Source: Civil Alliance for Social Transformation through Education - CIATE Korea (2019)

*Opportunities for social activism in the context of education[54]*

Spaces for social activism and advocacy to promote the right to education are central to the very meaning of positive transformative education. States should not only respect and protect civil society's right to contribute to the design, implementation and follow up of education policies, but also open and enhance democratic spaces for CSOs to contest and challenge education policies.

Civil society engagement with SDGs considerably varies between countries and regions. There are cases in which governmental institutions and CSOs work hand in hand to design strategies to reach SDG4. Bangladesh is a significant example of collaborative partnership between government and CSOs.

**Box 6. Bangladesh: CSOs and government working together to achieve SDG4**

In Bangladesh, non-state actors, particularly NGOs and civil society, are playing a significant role in fostering the progress in implementing SDGs. CAMPE, a civil society platform formed by the education activists in 1990 act as the national coalition for education in Bangladesh and engaged with the government, development partners and civil society actors including the teacher's associations to advocate for the right to education and pro-poor policy decisions focused on quality, equity and financing education. CAMPE represents the civil society in different working groups and technical committees formed by the government. Currently, CAMPE is representing the civil society in more than 30 committees, taskforce, technical team, and an advisory committee formed by the government.

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[54] I am grateful to Camilla Crosso and Giovanna Mode, from CLADE, who suggested to include a section on opportunities for social activism in the context of education in the GCE Spotlight Report for the HLPF 2019.

> CAMPE has contributed to developing the SDG4 Strategic Framework for Bangladesh under the leadership of the Ministry of Education and Ministry of Primary and Mass Education. The core process has been conducted jointly by BNCU, CAMPE and UNESCO Dhaka office. CAMPE has organised a series of consultation at the national and sub-national level and contributed to the identification of strategies to implement SDG4.
>
> Governmental institutions value the citizen-led initiatives to implement SDG4 and often take part in consultations organized by CSOs e.g. national coalition, Citizen's Platform for SDGs, and youth-led organizations. CAMPE, as a national coalition for Education, coordinates the Citizens Platforms for SDG4. There is diversity in the membership of the Citizens Platform that covers all 17 goals and engaged in service delivery, identifying innovative solutions, reaching the outreach and performing watchdog role, among others.
>
> The collaborative work between government and CSOs however still ad-hoc in nature and yet to be institutionalized at different levels to secure a long-term productive relationship.
>
> Source: Campaign for Popular Education (CAMPE), 2019.

In El Salvador, a national council on education was established by the government in 2014 and it is perceived by some CSOs as the first space in the country where civil society's views and suggestions to promote the right to education are heard by representatives of the Ministry of Education. In Australia CSOs are able to advocate publicly and have reasonable access to the Department of Education and Training and to politicians. However, there was limited consultation on Australia's 2018 VNR on the SDGs and a lack of resources for CSOs limits what they can achieve in implementation of the goals. ACED (2019) recommended that the Australian Governmentestablish a multi-sectoral reference committee that includes CSOs and the Government in a meaningful partnership.

Despite these largely positive engagements between governments and CSOs towards achieving SDG4, which were also mentioned in the reports of Spain, and Korea, most coalitions who provided information for this report highlighted that students, families, and civil society as a whole are dealing with significant challenges to promote and defend the right to education in several regions of the world. Even in countries where CSOs are able to advocate publicly and have reasonable access to departments or ministries of education such as Japan or Denmark, there is limited consultation of CSOs for the design of education policies and the implementation of SDG4.

South Asian and Latin American coalitions, in particular, highlighted that democratic spaces for productive engagement with governments towards SDGs are either a mere formality or have been reduced in recent years. In Afghanistan, the government established formal dialogue spaces for policymakers and CSOs. In practice, however, the government does not practically engage CSOs in strategic planning, implementation and monitoring. In India, the government claims to have undertaken various national and state level consultations with CSOs for the design of indicators and the VNR process. However, those processes were largely a formality and the contributions made by CSOs were either overlooked or deleted from official documents. NCE India (2019: 6) reported that "initially the CSOs were supposed to write a chapter and there was a task team for VNR. Later, the CSOs were told that instead of a chapter, only case studies will be taken from them, which too was later dropped. It was conveyed that in the VNR, the role of CSOs will be 'acknowledged' and the names of the task team CSOs other organisations would be mentioned. Finally, even the names of the CSOs

were dropped from the VNR. No feedback on the VNR was sought from the CSOs". Tajikistan, Nepal, Kyrgyzstan, and Pakistan, also mentioned that CSOs were formally included in discussions towards SDGs but their ideas and suggestions were practically ignored.

More importantly, in some countries, the CSOs' right to organise themselves and take part in demonstrations to promote the right to education is being limited and social protests are increasingly criminalised. In Madagascar, the National Coalition for Education (2019) reported that "as a result of the politicisation of education within the country, CSOs have no freedom to demonstrate. The report states that social activists have to face police and tear gas in demonstrations, even within institutions, and also face the risk of being illegally imprisoned and prosecuted". In Guatemala, the national coalition for education denounced that the state has been increasingly criminalising social protest. In the field of education, specifically, the government put restrictions on teachers and students' mobilization (*Colectivo de Educación para todas y todos,* 2019). Although CSOs have formal representation in the Education National Council, decisions adopted in this instance have no legal implications for the Ministry of Education. In Brazil, as box 7, exemplifies, the CSOs' right to engage in education policies appear to be under threat.

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**Box 7: Brazil: Civil Society Participation Under Threat**

Since the impeachment of Dilma Rousseff in 2016, the guidelines that enable popular participation in the formulation and monitoring of public policies have been weakened and, with them, we have moved away from complying with SDG16.

The Ministry of Education dismantled the National Education Forum (FNE) subjecting it to its monocratic decision regarding the composition of the forum without any independence and legitimacy as a space for deliberation. Such action has represented a dismantling of the participatory and social control model for the monitoring and evaluation of the National Education Plan (PNE).

With Presidential Decree No. 9,759 / 2019, which extinguishes all the collegiate bodies created by decree, this situation has worsened. The decree threatens the revocation of 70 instances and public policies built with popular participation. The most affected areas are: human rights, racial equality, indigenous, rural, cities, LGBTs and the environment.

In this context, the authoritarian horizon opened by the decree is alarming for society: a government that does not have internal counterweights, without the active participation of the entities and voices of society, can feel fully authorized to manage the public machine in a highly discretionary fashion.

Source: Brazilian Campaign for the Right to Education (2019)

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### 5.4. Education in emergency contexts

The term 'people living in emergency situations' is used here to denote people who are affected by conflict and climate change-related disasters. Conflict and climate change-related emergencies leave millions of children and youth out of school. In the context of conflict, the attack, destruction or occupation of school facilities by armed forces disrupt the children and youth's opportunities to attend school and their right to education. In the context of climate change-related disasters, extreme temperatures, landslides, cyclones,

floods and storms, among other natural disasters have a negative impact on their right to education.

Conflict and climate change-related emergencies affect people who move and people who stay put either by choice or because they find themselves confined by conflict, violence and/or climate change-related emergencies. For those who stay, one of the critical challenges is to go back to schools when infrastructure is either at risk of causing harm to students or totally destroyed. The reconstruction of school infrastructure after an earthquake, for example, like in Nepal or Chile, , may take years.

For those who move, to survive the journey is indeed the first challenge. People around the world have been utterly distressed by the images of millions of people escaping conflict in Syria and North Africa who have lost their lives in the Mediterranean. Alan, the 3 years old Syrian boy who was found drowned on Bodrum (Turkey) on 2015 and Oscar, a Salvadoran migrants and his 2 years old daughter Valeria, who were found also drowned last June in the Rio Bravo in the Mexican-USA border are just two well-known examples of how perilous those journeys are. For those who are lucky enough to reach their destination alive, it is just the beginning of the journey in terms of going back to school, sometimes in a different culture and language and often additional challenges for those who have escaped violence.

