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UN Transforming Education Summit

Action Track 1 on Inclusive, equitable, safe and healthy schools

Discussion Paper (Final draft – 15 July)

Context

Education is at a crossroads. While much progress has been made globally in recent decades in education, high rates of poverty, exclusion, insecurity and gender inequality continue to hold millions back from learning. COVID-19, violence, armed conflict, refugee and internal displacement, natural hazards including climate-induced disasters and associated economic migration, and a growing backlash against gender equality and women's rights are reversing progress and widening inequalities in many contexts. The health and well-being of learners are a critical point: increasing numbers of them are vulnerable to poverty, malnutrition, infectious diseases, early and unintended pregnancy and poor psychosocial and mental health. Marginalized groups are suffering most.

We need a new vision for education: schools and their surrounding education communities must be transformed to become more responsive to the needs of learners and to ensure that their rights are met. Bold action is needed if the international community is to meet its commitments and make education inclusive for all. In 2020, some 259 million children, adolescents and youth were out-of-school, including at least half of all refugee children and youth.¹ Although the evidence shows that pre-primary education has a positive impact on learning and development, only 45% of young children in low-income countries, compared to 91% of children in high-income countries, have access to this level of education.²

We know what holds learners back from educational participation and success. Identity, background and ability dictate educational opportunity, with gender, location, poverty, disability, ethnicity, religion, language, displacement, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression³ and legal status intersecting and compounding disadvantage. The most marginalized learners face several layers of discrimination. Outside of the high-income countries in Europe and North America, only 18 of the poorest youth compared to 100 of the richest youth complete secondary school. In at least 20 countries, largely in Sub-Saharan Africa, few poor rural young girls complete secondary school,⁴ and only 11% of the poorest girls in crisis-affected countries do so.⁵

Girls' average primary completion rates have increased by almost 20 percentage points over the past 25 years to 87%, while completion rates for boys have risen from 85% to 90%.⁶ Girls are more likely than boys to never attend school, but boys in many countries are at higher risk of failing to advance and complete their education.⁷ Girls with disabilities are more likely to be out of school than their female peers without



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disabilities or than boys with disabilities. Persistent gender disparities in access, participation and learning contribute to widening gaps in socioeconomic opportunities that risk reinforcing intergenerational cycles of poverty.⁸

An estimated 246 million learners experience different forms of violence in and around school every year,⁹ with more than one in three reporting having experienced bullying.¹⁰ Children are too often targets of violence, discrimination and exclusion based on their socioeconomic, disability or migrant status or for being, or perceived to be, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex or queer. School violence has a significant impact on health, well-being and learning outcomes and social cohesion.

Even before COVID-19, in 60 countries, largely in Africa, there were 73 million children living in extreme poverty, food insecurity and hunger, unreached by school health and nutrition interventions.¹¹ At least 10 million unintended pregnancies occur annually among adolescent girls aged 15-19, often unfairly signaling the end of their formal education.^{12,13} While adolescent childbearing rates are declining in most regions, they remain high in many countries and maternal complications are the leading cause of death among girls aged 15-19 globally. Five in six new HIV infections in Sub-Saharan Africa are among girls aged 15-19.¹⁴

Access to education during and after emergencies and protracted crises continues to challenge the right to education and outcomes of learning for millions. The number of forcibly displaced people reached a record high of 100 million people in 2022, among them nearly 32.4 million refugees – half of whom are under the age of 18.¹⁵ More than 11,000 reported attacks on schools, universities, students, and personnel occurred between 2015 and 2019, harming over 22,000 students and educators in at least 93 countries.¹⁶ Failure to meet the educational needs of those affected by emergencies only creates further a crisis within a crisis.

It is time to act!

We can no longer gloss over and lament the fact that poor access to quality education and the unmet well-being needs of learners lead to poor learning outcomes, poor progression to and retention in secondary and tertiary education, and ultimately limited opportunities for lifelong learning. High drop-out rates point to an exclusion crisis within education systems. We must tackle head on the barriers and root causes of exclusion, and effectively respond to the impact of COVID-19 and related school closures.



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We must take our knowledge and leverage our capacity to address learning poverty. Far too many learners exit education systems without the foundational knowledge, skills, attitudes and behaviours needed for life, work, community development and leadership.¹⁷ The learning crisis is deepening: an estimated 70% of 10-year-olds in low and middle-income countries are unable to understand a simple written text, compared to 57% before the pandemic.¹⁸

The poor quality of education within countries also has implications for equity. A painful legacy of this is women's illiteracy: in 2019, women still accounted for almost two-thirds of all adults unable to read, a proportion unchanged in 25 years.¹⁹ The learning crisis was exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic and its associated school closures, lost learning hours, and increased dropout rates.²⁰ More transformative actions are needed to ensure inclusive, equitable, safe and healthy schools where learners can thrive.

What does transformation look like?

Transform is not reform. Reform upon reform has not led us to where we should be. Transforming education calls for far-reaching, bold and evidence-based actions on the key levers that can disrupt the status quo and turn around the trajectory of education from lethargy, stagnation and most recently, the shock and aftershocks of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Inclusive, transformative education must ensure that all learners have unhindered access to and participation in quality education, that they are safe and healthy, free from violence and discrimination, and are supported with comprehensive care services within school settings. This is essential to unlock the potential of learners in all their diversity; end harmful gender norms, attitudes and practices; and transform institutions to achieve just, equal, accepting, inclusive, sustainable and peaceful societies.

As we transform education systems, we must also transform our own attitudes and beliefs about education. We must recognize that learners in all their diversities have a right to education, and that education for all is an effective investment in our collective future. We must reach out to, and seek collaboration with, partners beyond the education sector. We must critically reflect on our perception of education and its role, and forcefully challenge social stigmas, biases and harmful norms that may lead to inequitable and discriminatory practices in education.

Governments around the world have committed to inclusive, equitable and quality education through Sustainable Development Goal 4, but many must overcome roadblocks to achieve this. These vary depending on the country context, but include:

- Limited political leadership and accountability frameworks



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- Poor enabling environments, including absent or unimplemented legislation, policy and institutional frameworks, international conventions, and weak capacity for enforcement
- Limited individual and institutional capacities in many education systems, including as a result of under-resourcing and insufficient professional development opportunities for education system personnel
- Insufficient domestic and/or inflexible international financing, gaps in long-term investment and planning, and resource allocation to reach the most marginalized learners
- A high degree of risk aversion to taking the radical steps to address the known cause of educational exclusion and underperformance
- Growing insecurity, conflict and inter-state wars, resulting in massive displacement, attacks on schools, students and teachers, and the undermining of educational opportunities
- Entrenched cultural and societal norms that impede inclusion, equity and equality.

Identifying and understanding the causal factors of exclusion and vulnerability and the roadblocks preventing action must be the first step to transform education. Governments and their partners must urgently address the gaps in data, budgeting and planning to ensure progressive universalism in education, making a commitment to all learners while prioritising those farthest behind.²¹ But this is not enough. Urgent leadership is required to implement high-impact, evidence-based and cost-effective interventions to deliver transformative education at scale.