Amongst those who move, displaced persons require special attention in education policies. The term 'displaced persons' denotes here people who move largely against their will for causes directly or indirectly related to conflict, violence and climate change. They are respectively labelled as 'conflict-induced displaced people' and 'climate change-induced displaced people'. The term 'displaced people' includes those who move within and across national borders. According to the international law, those who move within national borders are labelled as 'internally displaced people' and those who migrate across national borders as 'refugees'[55]. According to IDMC (2018) 30,6 million new displacements took place in 2017, which equivalent to 80,000 people displaced every day. By 2017, UNHCR estimates in 22.5 million the number of refugees, 40.3 million the number of internally displaced people and 2.8 million the number of asylum seekers. Only in 2017 the number of new internal displacements associated with conflict and violence accounted for 11.8 million, being Syria, Democratic Republic of Congo, Iraq, South Sudan and Ethiopia the countries most affected (IDMC, 2018). In the same year, China, the Philippines, Cuba, USA, and India ranked top five among those affected by climate change disasters with nearly 12 million people affected.

The social, political, cultural and financial implications of including displaced people within their host societies' education systems and the adaptations that those systems need to pursue to respond to the physical and psychological needs of displaced people are often overlooked or underestimated in education policies and planning at international and local levels. Most modern states are aware of the international obligation of securing the right to education for all human beings, including children, youth and adults escaping climate-change and conflict-induced disasters. Only few of them, however, have developed comprehensive frameworks to secure the access to high quality education for them and secure the necessary funding.

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[55] The International Organization for Migration (2017) uses the category of 'environmental migrants' to refer to those who move in the context of disasters, climate change and other environmental factors.

*Migrants and displaced people searching for education opportunities*

Migrants and displaced people, including internally displaced people, asylum seekers and refugees, are often excluded from education or enrolled in parallel systems. In spite of several governments have taken positive measures such as adopting the 2018 Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration and the Global Compact on Refugees, legal, social and cultural barriers limit migrant and displaced people's opportunities to enjoy their right to education. In the context of rural-urban migration, for example, millions of children in China and India are out of school or enrolled in schools of lower quality. The recently published Global Education Monitoring Report (UNESCO, 2018) entitled *Migration, displacement and education: Building bridges not walls* – reveals that residence permit restrictions introduced by Chinese authorities in an attempt to deter the massive migration from rural to urban areas (rural migrant workers constitute 21% of the Chinese population) lead to the majority of migrant children in cities like Beijing to attend unauthorised migrants schools.

Unequal access to education is even severe amongst displaced people. Although the Colombian government has implemented legal measures to ensure displaced children are treated preferentially in terms of access to education, considerable gaps remain in both urban and rural areas. For those who move across borders there are also significant barriers. In Austria (Styria State), children above age 15 who are considered not ready for secondary school are not allowed to attend schools and, following an assessment, can be transferred to non-regular courses. In some countries, students with low performance are often enrolled into less demanding tracks, which compromises their opportunities for higher education. To name but one example, Dutch students of Turkish and Moroccan descent were five times as likely as natives to enter lower secondary vocational tracks at age 12 (UNESCO, 2018).

As table 3 illustrates, children, youth and adults with either migrant or refugee background struggle to enjoy their right to education in low, middle- and high-income countries.

| Type of migration | Examples of affected countries | Critical challenges |
|---|---|---|
| Internal migration | China - Rural-urban migration in the search for job opportunities | Access to regular schools of equivalent quality as non-migrant families |
| International migration | The Netherlands – second generation migrants of Turkish and Moroccan descent | Lower performance in early years of schooling limits students' progression to the next academic stages thereby compromising their academic and professional prospects |
| Internal displacement | Colombia – Children, youth and adults searching for safety mainly in the outskirts of main urban areas | Nominal inclusion by law but persistence of social, economic and cultural barriers to ensuring the right to education for children, |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | | youth and adults. Adults wanting to resume their studies after years or even decades in displacement are often amongst the most excluded. |
| Displacement across national boundaries | Turkey – asylum seekers and refugees settled across Turkey in the search for safety – Many of them fleeing war in Syria | Access to education for asylum seekers and refugees in both self-settled towns and refugee camps |

Source: Elaborated by the author based on UNESCO (2018) and local and regional reports produced by GCE coalitions.

Education for people with refugee backgrounds has become a critical issue in all low, middle and high-income countries. The ongoing conflict in Syria, which has compelled millions of Syrians to move mainly to neighbouring countries such as Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey, entails significant challenges at different levels. In Jordan, for example, schools within and outside refugee camps lack facilities to enrol the increasing number of refugee children. In order to address this emergency, the government has opened 98 additional schools, operating in double-shifts, to ease the pressure on the size of classrooms (UNICEF, 2015). As a result, the proportion of students enrolled in double-shift schools increased from 7.6% in 2009 to 13.4% in 2014 (REACH, 2014). The ability of those schools to absorb additional numbers of students is limited.

Moreover, as outlined in the financial allocations for Jordan Global Appeal 2015, UNHCR has invested 1.99% of the budget for the refugee program on education. It is worth highlighting that the UNHCR reduction of funding for schools outside refugee camps in 2016, has been detrimental to the refugee children's opportunities to enjoy their right to education and associated to their increasing dropout rates (Jordan Education Coalition, 2019).

There are also significant challenges regarding the education of migrants and refugees across Europe. Although resources have been allocated in countries such as Germany, it is estimated that over 40,000 teachers are needed to handle the number of refugees and asylum seekers integrated within schools. In Spain, school dropout rates are considerably worse for students with migratory background. According to data from 2017, 30% of students of migrant origin from countries outside the EU dropout of school early, twice as many as their peers of Spanish origin (15.6%). In addition, the little data that exist indicate even greater inequality in the case of Roma students, whose dropout rate rises to 63.7%, which is more than three times the Spain national average (17.9%)[56].

Furthermore, school segregation is still an issue in many countries. In Spain, the school segregation index has increased by 13.4% in the last 10 years to stand at 0.31, which places the country in sixth place in the European ranking with the highest scores, above the average of the EU. There is a high concentration of vulnerable students, especially in publicly funded schools. Students with special educational needs and those who belong to low income families and who have migratory background are amongst those in higher risk of being

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[56] Las cifras de la educación en España. Estadísticas e indicadores. Estadística 2019. https://sede.educacion.gob.es/publiventa/descarga.action?f_codigo_agc=19668

segregated[57]. As the Spanish Coalition Global Campaign for Education (2019) reports, issues related to discrimination against people with migrant and refugee backgrounds vary across regions. In Melilla, for example, a Spanish autonomous city located on the north coast of Africa, the issue has become critical because the government's decision to restrict access to school for children who belong to undocumented families, including those who have spent their whole life in the city. Following legal petitions supported by CSOs and demonstrations, 160 children were enrolled into school. Local CSOs claim than there are about 400 children in a similar situation of exclusion[58].

Barriers to the fulfilment the right to education for migrants and displaced people can be found in all levels of education. The UN Special Rapporteur on the right to education, Koumbou Boly Barry, for example, has shown concern about the human right to tertiary education for refugees. She stressed: "With regard to tertiary education of refugees, the situation is equally grim. While globally enrolment in tertiary education stands at 36 per cent, up 2 percentage points from the previous year, for refugees that figure remains stuck at 1 percent, despite significant improvements in overall numbers thanks to investment in scholarships and other programmes [….]"[59].

*Conflict and violence-related emergencies: The right to education under attack*

Education facilities continue to be under attack by armed forces from all sides in different parts of the world. Between 2013 and 2017 there were more than 12,700 attacks against schools and universities, harming more than 21,000 students and educators in at least 70 countries[60]. In Brazil, the Brazilian Campaign for the Right to Education has raised concern against the militarisation of schools. From 2013 to 2018, the number of state schools managed by the Military Police jumped from 39 to 122 in 14 states of the Federation, which represents an increase of 212%. The militarisation of schools is gaining support from federal government. Those policies, however, are unconstitutional and, in addition, violate the international treaties signed by Brazil. They are unconstitutional because they violate the principles of the Federal Constitution of 1988 and the Law of Guidelines and Bases of Education - LDB. Militarisation of schools is against Article 61 of the LDB, which defines who is legally authorised to work in education; they are teachers and education workers with a granted authorisation.

Box 8 quotes some extracts of the Report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict.

| **Box 8: The right to education under attack** |
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[57] Save the Children. *Mézclate conmigo. De la segregación socioeconómica a la educación inclusiva*. Abril 2018. https://www.savethechildren.es/sites/default/files/imce/docs/mezclate_conmigo.pdf

[58]    https://www.publico.es/sociedad/menores-escolarizar-melilla-educacion-mantiene-apartheid-educativo-cientos-ninos-papeles-melilla.html

[59] A/73/262, para. 62-66, 2018

[60] http://eua2018.protectingeducation.org/#introduction

In a recent UN report entitled Children and Armed Conflict, the UN Security Council highlights global trends regarding the impact of armed conflict on children and provides information on violations committed in 2017, as well as related protection concerns.