There are immediate needs to be tackled in the recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic as a matter of urgency. The most marginalized will need a rapid support to return to and remain in school, catch up on lost learning, and to access health, nutrition and protection support.²² Accelerated education, a focus on quality catch-up and bridging programmes, and flexible complementary learning support are part of the solution. We must focus on foundational literacy and numeracy, while supporting the development of a full range of knowledge, skills, attitudes and behaviours for lifelong learning.

Medium-term changes must be implemented to make progress on SDG 4, and to ensure education systems are truly inclusive, equitable and gender-transformative. The essential package for transformation includes:

- Policies and legislation that protect rights, promote inclusion, prevent and address all forms of stigma, discrimination and exclusion. Countries taking bold and needed action in these areas include Namibia, Sierra Leone and the United Republic of Tanzania which have removed bans on pregnant girls and young mothers attending schools; Jamaica's policy interventions addressing boys' disengagement from education; and Bangladesh, India and Indonesia which undertook legal reforms to raise the legal age of marriage to 18.²³ Ghana also created an inter-ministerial committee between the Ministries of Health, Gender, Children and Social Protection, Local Government and Rural Development; and Transport to implement the inclusive education policy. In Colombia, an Intersectoral Commission, chaired by the Presidency of the Republic with ministries, government agencies and institutes, is advancing the national policy for the holistic development of young children. An evaluation found that the implementation of actions highlighted in the policy



contributed to a 48% increase in access to early childhood services among rural populations between 2011 and 2017.²⁴

- Education sector plans and budgets that place equity, inclusion and gender equality at the centre and that put the money where it is most needed. Ministers of Education in numerous countries in Africa have committed to include and increase clearly delineated budgets, strategies and commitments to gender equality in and through education through the Freetown Manifesto for Gender-Transformative Leadership in Education.²⁵ The inclusion of refugee and vulnerable migrant children in national education system planning is also occurring through the implementation, as applicable, of the Global Compact on Refugees, and the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration.²⁶ Removing school fees and other hidden education costs through cash transfers has also proven effective in increasing girls' secondary school participation in Brazil, Colombia, Guatemala and Mexico, among other countries.
- Quality data production, dissemination, and use. This requires the strengthening of national data systems that ensure that the most invisible are visible, including demonstrating the impact of intersecting vulnerabilities through disaggregated data. For example, Fiji's education monitoring information system includes an accessibility audit of schools with the engagement of disabled persons' organizations and students with disabilities, and student-level information on difficulties experienced by learners with disabilities, which enables the accessibility of schools to be verified by students and teachers with disabilities, through their involvement in the monitoring and evaluation system. In much of South America and Europe, refugees are accounted for in national education information management systems, and consequently in associated planning and resource allocation. In Malawi and South Africa, the Accountability for Gender Equality in Education (AGEE) project has been supporting participatory methodology to monitor and evaluate gender equality in education.²⁷ In Italy, accountability for gender equality in education and in all other policies is carried out through a gender budgeting process and annual gender budget reports, with an analysis of the State financial accounts.
- Teachers and educators as key partners for transformation. Examples of good practice include mobile and itinerant teachers with specialist skills in Bangladesh, Burkina Faso and Togo, who are supporting and mentoring class teachers and providing ongoing support to students with specific needs.²⁸ In Chad, refugee teachers are included in national teacher training initiatives, allowing them to obtain recognition and certification of their skills and to teach in national schools. In Africa, the Forum for African Women Educationalists (FAWE) has been supporting gender-responsive pedagogy since 2005, with its teachers' handbook used as a reference material in teaching training colleges and schools in nearly 15 countries across the continent.²⁹
- Curricula and learning materials that celebrate diversity, promote equality, and offer pathways to learning and life beyond school. This includes countering harmful gender norms, attitudes and practices through gender-transformative education. For example, Nepal has supported reforms to remove gender stereotypes from textbooks, including guidelines, gender audits, and policy calling for a 5-year review and 10-year revision process.³⁰ Targeted actions are also needed to attract out-of-school children and youth, including migrant and refugee children and youth, to access or return to school where they can be welcomed and supported to learn. Accelerated education programmes



that are flexible, inclusive and age-appropriate have increased the integration of refugee children into national education systems in Turkey³¹ and Uganda.³² In Bangladesh, almost 750,000 children in rural, disadvantaged subdistricts and slums are enrolled in 22,000 learning centres through an initiative combining formal and non-formal education enabling learners to complete primary and transition into secondary.³³

- School and learning environments that are physically, mentally, and socially safe and conducive for learning. Evidence shows that mental health and psychosocial support interventions can lead to a reduction in distressing emotions and physical illness, an increase in interest in attending school and completing homework, an increased sense of safety, and can support development of critical social-emotional skills and other nonacademic skills.³⁴ This is needed more than ever, as the global prevalence of anxiety and depression increased by a massive 25% in the first year alone of the COVID-19 pandemic.³⁵ Examples of good practice in creating safe spaces include the Finnish KiVa antibullying programme, the most widely used bullying prevention programme in the world, and Promundo’s Programme H in over 45 countries, including Bosnia and Herzegovina, Brazil, Ethiopia and India.³⁶ In Argentina, provincial governments have opened ‘maternity rooms’ in secondary schools, supporting adolescent mothers to continue their education and have access to early childhood education support for their children – kickstarting their children’s development, and overcoming a major barrier for girls’ continuity of education.³⁷
- Intersectoral partnerships to ensure the health and well-being of learners. The School Meals Coalition, for example, is joined by 66 governments and 65 partner organizations with the objective to massively scale up school health and nutrition interventions for more effective and equitable education systems.³⁸ The Our Rights, Our Lives, Our Future (O³) initiative has also supported ministries of education to deliver life skills-based HIV and sexuality education to 28 million learners in 32 Sub-Saharan African countries.³⁹ In Finland, free school meals are offered from pre-primary to upper secondary education, and heavily subsidized at tertiary level. Finland’s over 70-year history of free school meals has made a major impact on inequality in education.⁴⁰
- Engagement of youth, parents and communities as genuine partners to the realization of inclusive, equitable, safe and healthy learning environments, not just as an optional add-on. Youth-led networks and activists are active at community, national, regional and global levels; active advocates for transformative approaches include the Global Partnership for Education’s Youth Leaders, the SDG4Youth Network, the Refugee Education Council and Transform Education, hosted by the UN Girls’ Education Initiative (UNGEI).⁴¹

Transform Now, Secure Futures: Key Recommendations

The time for excuses is over: we need decisive action now. The future will be lost unless transformation is achieved now. The importance of addressing the roadblocks to achieving more inclusive, equitable, safe and healthy schools is well-understood, yet progress remains uneven and stilted. Change *is* possible, as examples from countries that are overcoming roadblocks show.



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Transforming education requires long-term, sustained, bold and radical political commitment, sound planning, robust use of evidence and strong consultative processes. It requires a significant increase in investment in education that guarantees **adequate domestic budgets and resources** based on realistic unit costs to guarantee **good quality education**. The right to education must begin with laying a strong foundation that begins with **comprehensive early childhood development and education** to enable all children to benefit from an early start and as part of lifelong inclusive learning. These are essential investments to reduce poverty, violence, unemployment, poor health and gender inequality.

To realise this transformation, governments and their partners must:

- **Protect rights and change mindsets.** We must begin with policies, legislation and plans that protect rights, promote inclusion, prevent and address all forms of stigma, discrimination and exclusion. This has to be accompanied, though, with interventions that stimulate changes in mindsets as these frameworks alone will not lead to equality. This includes ending bans on pregnant girls and young mothers⁴² in schools and amending laws on minimum age of marriage and employment which rob children of their childhood. It also calls for action to facilitate young people's access to sexual and reproductive health information and services, including contraception, to support their healthy transition to adulthood. All learners must have access to educational pathways that recognize, accept and respond to their diversity and meet their holistic educational, health and social needs.
- **Invest in those furthest behind.** Transformative strategies must be costed and financed in education sector plans; accountability mechanisms and cross-sectoral partnerships established; and capacity built for gender-transformative disaster risk reduction, resilience and emergency preparedness.⁴³ Equitable, efficient and effective pro-poor resource mobilization and allocation for those furthest behind are needed, based on education plans and budgets that put learners, equity, inclusion and gender equality at the centre. Key strategies to overcoming financial barriers to education and early school leaving include subsidizing indirect costs associated with schooling, providing social protection programmes such as cash transfers for poor families, and promoting a twin-track approach that transforms education systems while also targeting specific investments to groups that need them. Governments and their partners must leverage innovative financing to bring in more and better resources to reach the most disadvantaged and marginalized groups.
- **Ensure visibility of the least visible.** Governments must account for every boy and girl who is accessing, participating, learning and thriving in schools – and who isn't. This calls for the creation and maintenance of a data culture and systems for quality data production, dissemination, and use. As a starting point, all data must be disaggregated by sex, age, location, nationality, language, disability, and where relevant ethnicity and religion, as well as by other dimensions that lead to marginalization. These data must be examined with an intersectional lens that identify and address the factors that lead to inequity, exclusion and gender inequality including structural barriers and norms which prevent learners from accessing, learning and completing their education. Data collection must be more standardized, comparable, multi-sectoral, sensitive, timely and reliable. It must inform the effective and equitable allocation of resources at all phases, including for the most marginalized in emergencies and protracted crises. Participatory, citizen-inclusive data gathering, and digital advancements and big data, with the required protections, should also be leveraged.



- **Empower teachers to empower learners.** Support the professional development of teachers and educators to deliver inclusive, learner-centred, gender-transformative pedagogy and ensure adequate planning time and resources.⁴⁴ This should empower them to ~~develop~~ facilitate and support learners' agency, self-efficacy and voice, and create safe spaces that respect difference and diversity and meet *all* learners' needs. Teachers should be trained to actively recognize and challenge interpersonal biases, stereotypes, discriminatory practices and imbalances of power. Governments must also close gaps in the supply of teachers and educators in rural and disadvantaged schools and emergency and protracted crises contexts, and break the glass ceiling for women in teaching and education leadership positions.⁴⁵
- **Build the foundations for learning to live together.** Ensure curricula and learning materials promote gender equality, peace and non-violence, and appreciation of diversity, in line with SDG target 4.7 and SDG 5.1.⁴⁶ This includes expanding gender-transformative education which empowers learners to examine, challenge and change harmful gender norms and masculinities, gender-based violence and power imbalances. This must start from pre-primary education, as children internalize gender norms, stereotypes and identities early, limiting their understanding of their abilities and opportunities.⁴⁷ Support all children, including the most marginalized, to gain foundational knowledge, skills, attitudes and behaviours by meeting them where they are on their learning trajectory and helping them reach their full potential.
- **Create safe learning spaces to thrive.** Governments must prevent violence and bullying in and around schools, attacks on schools and ensure inclusive and accessible universally designed learning spaces, including through the endorsement and full implementation, where applicable, of the Safe Schools Declaration, the Guidelines for Protecting Schools and Universities from Military Use during Armed Conflict, and the Comprehensive School Safety Framework.⁴⁸ Key features of a transformational approach include: strong, bold and transformational leadership to tackle violence, training and support for teachers in positive discipline and inclusive classroom management, curriculum-based approaches, reporting mechanisms to respond to violence and bullying, strong links to external health and protection services; and school infrastructure that is accessible, adaptable and equipped to deal with the impacts of climate change.
- **Nourish healthy bodies and healthy minds.** Establish partnerships and engage multiple sectors to expand integrated and comprehensive school health and nutrition, including school meals, nutrition education, deworming, iron and folic acid supplementation, vision and audio screening, vaccination, malaria prevention, comprehensive sexuality education including access to sexual and reproductive health services or referrals, mental health, water and sanitation including menstrual health-related information and products.⁴⁹ Address urgently the severe impact on mental health and well-being that COVID-19 pandemic has had on learners, teachers and school staff through school-based and linked counselling, social and emotional learning and greater recognition that a healthy mind and body are key to learning.
- **Realise the idiom, 'it takes a village'.** A new social contract for education demands strong community and school linkages, and the meaningful engagement of learners, parents, and community organizations working on protecting the rights of children and young people. This includes coordinated collaboration at various levels for the holistic development of learners, and the



end of siloed approaches – with shrinking economic resources, the world can't and shouldn't finance them and they are not effective. Intergenerational, multi-sectoral, and coordinated collaboration is required to meet the health, protection, social and education needs of all learners, including to strengthen education in emergencies.⁵⁰

Synergies and alignment across Action Tracks and their sub-themes

Equity, inclusion, gender equality, health and well-being, safe learning environments, and education in emergencies and protracted crises are essential themes across all Action Tracks of the TES. Areas that merit attention across all Action Tracks are provided below as key considerations.

AT 2: Learning and skills for life, work, and sustainable development:

- Expand demand-driven, industry-responsive and rights-based education and training systems that consider equity and gender equality, with particular attention to supporting the education and training of learners from under-represented and marginalized groups with a view to ensuring that they obtain qualifications and increase their employability.
- Scale up family literacy and skills programmes.
- Scale up access to role models and mentors, and school counselling to dismantle stereotypes and tackle social norms on careers 'suitable' for women and men, persons with disabilities, or other learners and open up equal pathways to education.
- Revamp climate education to equip learners with the knowledge and skills needed to tackle the climate crisis, exercise their rights, and challenge the systems and norms which reinforce gender, climate and other social injustices around the world.
- Encourage parental engagement in education with targeted interventions and/or opening opportunities for them to participate actively in the school.

AT 3: Digital learning and transformation:

- Close the digital divide and develop digital solutions that ensure the full and equal participation of *all* learners. Harness the potential of technologies for inclusion and avoid over-reliance on single technology solutions, closing gaps in digital access, knowledge, skills and leadership.
- Harness the potential for education technology to tackle and prevent online bullying, gender-based violence and harmful gender norms, and to build students' and teachers' attitudes, behaviours and skills to support justice, inclusion, health and gender equality.
- Build the capacities of teachers, counsellors and the whole school community to offer transformative education and career orientation to deconstruct stereotypes and redress gender and other gaps in digital literacy and participation in STEM.
- Invest in robust research on education technology, assessing impact, cost-effectiveness and equity implications before committing resources to scaling up interventions.