Report main findings:

Children continue to be disproportionately affected by armed conflict in many country situations.

In 2017, changing conflict dynamics, including the intensification of armed clashes, directly affected children. Verified cases of the recruitment and use of children quadrupled in the Central African Republic (299) and doubled in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (1,049) compared to 2016. The number of verified cases of the recruitment and use of children in Somalia (2,127), South Sudan (1,221), the Syrian Arab Republic (961) and Yemen (842) persisted at alarming levels. In addition, boys and girls recruited and used were often doubly victimized by subsequently being detained for their former association with armed forces or groups (Paragraph 6).

Surges in the recruitment and use of children often coincided with increasing levels of killing and maiming of children. In addition, spikes in armed clashes and violence led to a substantial increase in the number of child casualties in Iraq (717) and Myanmar (296). Afghanistan, the Syrian Arab Republic and Yemen remained the country situations with the highest number of verified casualties. In Nigeria, Boko Haram continued to force civilians, including children, to perpetrate suicide attacks, which led to over half of all the verified child casualties in the country (Paragraph 7).

The report highlights both situations on and out of the agenda of the Security Council. The following extracts from the report illustrate the multiple ways in which children opportunities to enjoy their right to education are shaped by conflict and violence.

**Afghanistan**

18. Conflict-related violence continued to severely affect children throughout Afghanistan, with 3,179 verified cases of children killed and maimed in 2017.

19. The United Nations verified the recruitment and use of 84 boys, and documented an additional 643 cases (all boys). Children were recruited and used for combat, as bodyguards, at checkpoints, to assist in intelligence gathering and to plant improvised explosive devices. When recruited by armed groups, children were also used to carry out suicide attacks.

26. For the second consecutive year, verified incidents of attacks against schools and education personnel decreased (68 incidents). Armed groups perpetrated 55 of the incidents (Taliban, 41; ISIL-KP, 7; undetermined armed groups, 7). Furthermore, three such incidents were attributed to pro-government militias, two to Afghan National Defence and Security Forces, two to international military forces and two to cross-border shelling out of Pakistan.

28. The United Nations verified 16 incidents of the military use of schools and hospitals: 10 by the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces, 4 by the Taliban and 2 by ISIL-KP.

**Syrian Arab Republic**

182. A high intensity of conflict continued across the Syrian Arab Republic in 2017, resulting in the highest number of verified grave violations against children (2,896) ever recorded in the country. Civilians trapped in densely populated besieged areas, mainly by Government forces, continued to be the worst affected.

183. Verified cases of the recruitment and use of children increased by 13 per cent compared to 2016, with 961 cases (872 boys, 89 girls) verified. Ninety per cent of the children served in combat roles (861) and 26 per

cent (254) were below the age of 15. Of the total number of verified cases, 36 children were of foreign origin and at least 16 were killed in combat.

190. The United Nations verified 67 attacks on schools and education personnel. Incidents were attributed to Government and pro-government forces (44), the international counter-ISIL coalition (4), ISIL (3) and groups self-affiliated with the FSA (2). The majority of attacks were a result of air strikes (47).

192. Schools were frequently used for military purposes, with 22 verified incidents attributed to ISIL (20) and YPG/YPJ (2). Of these, 16 schools were subsequently attacked.

**India**

218. The United Nations continued to receive reports of the recruitment and use of children, including by the Naxalites, particularly in Chhattisgarh and Jharkhand. Naxalites reportedly resorted to the use of a lottery system to conscript children in Jharkhand. []

219. Children continued to be killed and injured in the context of operations of national security forces against armed groups. According to Government data, 188 civilians were killed in Naxalite-affected regions [].

220. In Jharkhand State, suspected Naxalites elements attacked one school in Khunti district, partially destroying it. With regard to military use, the occupation of over 20 schools was documented by the Central Reserve Police Force in Srinagar, Kashmir, in April. Increased tensions in Jammu and Kashmir reportedly also led to school closures for varying periods, including in Rajouri (65) and Poonch (76) districts.

**Pakistan**

236. The United Nations continued to receive reports of the recruitment and use of children, including from madrasas, and allegations of the use of children by armed groups for suicide attacks. In January, TTP released a video showing children, including girls, being instructed in how to perpetrate suicide attacks.

238. Eight attacks on educational facilities and students were reported, four targeting girls' education. For example, in March, unidentified individuals vandalized the Oxford Public School, located in Ghizer Valley, Gilgit-Baltistan, and threatened to bomb the school if female teachers did not cover themselves. In the same month, a girls' school located in Qila Abdullah in Balochistan Province was damaged in an attack, through the use of improvised explosive devices.

Source: This box reproduces some extracts of the Report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict (A/72/865–S/2018/465) issued on 16 May 2018. See https://undocs.org/en/s/2018/465 Accessed on June 22 2019

Besides the examples provided by the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict, it is important to highlight that in contexts of conflict and violence, access to school is often neglected even before an attack is perpetrated. In February 2019, the Minister of Education of Burkina Faso denounced that over 1,100 schools were temporarily closed, affecting more than 150,000 students, because of the threat of violence[61]. The Burkina Faso National Coalition for Education (2019) has stressed that securing schools and educational institutions against terrorist attacks is one of the most significant challenges the country is dealing with to achieve SDG4 by 2030. The Coalition highlighted the need to establish a disaster and crisis-sensitive emergency planning system that considers the needs of people living in emergencies, specifically displaced people.

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[61] https://citizen.co.za/news/news-africa/2088674/fear-of-attacks-keeps-150k-children-away-from-school-in-burkina-faso/, Online search on March 29th, 2019.

The people's right to education in the context of emergency is not only temporarily disrupted or neglected. The conflict between Israel and State of Palestine clearly illustrates that barriers to achieve the right to education in context of conflict may become permanent.

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**Box 9: The right to education in the context of return: The Gaza's "great march of return"**

'The so-called Great March of Return (GMR) protests began on 30 March 2018 – known as "Palestinian Land Day" – when 40,000-50,000 Palestinian men, women and children, the vast majority of them peaceful demonstrators, took to the perimeter fence separating Gaza from Israel, in popular protest, to demand the end of the Israeli blockade and the right of return for refugees. [] While protests have continued to be largely non-violent and the vast majority of those in attendance are unarmed, there are often reported incidents of stone throwing as well as tire burning, attempts to damage the fence and, since April, some demonstrators flew kites or balloons towards Israel that carried burning rags and damaged Israeli property, including agricultural land. Israeli Security Forces (ISF) have, throughout the past twelve months, responded to these civilian demonstrations with the use of tear gas, rubber-coated bullets and live ammunition. According to OCHA figures, as of 22 March 2019, the ISF have killed 195 Palestinians (including 41 children) and injured nearly 29,000 people (including over 7000 wounded with live ammunition)' (UNRWA, 2019: 6).

"UNRWA operates 274 schools in Gaza with 278,938 students (143,973 boys and 134,965 girls). UNRWA school principals have recorded the deaths of 13 students aged between 11 and 16 years since the start of the GMR. A total of 227 students have also been recorded by their school as injured (most were aged between 13 and 15 years, but some were as young as 7 years old). Most students have missed at least two weeks of school as a result of their injuries, with some students requiring much longer absences (up to 65 school days in one instance).

UNRWA teachers have expressed concern over their ability to assist injured students in keeping up with their studies during their absences and support their return to school after they have recovered. Some staff worry that a prolonged absence from school, coupled with the additional stresses and life changes resulting from a GMR injury, may be the trigger for dropping out of school altogether. In response, UNRWA has worked to scale up its computerized Interactive Learning Programme (website) and UNRWA TV channel on YouTube to provide additional learning support for students affected by conflict.

During an education needs assessment in June 2018, education staff, students and parents all expressed a need for increased psychosocial support and resources to better help children in and outside of school in dealing with the impact of crisis and conflict" (UNRWA, 2019; 11).

"In the twelve months of GMR demonstrations, more Palestinians have been injured than during the 2014 Gaza hostilities, more Palestinians have been killed than during the 2012 Gaza hostilities []

The GMR is symptomatic of the rising level of frustration and despair among Palestinians living in the Gaza Strip who have endured 12 years of blockade, more than 50 years of occupation and, for Palestine refugees, 70 years of a lack of a just and lasting solution to their plight. [] Political solutions, including a just and lasting solution to the plight of Palestine refugees, are urgently needed" (UNRWA, 2019; 16).