AT 4: Teachers, teaching and the teaching profession

- Train and support teachers and education support personnel on gender-transformative pedagogies, how to prevent and address school violence, and to help learners adopt healthier choices and challenge rigid gender norms.



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- Remove the glass ceiling that prevents women from accessing education management and school leadership positions, alongside fulfilling commitments to ensuring adequate supply of qualified teachers made in SDG target 4.c and SDG 5.5.
- Train and support teachers and education personnel to identify and adapt to the learning needs of diverse learners – core skills that will benefit all children and youth.
- Renew attention to teacher recruitment, preparation and support, particularly in locations with severe teacher shortages, and boost inclusion by ensuring that teacher diversity mirrors student diversity.

AT 5: Financing of education

- Protect and increase education budgets, increase development aid to education, and ensure education reaches 10% of humanitarian finance⁵¹ focusing on capacity building for local and national responders, and ensure equitable financing to support marginalized children and reduce inequalities. Address immediate needs, while building system capacity to address equity, inclusion, health and gender equality in tangible and sustained ways.
- Leverage innovative financing to – in line with SDG 4 – provide 12 years of free, publicly-funded, inclusive, equitable and quality education to all, without discrimination. Recognize that the additional investments required to reach the most marginalized and disadvantaged is well worth it as it transforms societies towards peace and equality.
- Provide supplemental or top up funding to governments who increasingly recognise the wide-ranging benefits of school health and nutrition programs in education, and who are seeking to ensure scale and reach for all learners, particularly the most vulnerable.

Action Track 1 has also developed short overviews that provide a more in-depth understanding for each of five sub-thematic areas considered under this Action Track: 1) inclusion and equity; 2) gender-transformative education; 3) safe schools; 4) school health and nutrition; and 5) education in emergencies. These are included as an Annex to this document.



Sources

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- ⁷ UNESCO. 2022. [Leave no child behind: Global report on boys' disengagement from education](#). Paris, UNESCO.
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- ²⁵ [Freetown Manifesto for Gender-Transformative Leadership in Education](#) developed through the Gender at the Centre Initiative, a programme implemented by UNGEI and UNESCO IIEP and supported by UNICEF, GPE, UNESCO and the governments of Italy, France, United Kingdom, Germany and the European Union.
- ²⁶ See: The [Global Compact on Refugees](#), and the [Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration](#).
- ²⁷ See the [AGEE](#) website; and UNESCO. 2020. [Global Education Monitoring Report 2020: Inclusion and education](#). Paris, UNESCO, p. 84. The [Washington Group on Disability Statistics](#), the [Inter-Agency Group on Education Inequality Indicators](#) are also important initiatives.



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UN Transforming Education Summit

Action Track 1 on Inclusive, equitable, safe and healthy schools

ANNEX TO THE DISCUSSION PAPER

Discussion Paper (Final draft – 15 July 2022)

The members of Action Track 1 have also developed short overview papers that provide a more in-depth understanding for each of five sub-thematic areas considered under this Action Track, namely:

- 1) inclusion and equity
- 2) gender-transformative education
- 3) safe schools and learning environments
- 4) school health and nutrition, and
- 5) education in emergencies.

These are included as an Annex to the discussion paper for Action Track 1 on Inclusive, equitable, safe and healthy schools for further guidance.



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Paper 1: Counted, Participating, Achieving: Equitable and Inclusive Systems that Leave No One Behind

Overview

Inclusion means all children being counted, participating and achieving with no one left behind. This includes children with disabilities as well as many other groups currently at risk of exclusion. Inclusion is the process of transforming the education system to take diversity and multiplicity of needs into account, respect and value such diversity, and eliminate all forms of discrimination.

Since 2010, progress has stalled on expanding educational opportunities. Children from poor households, rural areas, children with disabilities, ethnic and linguistic minorities, adolescent girls and other marginalized groups have been left behind. Intersecting barriers including economic and institutional barriers, discrimination and the inequitable allocation of resources continue to exclude and segregate children. COVID-19 has compounded these inequalities. The Futures of Education report¹ calls for a new social contract on education based on human rights principles including inclusion and equity.

The transformation that is needed involves (1) An inclusive COVID-19 recovery that tracks every child's entry into or return to school, (2) Advancing on SDG 4 through equitable financing, legislative frameworks, removal of institutional and social barriers to inclusion, individualized support, curriculum reform, and data systems that count all learners, (3) Inclusive education systems with universal, fee-free education from pre-primary to upper secondary.

We recommend a system-wide 'twin-track' approach that will both promote a culture of inclusion and provide targeted support to those at highest risk of exclusion. Political leadership, sufficient financing, legislation, institutional frameworks and capacity, and a steady focus on making systems equitable and inclusive, are needed for transformation to take place. Within this approach, we call on governments to take five **key actions** with transformative potential, particularly in low and lower middle-income settings:

1. Build and improve school facilities to ensure all children have access to pre-primary, primary and secondary schools near their home.
2. Create and distribute learning and teaching resource materials in accessible formats for children with visual, audio and other print disabilities, as well as materials in local languages, and train teachers on using them and on how to support a diversity of learners.
3. Generate more data and evidence to identify who is excluded, what barriers they face, and how they can most effectively be reached, including as part of the COVID-19 recovery.
4. Build education system capacity to plan, monitor and report on inclusion and equity.
5. Remove institutional barriers that exclude and segregate children, including fees and other costs, high-stakes examinations, and reliance on separate special schools for children with disabilities.



Context

The world made dramatic progress on expanding educational opportunities between the 1990s and 2010, but since then **progress has slowed to a halt**. Some 259 million children, adolescents and youth remain out-of-school, the vast majority of them in low and lower-middle income countries; an additional 33 million children of pre-primary age are not enrolled in education. In low-income countries, one-third of children do not complete primary school and only 2 in 5 complete lower secondary grades. The children who are left behind are predominantly those from poor backgrounds and living in rural areas. Disproportionately, they are also adolescent girls, children with disabilities, ethnic and linguistic minorities, and other marginalized groups.

Children with disabilities are among the most marginalized in education. They are 49% more likely to have never attended school than those without disabilities in low- and middle-income countries.² They are more likely to drop out due to multiple barriers, including stigma, lack of trained teachers, inadequate learning materials and inaccessible facilities. Many countries still lack inclusive education legislation and definitions of inclusive education in their policies, and children with disabilities who are in school often learn in segregated environments.³

Ethnic and linguistic minorities face disadvantages including language of instruction being different from their mother tongue, prevalence of discriminatory attitudes and wider social exclusion.⁴

Homeless and street children; children in care homes, orphanages and hospitals; difficult to reach households; and nomadic and pastoralist populations are among marginalized groups who are commonly not even counted in surveys and censuses, so that the extent of their exclusion remains unknown.⁵

Persistent barriers maintain inequalities and exclusion in access to education, full participation, and learning. These include conflict and crisis; distance to school; economic barriers such as fees, transport and other costs; gender inequality; discrimination; limited capacity of teachers to respond to individuals' learning needs; unfair distribution of resources and unequal allocation of qualified teachers; and institutional barriers such as high-stakes examinations and segregated school systems. In many low and lower middle-income countries, particularly at the secondary level, there are not enough school places for all children to attend, meaning that the disadvantaged drop out. Overall education spending is usually pro-rich as a result of the allocation to different levels of schooling,⁶ limiting the resources that could address these barriers.

Multiple barriers **intersect** with each other to compound disadvantage. Poverty and income inequality intersect with gender discrimination, location, ethnicity, language and indigenous identity to further marginalize children. Disability affects access across all regions and income groups when inclusive policies are not in place, but the barriers to education experienced by those with disabilities are compounded by poverty.⁷ Children with disabilities are more than twice as likely as children without disabilities to be victims of violence.⁸ Adolescent girls' exclusion is compounded by poverty and rural location, and they are at greater risk of sexual exploitation and abuse, violence, teenage pregnancy and HIV infection.



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COVID-19 and school closures in response to the pandemic are likely to have had the worst impact on groups that were already marginalized. Children with disabilities are particularly at risk of having been left out of distance learning modalities. In one survey, one in five students with a disability had to drop out of their education programme due to limited online access, loss of income and inaccessible learning resources.⁹ The digital divide has disproportionately affected girls, those living in rural and remote areas, and poor households.¹⁰ School closures result in huge increases in teenage pregnancies, child marriage, gender-based and sexual violence, and sexual exploitation¹¹ – all impacts likely to have been felt most keenly among already-marginalized groups.

Inclusion means all children being **counted, participating** and **achieving**, with **no one left behind**. It recognizes that children with disabilities are often among the most marginalized, but that overlapping mechanisms affect others on account of gender, location, poverty, disability, ethnicity, indigeneity, language, religion, migration or displacement status, sexual orientation or gender identity expression, incarceration, beliefs and attitudes. Inclusion is the process of transforming the education system, and society as a whole, so that they take diversity and the multiplicity of needs into account, respect and value such diversity, and eliminate all forms of discrimination.¹²

Inclusion and equity are already recognized among international commitments made by most countries and stakeholders. **SDG 4 and the Incheon Declaration and Framework for Action** committed countries to providing 12 years of free, publicly funded, equitable quality primary and secondary education, of which at least nine years are compulsory, and at least one year of free and compulsory quality pre-primary education. The declaration states that “Inclusion and equity in and through education is the cornerstone of a transformative education agenda, and we therefore commit to addressing all forms of exclusion and marginalization, disparities and inequalities in access, participation and learning outcomes. No education target should be considered met unless met by all.”¹³ The Framework for Action provides further normative guidance on what inclusive education means: “Inclusive education for all should be ensured by designing and implementing transformative public policies to respond to learners’ diversity and needs, and to address the multiple forms of discrimination ... which impede the fulfilment of the right to education.”¹⁴

The **Cali commitment to equity and inclusion in education**¹⁵ reaffirmed a definition of inclusion as transformative and about eliminating all forms of discrimination in and through education, and called on governments and other stakeholders to accelerate efforts, including through specific attention to inclusion within a rights-based approach in legislative planning and policy frameworks. The **Global Disability Summit in February 2022** aimed to accelerate progress through concrete commitments made by a range of stakeholders, including donors and country governments, with a tracking system to monitor progress on these commitments. The **Futures of Education Report**¹⁶ calls for a new social contract on education based on human rights principles including inclusion and equity.



Transforming Education: Counted, participating, achieving: Equitable and inclusive systems that leave no one behind

The transformation that is needed to make education systems around the world equitable and inclusive involves ensuring all children are *counted*, so that their needs are understood; can *participate* in their local schools without discrimination and with respect for their diverse needs; and are able to *achieve* relevant learning. There are immediate needs to be tackled now, in the recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic; medium-term changes that will be needed to make progress on SDG 4; and longer-term aspirations that must be met if systems are to become truly inclusive.

Immediate needs: recovery from COVID-19

Currently 43 million learners remain affected by school closures in response to COVID-19. The most marginalized have been disproportionately affected by school closures, and will need the most support to return and catch up on missed learning.¹⁷ Those most likely to have been excluded include the rural poor, children with disabilities, especially children with intellectual, communication and psycho-social disabilities, girls, ethnic and linguistic minorities, children affected by displacement, hard-to-reach missing out-of-school children, and learners living with HIV. COVID-19 education response plans need to be inclusive of all children, for example ensuring that virtual learning platforms are accessible, catch-up classes are inclusive for children with disabilities or specific learning needs, and exclusionary streaming by ability is avoided.

Tools such as the RAPID Learning Recovery Framework aim to support countries through this process, including by tracking which children drop out, for what reasons, and whether they return to school; and by supporting teachers to adapt their teaching to students' learning levels.¹⁸ Strategies need to be in place to enable pregnant girls and teenage mothers to access learning, while supporting provisions for childcare. Health, education and social service systems, and other support mechanisms, need to be connected, positioning schools as an entry point to providing gender-sensitive support, protection, and referrals for all learners.¹⁹

The medium term: Advancing on SDG4

Transformations needed in the medium term include:

- Data systems that count the most marginalized, and that can provide an understanding of the intersecting barriers that exclude them.
- Equitable financing to support all marginalized children and reduce inequalities. Direct funding away from parallel segregated systems and towards inclusive education.
- Legislative frameworks that enshrine the right to inclusive education and the need to prevent all forms of stigma, discrimination, segregation and exclusion.
- Making reasonable accommodations and providing individualized support and services to meet the needs of all children – including their health, nutrition, participation and well-being as well as learning. Multi-sectoral approaches are needed to do this, ensuring that roles, responsibilities and coordination mechanisms are clearly delineated and supported. Integrated service delivery approaches can improve school retention.²⁰



- Change to curricula and textbooks to be inclusive of all groups and avoid discrimination, including their availability in indigenous and local languages, and available in multiple accessible formats. Review of teacher training curricula to better address inclusive education principles and curriculum differentiation for learners.
- Systems-level policy measures that can improve equity in learning outcomes, including limiting grade repetition; counterbalancing potential negative impacts of school choice on inequality; avoiding early tracking and selection into different types of school (for example, vocational versus academic), and promoting a common core of learning across school types.²¹ High-stakes examinations tend to limit expansions of enrolment²² and, alongside systems of private tuition²³ and segregation into different types of school, can reinforce inequalities and discrimination in education systems. High-stakes examinations during the return to school from COVID-19 need to be considered carefully, with decisions driven by concerns for fairness, equity and inclusion.²⁴
- More inclusive and flexible accelerated education programs can help out-of-school adolescents, especially those overaged, to return to school, increase their chance of transition to secondary and prevent dropout.²⁵
- Strategies to prevent violence in and around school need to be written explicitly in the education sector plan and accompanied with key indicators, action plans and budgets.