Source: United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (2019). Gaza's "great march of return", one year on. Impact on Palestine refugees and UNRWA services.

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Technical and financial aid is often insufficient to cover education demands for those living in emergency situations. Those countries which provide technical and financial support tend to prioritise children in primary and secondary school age leaving the youth and adults behind and this is an overarching challenge for securing the lifelong learning perspective SDG4 is aiming for. There are also significant challenges associated with the enforced displacement of

teachers and the impact of conflict, violence and displacement on both students and teacher's mental health.

Education in post-conflict scenarios is also a critical challenge for securing SDG4. Although programmes such as Education Cannot Wait have been put in practice in countries such as Afghanistan, a significant number of returnees from neighbouring countries are out of school. Children who return to insecure areas are at higher risk of exclusion. Along with lack of financial resources, ANEC (2019) has drawn attention to how political instability and limited access to insecure areas of Afghanistan, are one of the most significant challenges to the country making progress towards achieving SDG4.

Although investment in the education of displaced people by the international community has increased in recent years (UNESCO, 2018), and although bilateral cooperation often targets countries affected by emergencies, more international financial commitment, as well as extraordinary funding mechanisms in the countries affected, are needed to protect and guarantee the right to education. In  the case of  Australia, for example, 11 out of 15 of the country's development partners are either fragile states or countries affected by conflict and which largely depend on international aid (Commonwealth of Australia, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 2015). The Japan NGO Network for Education (JNNE) and the Global Campaign for Education Spanish coalition have raised concern about the very low financial commitment of their countries to financing education in developing countries and providing more financial support to the education needs of those living in emergency situations. After Greece, Spain is the country with the lowest investment in international development cooperation. The Japan coalition welcomes Japan's government decision to include in its SDGs Plan an investment of 200 US$ to support the education of girls and women in developing countries, and to enhance support for empowerment of women in crisis and humanitarian assistance but draws attention to the fact that much more financial commitment is needed. In Denmark, the Danish Coalition for Education (2019) has shown concern on how current trends of anti-migration discourses in Europe, make advocating for the right to education of ethnic minorities, including migrants and refugees, a real challenge for civil society. Very few politicians are willing to propose free education for refugees. Even if this would come at a very small economic cost, and would be a positive social and economic investment; many political parties would rather capitalise on current anti-migration trends in order to gain popular support.

*Climate change-related emergencies*

Climate change-related emergencies leave millions of children out of school every year. Climate change-related displaced people, including internally displaced people, refugees, and asylum seekers are often overrepresented amongst those who abandon school for months and even years. Climate change disasters do not care about the level of income or nationalities. Millions of people have been affected in countries as diverse as the USA, Vietnam, Somalia, Bangladesh, India, China, Cuba, and Iraq, to name but a few (IDMC, 2018).

Despite the magnitude of such emergencies and of their negative impacts, those internally displaced by climate change are rarely included in the SDGs planning and monitoring frameworks. As Cazabat (2018) highlights, internally displaced people are amongst the

vulnerable groups affected by climate change, and do not receive the attention required in the SDGs country's planning actions.

Planning at all levels, including early warning strategies, quick humanitarian response to emergencies, and long-term durable solutions for those affected, is one of the most significant challenges for achieving the sustainable development agenda in multiple corners of the world. Cazabat (2018) and IDMC (2018) also highlight that all SDGs impact internal displacement and, at the same time, internal displacement impacts all SDGs[62].

Several actions need to be taken at all levels to mitigate the impacts of climate change through education. Low income and wealthy nations should make climate change education a more central and visible part of the international response to climate change (UNESCO, 2010). Initiatives to prevent and mitigate the impact of climate change through education may allow children, young people and adults to get a better understating of the impact of global warming on their possibilities to enjoy their fundamental human rights. In this regard, states should demonstrate financial commitment to provide quality climate change education for all. Furthermore, as UNESCO (2010) and (2016b) highlights, education can encourage people to change attitudes and behaviour towards climate change-related problems and enhance their skills to adapt to emergencies.

Financial resources are needed to promote both formal and non-formal education, to develop teaching strategies to engage children, young people and adults with climate change-related problems, strategies to adapt to climate change emergencies and to reduce one's footprint on earth. Putting all these measures in practice, requires significant investment in teachers, education, to the needs of all people according to their age, abilities to learn, disabilities, and the risks and harms present in every geographical context.

Conflict and climate change-related emergencies overlap in many places of the world, Bangladesh being only one example. In terms of climate change related emergencies, the government has allocated resources from its regular education sector budget. In the case of conflict-related emergencies, such as the ongoing Rohingya crisis and the displacement of thousands of people from the Rakhine state of Myanmar, the response largely depends on international aid. In this particular case, the Global Partnership for Education (GPE) provided 8.33 million USD from the unused balance of the Third Primary Education Development Programme (PEDP3) and an additional 12 million approximately was provided by the Education Cannot Wait (ECW) fund.

## 5.5. Education financing

The removal of financial barriers is at the heart of the challenges to effectively protect and fulfil the right to education and make significant progress towards achieving SDG 4. Several nations of the world, especially in low- and middle-income countries, however, failed to commit the maximum of their resources available to the protection of the right to

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[62]    http://www.internal-displacement.org/expert-opinion/while-the-migration-agenda-moves-forward-idps-keep-getting-side-tracked

education; and a few even adopted regressive financial measures to secure the right to free quality education for all.

*Privatisation and the risk of shifting from the right to education to learning*

The rise of privatisation of education systems, regardless of its modality, has worsened inequality in education, deepened social and economic divides, and undermined the opportunities to deliver quality public education for all. In a recent study commissioned by ActionAid, Unterhalter, Robinson, Benito, and Coysh (2019) use the recently adopted Abidjan Principles to examine the states' obligation to provide public education and regulate private involvement in education. Drawing on the case studies of Malawi, Mozambique, Tanzania and Nigeria, the authors provide new evidence to confirm a significant expansion of private schools in low- and middle-income countries.

The findings of the four case studies reveal that although legal and constitutional commitments to fulfil the right to education have been adopted, countries tend to rely on the provision of private education to improve schooling rates. Thus, rather than investing public funding in enhancing public education systems, resources are given to private initiatives. In all cases, the researchers found that policy documents often take for granted that the private sector is a more efficient or better-quality provider. In all cases, moreover, the increasing participation of the private sector in the provision of education has been largely unregulated and have consistently resulted in stratified education systems which affect those living with low income.

In spite of all those common trends, the report identifies some differences in the ways those education systems have been permeated by the provision of private education and some of the effects on inequality associated with the growth of private schools. Unterhalter, Robinson, Benito, and Coysh (2019; 100) place comparisons and contrasts between the four countries in a continuum. "At one end of the continuum we position Mozambique, where private actors are only involved in private education provision for primary schooling aimed at the elite" and where parents are often charged for uniforms and exams, and these do appear to exclude some of the poorest children. In the middle of the continuum stand Malawi and Tanzania. In both countries "the commercial and the partnership model of engagement with private actors, fees are charged and the result is to exclude children from poor and very poor households". Finally, at the end of the continuum stands Nigeria, "where so little money has been allocated to schooling over the past 30 years that the President and many major civil society organisations have declared an education state of emergency with enormous needs to be met in terms of raising revenues, building schools, employing teachers, giving children free primary and secondary schooling".

In a similar research initiative also commissioned by ActionAid, Ron Balsera (2019: 1) concludes that "Ghana, Kenya and Uganda are not fully meeting their obligations to provide free and quality education, partly due to the underfunding of the sector, and the private sector in these three countries is growing as a result. This growth of the private sector is causing and entrenching social inequalities, leading to stratification and huge disparities of education opportunities".  As in the case of Malawi, Mozambique, Tanzania and Nigeria Ron Balsera (2019) stresses that although  Ghana, Kenya and Uganda had formally adopted

legislation to provide free quality public primary and secondary education, in all these three countries families are burdened with a variety of fees, which are higher in private schools. Overall, she concludes "the growth of enrolments in the private sector is symptomatic of the lack of availability or quality of public schools. Yet, in these three countries the government seems to be encouraging the private sector to fill the gaps rather than fulfilling their obligations to provide free and quality public education" (Ron Balsera, 2019: 10).