Longer-term transformations

- **Making secondary education free and universal** – in accordance with SDG 4 – will require major additional investments and increased domestic financing, including through fiscal reform.²⁶ Many more secondary school places are needed, prioritizing remote and rural areas where the need is greatest, and with substantial investment in qualified teachers; and in addition to eliminating fees, needs-based subsidies may be required to offset hidden costs and retain children from poor households.
- **Universalizing quality inclusive pre-primary education** will also require major investments; pre-primary is the least well financed sub-sector. Including children from the poorest households, those from rural areas, and those with disabilities in pre-primary education will have a huge impact in terms of later school retention, individual academic progress and subsequent success in school.²⁷
- A **twin-track** approach that transforms education systems so that they value diversity while also targeting specific investments to groups that need them. This implies a wide-ranging transformation that will take time and resources.²⁸ The first track means systems that embed a culture of inclusion, value diversity, promote gender equality and are designed to welcome and ensure success of all learners in all their diversity, inclusive of learners with disabilities. It requires cultural changes, policy and financing changes, inclusion in education sector plans and budgets, building capacity, shared responsibility for inclusion, inclusive pedagogy as part of quality teaching, and avoiding divisions between general and special education. The second track requires **targeted investment to address specific requirements of marginalized groups**. For children and youth with disabilities, this involves creation of school-based support systems to ensure reasonable accommodation is provided; targeted support to learners with disabilities; and avoiding grouping of students by disability or ability level. More broadly it means identifying and removing the barriers that exclude children.



Key initiatives, coalitions, networks and platforms

Many bilateral and multilateral donors, CSOs and NGOs are undertaking important initiatives and investments around inclusion and equity in education. Some key initiatives are listed below.

- **[Global Partnership for Education](#)**: GPE's new operating model aims to support transformation of education systems so that they leave no one behind, focusing on the countries in greatest need, and with partner countries choosing to prioritize areas including access, inclusion and gender equality.
- **[Girls' Education Challenge](#)**: funded by the United Kingdom (UK), this global fund aims to transform the lives of the most marginalized girls, including those with disabilities.
- **[Disability Inclusive Development](#)**: a consortium project led by Sightsavers and funded by the UK operating in Bangladesh, Jordan/Lebanon, Kenya, Nepal, Nigeria and Tanzania.
- The **[Inclusive Education Initiative](#)** and **[Disability-Inclusive Education in Africa Program](#)** of the World Bank
- **[Education Plus Initiative](#)**: Co-led by the Executive Directors of UNAIDS, UNESCO, UNFPA, UNICEF and UN Women, this is a rights-based, gender-responsive action agenda to ensure adolescent girls and young women have equal opportunities to access quality secondary education, alongside key education and health services and supports for their economic autonomy and empowerment
- **[Out-of-School Children Initiative](#)**: an initiative launched by UNICEF and UNESCO in 2010, aiming to reduce the number of children who are out of school around the world by profiling excluded children, identifying the barriers that lead to exclusion, and identifying, promoting and implementing sound policies that address exclusion
- **[Global Action for Disability Inclusive Education Working Group \(GLAD IEWG\)](#)**: a coordination body of bilateral and multilateral donors and agencies, the private sector and foundations working to enhance the inclusion of persons with disabilities in international development and humanitarian action.
- **[International Disability Alliance Inclusive Education Flagship Initiative and Task Team](#)**: aims to develop an evidence-based consensus, led by organizations of persons with disabilities, on how best to achieve SDG4 and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Article 24.²⁹
- **[International Disability and Development Consortium \(Inclusive Education Task Group\)](#)**: grouping of civil society organizations promoting inclusive international development and humanitarian action
- Groups working on **data and statistics** include the **[Intersecretariat Working Group on Household Surveys](#)**, the **[Washington Group on Disability Statistics](#)**, the **[Inter-Agency Group on Education Inequality Indicators and Technical Cooperation Group on the Indicators for SDG4](#)**, **[UNICEF Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys \(MICS\)](#)** and **[MICS-Education Analysis for Global Learning and Equity \(EAGLE\)](#)**.



Examples of successful policy interventions and good practices across different regions

- Removing fees and other hidden costs of education has been effective in increasing enrolments across many countries.³⁰
- Cash transfers can have large effects on reducing inequalities in education, and have been successful in increasing girls' secondary school participation in Brazil, Colombia, Mexico and Nicaragua.³¹
- Ensuring that early childhood and primary education receive an adequate share of education financing; that poorer or otherwise disadvantaged geographical areas receive higher funding allocations,³² and that funding formulae for schools take into account socioeconomic status of learners and assess additional needs due to disability.³³
- Sharing expertise and resources (use of resource centres and itinerant teachers as well as specialized resources).³⁴
- Cooperation across government departments, sectors and tiers as well as non-government actors to fill gaps.³⁵ Ghana, for example, developed a five-year plan for implementing inclusive education policy, creating an inter-ministerial committee between the Ministries of Health; Gender, Children and Social Protection; Local Government and Rural Development; and Transport.
- Teacher allocation mechanisms can explicitly allocate more teachers to disadvantaged schools or areas that currently have too few qualified teachers.
- Community engagement to tackle social norms/stigma and discrimination that prevent certain marginalized groups from accessing education, and to consult on policies that affect them. For example, Leonard Cheshire's inclusive education program works with fathers and male community leaders as 'male mentors' who have over time become advocates for the right of girls with disabilities to access education. Provision of role models from similar backgrounds and information on returns to education can increase school participation.³⁶
- Rwanda's inclusive education policy is cross-cutting and multi sectorial. Rwanda shifted to a competence-based curriculum at primary level, and reviewed all subjects through an inclusive lens, in addition to producing specific guidelines to support teachers in terms of implementing inclusive education approaches in schools. Rwanda's 2018 revised national policy for "special needs and inclusive education" outlines the roles and responsibilities of a range of stakeholders, with allocated resources for the whole education system. However, as in many countries, segregated schools are still present and part of the policy, and further support is needed to make an effective transition to a fully inclusive system.
- Support mechanisms for teachers are crucial. Examples such as mobile and itinerant teachers who have specialist skills to support and mentor class teachers and provide ongoing support to students with specific needs have been successful in a number of small-scale initiatives such as in Burkina Faso and Togo, with ministerial involvement.³⁷



Synergies and alignment across Action Tracks and their sub-themes

Inclusion and equity are cross-cutting principles that need to be applied across all areas of system change. There are clear synergies between inclusion and equity and the other Action Tracks of the Transforming Education Summit, as well as other sub-themes within the first Action Track.

- **Learning and skills for life, work, and sustainable development (AT2)** – Opportunities for all types of learning need to be provided equitably and inclusively. There is a need to look at education across the whole spectrum from early childhood development through to TVET and equipping learners to transition from education to employment, and inclusive pathways from education to employment, while avoiding reforms that could worsen inequalities through early tracking, selection and segregation into different types of school.
- **Digital learning and transformation (AT3)** – There is need to leave no one behind by using multiple accessible modes of digital learning, harnessing the potential of technologies for inclusion and avoiding over-reliance on single technology solutions. This includes the production of accessible textbooks in epub formats and universally accessible devices such as tablets. This requires a robust eco-system for the procurement and use of technology.
- **Teachers, teaching and the teaching profession (AT4)** – Inclusive education means training and supporting teachers to be able to identify and adapt to the learning needs of diverse learners – core skills that will benefit all children. This should also include training additional support staff for teachers and ensuring that teachers receive ongoing support and coaching after training.
- **Financing of education (AT5)** – In addition to increasing the quantity of domestic financing, financing must be distributed more equitably and target those with specific needs (see point on Targeted financing above). Inclusive budgeting must be adopted at the outset, so that the costs of moving towards a twin-track approach are embedded into overall education budgets.
- Recognize **multi-sectorial linkages** with inclusive education: e.g., health and rehabilitation assessments to provide assistive devices and support; social protection support that is inclusive of all children; inclusive water, sanitation and hygiene; accessible school environments (both inside and outside the classroom); school feeding to reduce costs associating with schools, improve the well-being of children and support their participation and learning.