In the other corner of the world, research conducted by Adrião, Crosso and Rodrigues (2019), has also shown the increasing role of the private sector in the provision of education. Specifically, they explain the role of the corporate sector in the increasing privatisation of education in Brazil. Their analysis reveals that in the states of São Paulo, Pará and Pernambuco only, 46 different private organisations are engaged in for-profit education. Amongst them, 27 are corporate foundations, 14 private companies, 2 banks, and one an international organization. This means that 93.5% are corporate bodies.

The findings of this research suggest that profit making education is taking place in Brazil and legal reforms are creating the space for corporate business in education. This tendency is a threat to the fulfilment of the right to education for all and especially for disadvantaged groups in society. As Tomasevski (2004) stressed, corporate business does not care about the right to education for those living in vulnerable situations who cannot afford education. Indeed, privatisation of education often follows the provision of low-cost private schools, school vouchers and public-private partnerships, which leave millions of children, young people and adults behind.

The negative impacts of privatisation and commercialisation on the right to education were also examined by Kishore Singh, former UN Special Rapporteur on the right to education. Singh indicates that for-profit education is contrary to the concept of education as a public good. He stressed:

> [The] commercialization of education necessarily involves the pursuit of material values to the detriment of the humanist mission of education. Private schools propagate a commercial value system and establish a learning system devoid of cultural diversity, as they cater to particular social strata. The "cultural-valuational currency" they breed is derogatory to the "moral worth" of the very poor. Privatization eclipses a holistic approach to education: learning to know, learning to do, learning to live together and learning to be.
>
> A regulatory framework for private providers is thus of critical importance in setting out responsibilities and accountability requirements. The corporate sector has a long track record of attempting to prevent government regulation and numerous corporations have sued Governments for trying to implement regulations that could harm their profits. Governments must be bold in regulating private operators, focusing on education as a public good. Regulations must ensure that education is accessible to all, works towards the broader public interest and reflects a broad humanistic notion of education[63].

As illustrated above, the increasing participation of private education is not only threatening public education systems but increasing inequalities, especially by excluding those with low

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[63] Report of the Special Rapporteur on the right to education, Kishore Singh Protecting the right to education against commercialization A/HRC/29/30, para.78-81-94, 2015.

income and living in vulnerable situations. The lack of regulation of those multiple forms of privatisation of education is clearly against the UN General Comment 13, as recently highlighted by the Abidjan Principles on the human rights obligations of states to provide public education and to regulate private involvement in education. Both the General Comment and the Abidjan Principles clearly state that private education can neither supplant or replace public funded education systems. Indeed, as the Abidjan's overarching principle 5 stresses "states must prioritise the funding and provision of free, quality, public education, and may only fund eligible private instructional educational institutions, whether directly or indirectly, including through tax deductions, or land concessions, international assistance and cooperation, or other forms of indirect support, if they comply with applicable human rights law and standards and strictly observe all substantive, procedural, and operational requirements.''

*Additional funding is needed but where should the money come from?*

Lack of investment in education is associated with lack of political will, tax evasion and the increasing space for education-for-profit's policies. The following chart, which is based on research commissioned by ActionAid in six countries of Africa, illustrates how the implementation of fairer tax systems can allow countries to inject substantial resources into their education systems, protect the right to education and be in a better position to achieve SDG4.

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**Box 10: Tax justice and education financing**

ActionAid's recent research on tax justice and education financing suggests that 'action to address both the size of government revenues overall and the share spent on education offers the best means to secure predictable and sustainable funding for education'.

**Context**
- The Education Commission (2016) estimates that 97% of the new resources needed to finance education in the coming years will have to come from domestic resources.
- Greater tax collection is key for developing countries to unlocking the financing required to meet development goals and deliver on citizens' rights. Brooks and Hwong (2006) and Piketty (2014) suggest that a country's ability to achieve its social and economic objectives is directly related to its ability to collect sufficient tax revenues.
- The UN recommends that a minimum tax-to-GDP threshold of 20% is required to deliver on basic citizens' rights and government commitments (OECD, 2011). Crucially, the 20% tax-to-GDP ratio must be seen as a floor and not a ceiling.
- UNESCO (2014) has called on countries that are already spending a reasonable share of their budget on education to work to expand their overall budget revenue, and to prioritise spending at least 20% of the total resources on education.
- European and North American countries raise on average 43% of GDP in domestic revenue. This finances all their government services, including education. In low-income countries, domestic revenue averages only 14% of GDP, and in lower-middle income countries about 18%. On average about 16% of this limited public revenue is then spent on education.
- Financial modelling shows that more than 6% of GDP would need to be allocated to education to achieve the goals set by the SDGs (see Lewin, 2017).
- Tax revenues are key to financing education sustainability, not only because they can help to raise more funds for public education, but because they provide long-term predictable funding that can be used to fund recurrent or operating costs, which cover teachers' salaries (the major item in education budgets).

**Case studies**: Malawi, Mozambique, Tanzania, Ghana, Kenya and Uganda

**Key research findings:**
ActionAid's research has shown that Mozambique, Tanzania, Malawi, Ghana, Kenya and Uganda are losing huge amounts of potential revenues that could be spent on improving education, especially for girls. As the report clearly stresses, investing in girls' education, who continue to form the majority of out of school children in some African countries, is not just a means to ensure one of their fundamental rights is fulfilled; it also could yield positive economic returns in the long term.

As the table below shows, on average, only 8.56% of the harmful tax incentives given to private companies in these six countries would be required to educate all girls who are currently out of primary school. What is more, on average and in the long term, educating these girls would have added a collective US$3.83 billion to these six economies over a 45-year working life due to increased productivity.

| Country | Girls out of school | GDP ratio % | GDP share on education % | Share of the total budged % | US$ Million/billion lose each year to harmful tax incentives | % of the harmful tax incentives required to educate all girls |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Tanzania | 952,499 | 14-15 | 3.5 | 17.7 | 531.5 m | 13.7 |
| Malawi | 154,000 | 15 | 5.6 | 24 | 87 m | 6 |
| Mozambique | 426,250 | 24-25 | 6.5 | 23 | 562 m | 23 |
| Ghana | 289,456 | 16 | 6.2 | 21 | 2 b | 1.6 |
| Kenya | 537,736 | 16.3 | 5.3 | 16.7 | 1.88 b | 4.1 |
| Uganda | 298,634 | 13 | 2.3 | 10.9 | 370 m | 3.1 |

Source: the author based on information provided by ActionAid (2019)

**What we can learn from these six case studies?**
The six cases under analysis clearly reveal that even if only a small portion of what the IMF terms 'harmful tax incentives' were allocated to education; it could provide all girls and boys with access to quality public education. To put this in another way, by reducing or eliminating the tax incentives that many governments offer, especially to corporations, governments can increase tax revenues and raise substantial extra resources for education

ActionAid shows that governments in sub-Saharan Africa may be losing around US$38.6 billion a year, or 2.4% of their GDP, by giving away tax incentives. This is equivalent to nearly half (47%) of their current education spending.

**Recommendations**
Governments should ensure that their tax systems are fairer, more progressive and better able to raise the funds needed to ensure adequate financing for free, quality, public education. In doing so governments should consider:
- Increase the size of national budgets, for example, announcing a timetable to reach a tax-to-GDP ratio of at least 20% by 2020 if not already reached.
- Increase the share of the budget allocated to education, for example, by announcing a timetable to reach an allocation of at least 20% of government spending (6% of GDP) to education by 2020 if not already reached.

| |
|---|
| ● Increase the sensitivity of national education budgets by focusing the investment in those facing vulnerable situations and exclusion, including girls and women, persons with disabilities, indigenous communities, refugees and displaced persons and other disadvantaged groups, through gender and inclusion audits. <br> ● Enhance the scrutiny of national education budgets by, for example, supporting increased analysis of education budgets and performance by civil society and promoting greater accountability. |
| **Source**: ActionAid (2019). Scaling-up Domestic Resources for Financing SDG 4: Keeping our promises. |

In line with the states' obligation to provide free quality public education, significantly more resources are needed to achieve SDG4. The Global Education Monitoring Report (2016) has estimated that unless countries adopt a radical shift in financing for education, the SDG4 targets for primary and secondary education will remain off track by 50 years. This means that governments should secure new domestic resources to be invested in education (at least 6% of GDP is likely to be needed for SDG 4) and, at the same time, the international community should show more financial commitment. Regarding the first aspect, the Education Commission (2016) estimates that 97% of the new resources needed to finance education in the coming years will have to come from domestic resources. Concerning the international aid, Lewin (2017) stresses that despite a trillion has been spent on Aid to education since 1960, another $40 billion a year is needed to achieve the SDG targets. This is more than 10 times the amount already allocated.