Recommendations

The overall recommendation of this paper is that countries adopt a **twin-track approach** to promote a culture of inclusion and provide targeted support to those at highest risk of exclusion.

1. Promote a culture of inclusion that values diversity

- Encourage **social and behavioural change interventions** to tackle stigma and discrimination towards marginalised groups and promote inclusion.
- Plan for **progressive realization of universal education** rights including twelve years of primary and secondary education and one year of pre-primary



- Adopt **legislation** to enshrine the right to inclusive education for all and develop **policy, strategies** and guidance for its enactment. This means defining inclusive education, and developing a timebound strategy to shift from segregated to inclusive education. across all parts of the education system.
- Provide adequate and equitable **financing** for transformation towards inclusive education systems. Budget for inclusive education at the outset using a twin-track approach, not as an afterthought. Mobilize an increased share of domestic resources for free, quality and inclusive national education that considers the capacity development needs of the education workforce.
- Put in place a **framework to ensure the transition** towards inclusive education. At a minimum, this includes training teachers and support staff on inclusive education approaches and pedagogies; supporting parents', caregivers' and children's active participation and raising community awareness about inclusive education; and ensuring schools and classrooms are designed to accommodate the diverse needs of all learners. All children should learn from the same flexible, relevant and accessible curriculum – one that recognizes diversity and responds to various learners' needs.
- Implement strong **accountability** mechanisms that include performance measures and the meaningfully involvement of Organizations of Persons with Disabilities, parents' organizations, and other education networks representing disadvantaged groups, from the programme design phase through the evaluation phase.
- Remove **system-level policies** that perpetuate inequalities and segregation, such as high-stakes examinations, early tracking into different school types, and divisions between general and special education.

2. Provide targeted support to those at highest risk of exclusion

- Disaggregate national education targets by gender, poverty, location, disability, and where possible, other factors of marginalization and exclusion.
- Gather data and evidence on barriers that perpetuate exclusion and use them to identify policies and programs that can remove the barriers.
- Share knowledge and learn from peers on high-impact interventions that remove financial, discrimination, and societal barriers to all children participating in education.
- Use technologies in ways that enhance participation of all children, and avoid over-reliance on single technologies that will exclude some groups of learners.

Five key actions for transformation

Within this twin-track approach, we identify five key actions that could be taken in the short to medium term and have transformational potential on inclusion and equity, particularly in low and lower-middle income countries. These are not necessarily new; many countries are already planning to implement them. However, political leadership, sufficient financing, legislation, institutional frameworks and capacity, and a steady focus on making systems equitable and inclusive will be needed for these actions to be advanced in practice.

1. Build and improve school facilities to ensure all children have access to pre-primary, primary and secondary schools near their home.



2. Create and distribute learning and teaching resource materials in accessible format for children with visual, audio and other print disabilities, as well as materials in local languages, and train teachers on using them and on how to support a diversity of learners.
3. Generate more data and evidence to identify who is excluded, what barriers they face, and how they can most effectively be reached, including as part of the COVID-19 recovery.
4. Build education system capacity to plan, monitor and report on inclusion and equity.
5. Remove institutional barriers that exclude and segregate children, including fees and other costs, high-stakes examinations, and reliance on separate special schools for children with disabilities.

Particular thanks are made to Stuart Cameron of the Global Partnership for Education (GPE) and Asma Maladwala and Wycliffe Otieno of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) for coordinating and drafting this sub-thematic paper for Action Track 1.

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Paper 2: Gender-Transformative Education

Context

While progress has been made in recent decades, gender inequalities persist in education. Gains are fragile as COVID-19, armed conflict, forced displacement, climate-induced disasters, insecurity, and a growing backlash against gender equality, women's and LGBTIQ rights in many contexts threaten to widen inequalities.

Are we fulfilling our promise to leave no one behind?

The primary gross enrolment rate of girls increased by only 11 percentage points between 1995 and 2019, from nearly 79 to 90 percent – less than half a point per year. Although this rate is faster than for boys (whose primary gross enrolment rate increased from 86 to 92 percent over the same period), getting every girl into primary school will not happen until 2050.¹

Globally, girls' primary completion rates have also increased by almost 20 percentage points over the past 25 years to 87%, while boys' have risen from 85% to 90%.² Poverty, location, ethnicity and other factors intersect with gender to compound disadvantage: In at least 20 countries, largely in sub-Saharan Africa, hardly any poor rural young girls complete secondary school³, along with only 11% of the poorest girls in crisis-affected countries.⁴

While girls are more likely than boys to never attend school, boys in many countries are at higher risk of failing to advance and complete their education. In 2020, 132 million of the 259 million children out of school were boys.⁵

An estimated 246 million learners experience violence in and around school every year⁶, with more than 1 in 3 reporting experiencing bullying in the past month.⁷ Children from poorer families, children with disabilities⁸ as well as migrant and LGBTIQ children⁹ far too often endure hostile conditions at school, experiencing physical violence, bullying and discrimination, with resulting impacts on health and well-being as well as educational outcomes.

Poor quality education in many contexts leads to limited learning, poor progression and drop out.¹⁰ Without foundational learning, many children and youth, particularly girls, are unable to acquire the skills needed for life, work and leadership: two out of three 15–24-year-olds (67.5%) not in employment, education or training are young women¹¹, and in 2019 women still accounted for 63% of all illiterate adults.¹²

Education systems must make more explicit and active commitment to addressing the gender-based barriers, stigma and discrimination that hold learners back from fulfilling their right to education and future life, work and leadership opportunities. **But action is also needed to harness education's power**



to unlock the potential of learners in all their diversity, end harmful gender norms, attitudes and practices, and transform institutions to achieve just, equal and inclusive societies.

What does transformation look like? Gender-transformative education.

Governments and their partners must urgently address the gaps in data, budgeting and planning to ensure a progressive universalism of education, prioritising those farthest behind while making a commitment to all learners. But this is not enough. High-impact interventions are needed to deliver gender-transformative education at scale and reach the most marginalized.

Gender-transformative education goes beyond acknowledging and responding to gender disparities within the education system and the learning experience, and strives to transform attitudes and practices within and beyond education systems to support the realisation of gender equality.¹³ It is necessary for the achievement of SDG 4 on inclusive, equitable quality education (particularly target 4.7), and SDG 5 on gender equality and women's empowerment (particularly target 5.1).