*More financial resources are needed, but how should the money be spent?*

Allocating more financial resources is just part of the solution. The resources should be invested in strengthening public education systems. The case of India, serves as an example. NEC India (2019) reports that there is a provision which reserves 25 percent of seats for children from the economically weaker sections in all the private schools. The government reimburses the private schools for these seats through public funds. While reserving the seats is a positive step towards inclusive education, decision of government to reimburse for 25 percent of students shifts the public funds to the private players. There is a growing discontent as enrolment in government schools is falling and several government schools are being closed in the name of less enrolment and on the other hand government is paying the private schools for 25 percent of the enrolment.

India is just an example of how governments and the international community should adopt progressive measures to spend their education budgets on enhancing public systems. As GCE (2019) stresses, the spending in education should also be guided by a greater sensitivity to equity, gender equality, inclusion and quality, while recognising the necessity of a balanced whole sector approach. In doing so, governments should expand domestic systems of taxation, review tax and royalty agreements in the extractive industry sector, close loopholes which enable tax avoidance and evasion by the private sector, and develop other forms of progressive taxation on wealth, property, land and trade. States should plan and deliver their education strategies in line with their legal national and international obligations and make public their advances and challenges to pursue SDG4 by 2030.

The international community, on the other hand, needs to show much more commitment to those who are often left behind by education systems. This means more investment in protracted humanitarian crisis, including education in conflict and climate change-related emergencies, education for those who are on the move within and across national borders, including migrants, internally displaced people, asylum seekers and refugees.

As Lewin (2017) stresses, sustainable educational development depends on sustainable funding. "The total public cost of SSA systems is USD 80 billion: USD 120 billion is needed for SDGs. A 1% increase in domestic revenue would solve part of the problem. A 10% increase in tax revenue in SSA would finance the education SDGs, not for one year but forever".

Despite financial barriers for achieving SDG4 emerged being overarching patterns amongst all countries under analysis, there are significant differences which deserve attention. In Australia, for example, one of the most significant challenges the country is related to the complexity of the funding arrangements between state and federal governments. The Australian Government provides the majority of public funding for non-government schools, which is supplemented by states and territories. The states and territories provide the majority of public funding for government schools, with the Australian Government providing supplementary assistance. The Australian Government provides the majority of public funding for higher education, while the states and territories are the main investors of technical and further education.

In spite of these apparently clear distribution of responsibilities in terms of financing, ACED (2019) has raised concerns that educational opportunity within the country is a matter of privilege. More specifically, socio-economic status is a leading predictor of successful education outcomes, and public schools, which teach the majority of disadvantaged groups, are less likely to reach the School Resource Standard than private schools.


*Lack of funding results in more and more people being left behind by education systems*

As discussed above, lack of investment in education is associated to several factors including lack of political will, tax evasion and the increasing space for education-for-profit's policies. Despite countries such as El Salvador having legally committed to investing 6% of their GDP in Education, the share GDE for education is only 3.4% (RESALDE, 2019). In Guatemala, the government has formally adopted the SDGs framework in the National Development Plan, but investment in education has been largely stagnant for years. It is largely related to issues such as tax evasion and lack of accountability mechanisms. As in the case of Bangladesh, CSOs in Guatemala have raised concerns related to increasing role of private actors in education.

Among the EU Member States, Romania has one of the lowest levels of public spending for education (as a percentage of GDP). Although the Law No. 1/2011 of National Education provides for a minimum of 6% of GDP allocated to education, the implementation of this provision (article 8) has been postponed repeatedly. Thus, in 2017 and 2018, under the state budget, the education received less than 3% of the GDP (2,86% and 2,98%, respectively). The European Commission has pointed out that the public expenditure on education in Romania is much lower than the EU average for the education levels of an utmost importance for

ensuring equal chances to vulnerable children. The public expenditure on pre-primary and primary levels only reached 0,7% of the GDP (compared to an EU average of 1,5%) and the secondary education benefited of 1,5% of the GDP (1.9% the EU average).

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**Box 11: The Hidden Costs of Education are Living Romanian Children Behind**

Although guaranteed under the Romanian law, free of charge public education in the country remains only a dream (Save the Children Romania (2010 and 2018). Families have to cover significant costs related to the education of their children, including transport, tutoring, school uniforms or adequate clothes and footwear, participation in after-school programmes, school books and stationary, and contributions for the teaching/school materials. Since almost half of the Romanian children are at risk of poverty and social exclusion, these hidden costs become a significant financial burden for most low-income families.

The inadequate public funding of education as well as the numerous reforms started and abandoned along the way led to a situation where, in eight years (between 2010 and 2018, when the Save the Children Romania measured the phenomena), the average hidden costs of education doubled (from 1.490 Romanian Lei/child/school year  in 2010 to 3.093 Romanian Lei in 2018).

Very low investment in education within the country, less than 3% of the GDP share in 2018, is leaving Romanian children behind. Out of school they cannot reach their potential and have very low prospects for the future.

Source: Save the Children Romania (2019)

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Financing matters for education for all groups of people and at all education levels. In terms of people with disabilities, International Disability and Development Consortium and Light for the World (2016) have drawn attention to the significant disconnection between policy aspirations in terms of education of people with disabilities and budgetary allocations. The report stresses how, even when education sector plans refer to learners with disabilities, they do not ensure adequate funds to ensure disability-inclusive education. There is an urgent need to include costs associated with the inclusion of learners with disabilities in national education budgets. Their analysis, which is based on 76 low- and middle-income countries, suggest that only 31 out of 76 countries have specific budget allocations for children with disabilities or for special education[64]. But even these budget lines do not clearly indicate whether finances are for special or inclusive education. For example, "in Ethiopia, under the education sector plan for the period 2010–2015, 0.2% of the entire education budget was allocated to inclusive education for disabled learners. No specific allocation has been made for disability under the latest plan for 2015–2020, as disability is included under the strategies for every level of education" (International Disability and Development Consortium and Light for the World, 2016; 36).

As Light for the World (2019) stresses, there is also a lack of funding for assistive technology and the adaptation of learning materials for education of people with disabilities. The allocation of financial resources for inclusive education often fails to be sensitive to the specific needs of people with diverse types of disabilities. For instance, specific financial

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[64] These countries are: Angola, Bangladesh, Benin, Bhutan, Bolivia, Cape Verde, Colombia, El Salvador, Fiji, Ghana, Honduras, India, Kosovo, Liberia, Malawi, Mozambique, Nepal, Nicaragua, Pakistan, Peru, Rwanda, São Tomé and Príncipe, Sri Lanka, Solomon Islands, Tanzania, Timor Leste, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe (Development Finance International, 2016).

resources should be allocated to the provision of braille books for blind students, audiobooks for those who have difficulty reading print due to learning difficulties or a vision impairment, and sign-language interpreters and captioning for deaf learners. These recurring and non-recurring costs need to be factored into disability-inclusive education budgets.

As International Disability and Development Consortium and Light for the World (2016: 37) suggest, the availability of data and indicators are crucial to developing disability-inclusive education sector plans with adequate funding for their successful implementation. Poor disaggregation of data, by contrast, tend to hamper planning, funding and implementation of inclusive education at all education levels. Development Finance International's (2015) analysis reveals that very few countries identify and track what they are targeting with public spending – by sector, location or beneficiary. Only 46% of countries split education spending by level to make it possible to identify allocations to, for example, early childhood education, primary, secondary or tertiary levels.

According to the Global Education Monitoring Report (2018), only 23 out of 56 countries provide data on the numbers of students with disabilities in education disaggregated by disability type. Furthermore, the 2016 UNICEF review on Education Management Information Systems flagged that the categorisation of disability types, terminology and indications of severity were problematic.

In conflict and post conflict scenarios the issue of funding is a significant barrier for achieving SDG4. As explained in section 5.4., it is not only because states need to invest in rebuilding school infrastructure, but also because of the particular challenges of teaching and learning in those contexts. In areas where conflicts still rage, the protection of school infrastructure from the attacks of armed groups demands financial resources as well as the protection of teachers and students when they are targeted by those groups. In post conflict scenarios the transition from war to peace also involves resources to reformulate education strategies, train teachers to support students who were affected by war and support those who return to their places of origin after years of displacement. In Afghanistan, for example, the government has reported that financial resources to implement SDG4 can only be allocated in 2020. Currently, as ANEC (2019) reports, education budget mostly depends on foreign funding. In Bangladesh, where conflict and climate change emergencies have place at the same time, lack of financial resources and inadequate funding allocation are overarching barriers to the country making significant progress towards SDG4. Although public expenditure on education has tripled between 2011 and 2019, it remains about 2% of the country's gross domestic product. The national budget share has decreased since 2016 from 14.39% for the financial year 2016-2017 to 11.41% for the years 2018-2019. This is not only one of the lowest percentages in South Asia but also among developing countries. What makes the already difficult financial investment in education within the country more complex is that teacher salaries and school infrastructure development account for more than 90% of the budget[65]. Similar financial constraints can be found in countries such as Jordan, where more financial investment is needed to attend to the thousands of refugees and asylum seekers fleeing conflict mainly from Syria, and where salaries for teachers and other employees in the education system take 83% of the education budget (Jordan Coalition for Education, 2019).

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[65] Citizen's Platform for SDGs, Bangladesh, 2019

As discussed in section 5.3., the spending of a very substantial share of the education budget on teacher's salaries does not mean that their salaries are competitive. It illustrates, rather, the limited financial resources allocated to education and addressing significant challenges in education systems. As the case of Bangladesh illustrates, financial resources to reduce the extremely high pupil-teacher ratio (46:1), which affects students' opportunities to learn and their performance, are not allocated in the education budget. Funding for teacher training and making school facilities accessible and adaptable to the needs of the most disadvantaged groups, such as students with disabilities, children living in the streets, and people living in rural and remote areas, are not allocated either. (CAMPE, 2019).

Education funding matters everywhere and at all education levels. In Denmark, financial reforms have been affecting higher education financing since 2015. The Danish Education Coalition reported that since 2015, the government has cut down 2% of the total funding for education each year. Accumulated during the period from 2016 to 2022, this means that more than 3 million US Dollars will be cut from teaching and education. This means dismissal of staff and more students per teacher. From 2007 to 2017, 60 percent more students have been admitted to universities but during the last five years the number of teachers has not followed the same development. This means that students have less opportunities to contact teachers, get feedback and overall a lower quality of education.

The reduction of funding for education has raised concerns among students because the Danish State Educational Grant and Loan Scheme provided for Danish students, and for some foreign students depending on their nationality and special circumstances such as refugee background, is likely to be reduced in the near future. According to the Danish Education Coalition, this grant represents a substantial percentage of the economy of students but it has not increased in recent years. This has resulted in the fact that students in Denmark are today at under higher economical pressure and concerned about ongoing reforms which reduce investment in education[66].

Lack of sustainable funding for higher education is an overarching pattern in most of the countries included in this report and the so-called alternative methods for funding education in the region, such as loan systems and charging higher tuition fees for non-European students are largely unsustainable (European Student Union – ESU (2019). Lack of funding for higher education especially affects low income families and those living in vulnerable situations. Public-funded initiatives to improve the inclusion of those who are left behind from higher education, for example people with refugee background, are needed all over the world. Initiatives such as 'Together, Moving Forward' implemented by ESU, has shown significant potential for better inclusion of refugees and asylum seekers in education systems. "The Together, Moving Forward programme is a fundamental tool for ESU to bridge expertise from ground work volunteers to policy makers. Furthermore, the Programme has the greatest potential to contribute to evidence- based policy making that will allow ESU to develop a systematic, pro-educational approach to facilitating displaced people in Europe, thus paving

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[66] State Educational Grant and Loan Scheme (SU and SU-lån). http://www.su.dk/english/state-educational-grant-and-loan-scheme-su/ Accessed on June 11 2019.

the way for ESU to become one of the pioneers for accessible and inclusive European Higher Education Areas" (ESU, 2019: 6).

## 6. Conclusion and recommendations

This report has identified and characterised some of the critical barriers children, youth and adults encounter to enjoy their right to education and discussed some of the critical policy challenges governments in different regions of the world should address to reach Sustainable Development Goal 4 by 2030.

Based on data from 41 countries, the report has shown that although there has been some progress in several countries towards achieving SDG4, critical challenges remain in every corner of the world, including low, middle- and high-income countries. Although the types of challenges and their magnitude show significant variation across regions and countries, the report suggests that more comprehensive policies and financial efforts are needed in all countries, to effectively respect, protect and fulfil the right to education for all, and therefore, to be on track for achieving SDG4. In this respect, the report highlights the need for governments to reaffirm their legal commitment to respect, protect and fulfil their right to education and design, implement and assess their education policies, including plans towards achieving SDG4, accordingly.

By bringing together the content of the right to education, SDG4 targets, and GCE's strategic policy areas in a single framework, the report has examined in detail the critical barriers children, youth and adults encounter to enjoy their right to education in four main areas: equality and non-discrimination; transformative education; education in context of emergency; and financing education. The critical policy challenges faced by governments in all these four different areas were also addressed.

In terms of **equality and non-discrimination**, the report has shown that inequalities and exclusion are still a considerable barrier for millions of children, youth and adults to enjoy their right to education. Discrimination and exclusion remain pervasive in many low- and middle-income countries where less than 10% of children with disabilities are enrolled in school, like in Ethiopia for example. Significant progress has been made in most of the world regions to improve the access of women to education and in some cases women enrolment rates have surpassed male rates. In many European countries, including Spain and Denmark, women have higher enrolment rates in higher education but a higher proportion of female with academic title does not mean that the work against discrimination is done. Female professionals are misrepresented amongst academics in all corners of the world, only few access professorships and directive positions in universities. Their salaries remain significantly below the average salaries for male with similar academic qualifications. Gender diversity still is a significant challenge to education policies, especially in countries where homosexuality is punished by law and countries where regressive measures against people's right to express their sexual identity have been flourishing. Brazil and Guatemala are just two examples. Policies to secure a lifelong learning approach remain a dream in nearly all countries under examination, including high income countries such as Australia. The report has shown that ECCD and education for the elderly have become a privilege rather than a basic right for

people at those life stages. In low-income countries there is a tendency to focus resources only on compulsory education which often means that children under 5 and adults over 64 years of age receive little policy attention and funding. Finally, in terms of inequality, the report has shown that those living in rural and remote areas, and those who belong to lower caste, especially in India, and minority ethnic groups, for example Roma migrants across Europe, and those whose faith do not match with the majority of the population are at higher risk of exclusion and discrimination.

Concerning the aspect of **transformative education**, the report has shown the existence of a significant gap between the rhetoric used for education planning and what is effectively delivered on the ground. In most countries SDGS plans acknowledge education as a basic human right but then just tend to ignore the importance of making education systems compatible with national and international law in education. In terms of quality, for example, there is an excessive focus on using standardised tests and the implicit assumption that evaluation automatically improves education systems. Children and youth in different regions of the world show very low performance and instead of investing financial resources to deliver better quality education, a new assessment is planned. Students' ability for self-reflection, and basic skills such as critical thinking, reasoning, and problem-solving are either ignored or placed as secondary priorities in education planning.

Furthermore, the report has shown that despite student's low performance being negatively associated to low quality teachers, policies to improve the qualifications of teachers in universities and training in their places or work are scarce. In the majority of countries under analysis those aspects are allocated very little funding and in some cases teachers training is being outsourced to private companies. Moreover, labour conditions for teachers are very precarious in low- and middle-income countries and there are neither social nor financial stimulus to motivate the most talented students to become teachers. Progressive discourses around education for sustainable development, including issues around global citizenship, peace education and education to enhance democracy remains a dream in most countries, including high income countries such as Korea, Japan and Spain. Lastly, the report has shown that in order to be compatible with the idea of transformative education, governments should open and protect spaces for democratic active participation of CSOs. Planning education policies without considering the views of students themselves, parents, communities and civil society as a whole is just incompatible with the idea of positive change that is inherent to education for sustainable development.

**Education in emergencies** is a significant challenge to countries reaching SDG4. The report has shown that education remains under attack in several regions of the world, including conflict and non-conflict areas and highlighted the importance that states military practices adhere to International Humanitarian Law. The report has also shown the multiple challenges brought about by conflict and climate change-related disaster, the reconstruction of school facilities being only one example. Concerning this area, the report has shown significant evidence to suggest that displaced people, including internally displaced, refugees, and an asylum seeker are consistently left behind by education systems in all corners of the world. There are significant challenges to securing their right to education in very contrasting settings such as Jordan in the Middle East, Turkey in Asia, Melilla in Northern Africa, Colombia in Latin America, and Germany in Europe. The level of access to education facilities varies

across these regions and countries, but similar challenges such as schools adapting to respond to language needs and providing psychosocial support to those affected by violence are largely missed in all those contexts. Even where financial resources to secure the right to education for refugees could be easily available, such as in Denmark, politicians show little interest in promoting those policies largely for fear of being perceived by potential voters as pro-migrants/refugees in a context where anti-migrants/refugees parties are emerging.

In terms of **financing**, the report has shown that much more financial commitment from governments and international donors is needed to respect, protect and fulfil the right to education, and put countries on track for achieving SDG4. Based on coalitions' reports and research commissioned by ActionAid, the report has demonstrated that along with more financial resources, structural tax reforms and policies against privatisation are urgently needed in most countries to reach SDG4. As GCE (2019) has been advocating for several years, governments should consider a 4S approach to education financing: The **Share** of national budgets they spend on education; the **Size** of their budgets; the **Sensitivity** of their public spending on education, and the **Scrutiny** of their education budgets.

Privatisation at all levels of education has shown negative impacts in Sub-Saharan Africa, Latin America, Asia and the Middle-East and reversing these policies is fundamental to secure the right to education. Research commissioned by ActionAid in Sub-Saharan Africa has demonstrated that progressive tax reforms will significantly help countries to reach SDG4. Only by allocating a small portion of what the International Monetary Fund terms 'harmful tax incentives' to education access to quality public education could be provided for all girls and boys in Mozambique, Tanzania, Malawi, Ghana, Kenya and Uganda. The report has also stressed the need to make financing planning sensible to the needs of those who were left behind by education policies and those who are at risk of being so, such as people with disabilities, migrants and displaced people, women living in rural areas, and those who are considered under class or belong to minority ethnic groups, like the Scheduled Caste in India and Roma in Romania and across.

Recommendations

GCE strongly recommends that the governments listed in appendix 2 take effective action to develop a national strategy for achieving SDG4 and make it compatible with the right to education. For those who have already developed a national strategy, GCE recommends to make it compatible with the right to education. Far beyond being just a formal procedure, a national strategy to reach SDG4 has implications on the design, implementation, evaluation and financing of education strategies to both secure the right to education for all and achieve SDG4.

More specifically, GCE recommends to those countries:

- To adopt a lifelong learning perspective in education and make special financial efforts to secure ECCD, ECCE and education programs for the elderly. Investment in literacy programmes is needed in many of these countries.
- To identify the social groups facing exclusion and discrimination and develop policies to address these problems. Special attention should be given to people with

disabilities, migrants and displaced people, women living in rural areas, and those who are considered under class or belong to minority ethnic groups.

- To take action to positively transform their education systems considering the best interest of the child and the education needs of all human beings within the country regardless of age, gender, sexual orientation, origin, ethnicity, or any other consideration.
- To promote democracy and human rights within and beyond education systems. Special attention should be given to promoting a democratic and participative environment where the people's rights are not only acknowledged but effectively respected and protected; and where their critical skills and abilities to contest for a fairer society are developed rather than suppressed.
- To design and implement a comprehensive policy to secure the right to education in contexts of emergency, including the reconstruction of education facilities and the training of teachers to work with children and youth affected by climate change and conflict-related emergencies.
- To design and implement a comprehensive policy to secure the right to education of internal and international migrants, including internally displaced people, asylum seekers and refugees.
- To invest the maximum of available financial resources in education, and to adopt progressive tax reforms to secure sustainable funding for public education and reach the SDG4 by 2030.
- To invest financial resources taking into account the needs members of society who are already excluded from education systems or at risk of being left behind.
- To increase their commitment to financing education through official development aid, especially through multilateral funds as GPE and ECW.
- G20 countries are especially encouraged to increase their financial commitment to achieving SDG4 in their own countries and significantly increase their investment in education in low-income countries.

GCE also recommends the HLPF to consider the evidence and recommendations provided in this report when analysing the VNR process and when formulating recommendations to those countries. More specifically, GCE recommends the HLPF to encourage states:

- To undertake effective action to develop a national strategy for achieving the SDG4 compatible with the right to education.
- To include a comprehensive strategy in those plans to secure a lifelong learning perspective and policies to eliminate exclusion and discrimination within and beyond education systems.
- To include a comprehensive strategy in those plans to promote democracy and human rights within and beyond education systems.
- To open, respect and protect spaces for CSOs' engagement in education policies.
- To invest the maximum financial resources available in education, and adopt progressive tax reforms to secure sustainable funding for public education and reaching the SDG4 by 2030.
- To invest financial resources considering the needs of those members of society already excluded from education systems or at risk of being left behind by them.

- To encourage governments to increase their commitment to financing education through official development aid, especially through multilateral funds as GPE and ECW.
- In line with the UN resolution to involve stakeholders in the national voluntary reviews, to encourage governments to prepare their reports in a consultative, inclusive, participatory, and transparent process involving all stakeholders, including different sectors and levels of government, civil society, the private sector, members of Parliament, and other institutions.
- Encourage, support and extend official recognition to the Parallel Reports/Spotlight Reports of non-state actors, including civil society organisations, as valuable contributions to SDG monitoring and review which can be used by governments, development partners and UN agencies as additional reference in the SDG review and reporting process.
- Encourage governments to include CSO representatives in their official delegation, particularly those governments which volunteered to present a VNR in the High-Level Political Forum.

**References**

Will be included in the final version

**Appendix 1: List of countries**

Afghanistan
Albanian
Australia
Bangladesh
Brazil
Burkina Faso
Cape Verde
Denmark
Dominican Republic
El Salvador
Ethiopia
Gambia
Ghana
Guatemala
Guinea-Bissau
Honduras
India
Japan
Jordan
Kenya
Korea
Kyrgyzstan
Madagascar
Malawi
Mauritania
Mongolia
Mozambique
Nepal
Nicaragua
Pakistan
Papua New Guinea
Peru
Philippines
Romania
Spain
Sri Lanka
Tajikistan
Tanzania
Timor-Leste
Vanuatu
Vietnam

**Appendix 2: Survey**

Name of the country:

1. What are the three most significant advances the state has made to achieve the SDG4 during the last two years?  Please provide examples and evidence to illustrate and the source of the information.
2. What are the three most significant challenges the state deal with to achieve the SDG4 in terms of equality and non-discrimination? Please provide examples of the most vulnerable groups and evidence.
3. Whether and how the state has implemented education policies to promote inclusive education? Please provide examples of the most critical challenges to secure the right to inclusive education for people with disabilities.
4. What are the three most significant challenges the state deal with to secure a life learning perspective in their education policies? Please provide specific examples and evidence of those challenges for early childhood education, youth's education and the elderly education.
5. What are the three most significant challenges the state deal with to achieve the SDG4 in terms of education quality? Please provide examples, when relevant, of differences between public and private education.
6. Whether and how the education system is compatible with the idea of transformative education GCE is campaigning for? Please provide specific examples to illustrate the remaining challenges in terms of the purposes of education, the understanding of education as a basic human right and the emancipatory power of education.
7. What are the three most significant challenges the state deal with to secure the right to education for people living in emergency situations, especially displaced people due to natural disasters and conflict? Please provide examples and references.
8. What are the three most significant challenges the state deal with to achieve the SDG4 in terms of financing education? Please provide examples in terms of the levels of education granted public funding, teacher's salaries and living conditions, and the use of public funds to private education.  Information about other challenges faced by the state to secure sufficient funding to public education are welcome.
9. What are the three most significant challenges the civil society is dealing with to promote and defend the right to education in this country? Please provide specific examples in terms of barriers to organise and take part in demonstrations to promote the right to education and the criminalisation of social protest.
10. Please provide any information you consider relevant to understand the level of commitment of the state to achieve the SDG4, evidence of progress made and remaining challenges.
11. Please provide details of the correct form your coalition should be cited in the report and the names and surnames of contributors.