Data, budgeting, planning and accountability: In the context of reductions in education spending in many countries as a result of the COVID-19 crisis, there is a need for consistent, flexible and substantive multi-year financing to support education systems to build back equal and deliver gender-transformative education. Key action areas include:

- **Making data systems more gender-responsive:** While ensuring that all data are disaggregated by sex, age, disability and other intersecting dimensions that lead to marginalization and inequality, data systems must find ways of making the most invisible children visible. This includes more sensitive, multi-sectoral and real-time ways of measuring gender gaps in educational participation, progression and learning, including participatory, citizen-inclusive data gathering from households.¹⁴
- **Protecting and increasing education budgets** in countries with significant gender disparities in education, and targeted investments to build system capacity to tackle gender inequality and exclusion in tangible ways.
- **Putting gender equality at the heart of education sector plans and budgets**, applying a gender lens to identify gender disparities and their underlying factors, and financing strategies that transform harmful gender norms and promote gender equality in and through education.¹⁵ This includes increased and clearly delineated budgets, strategies and commitments to gender equality in and through education, including transforming harmful gender norms in pedagogy, curricula, and learning environments.¹⁶
- **Recognizing children and young people, and feminist civil society actors** including national and grassroots actors working on issues such as child marriage, disability rights, child labour, gender-based violence and women's economic empowerment, as essential partners for gender-transformative education.
- **Building an evidence base** on the effectiveness of policies, programmes and interventions that advance gender equality in and through education, and core components of gender-transformative approaches.



High-impact interventions: Where evidence exists, there is a need to invest in and scale up high-impact interventions that overturn restrictive social and gender norms, attitudes and practices, unequal power relations, gender discrimination and wider inequalities present in education and beyond. Where evidence is lacking, greater investments are needed to uncover the interventions and innovations that are effective and required for transformative approaches. Key action areas include to:

- In line with SDG 4, **provide 12 years of free, publicly funded, inclusive, equitable and quality education, without discrimination**, including by subsidizing indirect costs associated with schooling, providing social protection programmes such as cash transfers for poor families, and ensuring that education systems and schools are responsive to gender-specific needs.
- **Support policy and legislative changes** that remove gendered barriers to education, including bans on pregnant girls and young mothers, early tracking and streaming of students, weak laws on the minimum age of marriage and employment, and age of consent laws to access youth-friendly, gender-responsive sexual and reproductive health services.
- **Ensure gender parity and non-discrimination** at all levels and in all subjects of education, and in teaching, education administration and ministerial leadership positions. This includes supporting women teachers with safe housing, transport and other resources needed to work in remote areas, and other efforts to break the glass ceiling within educational leadership and administration.¹⁷
- **Train teachers on gender-transformative pedagogies**, empowering them to challenge rigid gender norms, engender equal treatment and participation in the classroom, build all learners' agency, self-efficacy and voice, and create safe spaces for learners to respect difference, diversity and each other.¹⁸
- **Dismantle rigid gender norms and stereotypes early, and continue to do so throughout the education journey.** Research shows that children internalize gender norms, stereotypes and identities early,¹⁹ limiting their understanding of their abilities and opportunities. Gender-transformative approaches must begin in early childhood education and engage parents, and continue with age-appropriate pedagogy and curricula.
- **Remove stereotypes and gender bias from curricula, teaching and learning materials** and ensure all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to examine, challenge and change harmful gender norms and imbalances of power, and to promote gender equality, in line with SDG target 4.7 and SDG 5.1.
- **Support gender-transformative formal and non-formal education** that critically examine social norms and gender inequalities, such as those driving child marriage and other harmful practices, and challenge harmful masculinities, through curricular, extracurricular and/or community-based activities.
- **Ensure whole-school approaches that create safe, gender-transformative and inclusive spaces** for all learners, ensuring gender-responsive water, sanitation and menstrual hygiene management facilities, prevention and responses to gender-based violence, and support to learners' sexual and reproductive health and rights.



- **Develop and scale up comprehensive sexuality education and gender-transformative life skills programmes** to improve health, help prevent early and unwanted pregnancy, build socio-emotional skills and reduce gender-based violence and bullying.
- **Promote an integrated and coordinated approach** that addresses every learner's holistic education, health and protection needs. Support cross-sectoral, intersectional and intergenerational collaboration across education, health, nutrition gender, protection, youth, employment, economic development and justice ministries and between teachers, school administration, families and communities to safeguard rights and promote equal education pathways and employment.
- **Engage young people, particularly girls and young women, feminist organizations,** as genuine partners for the realization of inclusive, equitable, safe and healthy learning environments.

Gender equality across the Action Tracks

Gender equality is a transversal theme across all Action Tracks of the Transforming Education Summit. Additional recommendations for the other tracks are provided below.

AT 2: Learning and skills for life, work, and sustainable development:

- Work with national governments and other actors to establish demand-driven, industry-responsive and rights-based training systems that integrate gender equality considerations and provide training for the qualification and employability of women and adolescent girls and support gender transformative lifelong learning.
- Scale up access to role models and mentors, and mandatory gender-transformative school counselling to dismantle stereotypes on careers 'suitable' for women and men, and open pathways for careers with gender imbalances in representation.
- Ensure gender-transformative climate education that allows for critical analysis of the enhanced climate vulnerability of women, girls, and LGBTIQ learners and ensure their contributions to advocacy and knowledge systems around disaster risk reduction and sustainable development.

AT 3: Digital learning and transformation:

- Close the gender digital divide and develop inclusive and gender-responsive digital solutions that ensure the full and equal participation of girls, including girls with disabilities, in digital learning.
- Harness the potential for education technology to tackle and prevent online bullying, gender-based violence and harmful attitudes, behaviours and norms, and build students' and teachers' skills to support justice, inclusion and gender equality across a lifetime.
- Build the capacities of teachers, counsellors and the whole school community to offer gender-transformative education and career orientation to deconstruct gender stereotypes and redress gender gaps in digital literacy and participation in STEM.

AT 4: Teachers, teaching and the teaching profession

- Train teachers and education support personnel on gender-transformative pedagogies, enabling them to challenge rigid gender norms, and ensure an enabling environment for them to become agents of change.



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- Make curricula, teaching and learning materials gender-transformative, inclusive and free of stereotypes.
- Remove the glass ceiling that prevents women from accessing education management and educational leadership positions, alongside fulfilling commitments to ensuring adequate supply of qualified teachers made in SDG target 4.c and SDG 5.5.

AT 5: Financing of education

- Protect and increase education budgets, ensuring resources allocated equitably, effectively and efficiently for gender equality, and make targeted investments to build system capacity to tackle gender inequality and exclusion in tangible ways.
- Increase availability and use of disaggregated data, gender assessments, gender budgeting audits and other means to inform planning and budget allocation.
- Finance the implementation of evidence-based responses that aim to prevent or close gender disparities in all aspects and at all levels of education and promote gender-transformative education.
- Fund and partner with young feminist global regional and grassroots organizations to organize, collaborate and collectively advocate to governments and multilateral organizations to ensure gender-transformative approaches in and through education.

Particular thanks are made to Justine Sass of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) for coordinating and drafting this sub-thematic paper for Action Track 1.



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Paper 3: Safe Schools and Learning Environments

Context: Why governments need to prioritize school safety and violence prevention in and through schools

The Transforming Education Summit (TES) is coming at a critical moment when the COVID-19 pandemic, conflict, increased violence against children and the escalating climate and environmental crisis are having a compound negative impact on the wellbeing, learning and safety of children. The TES provides an important moment for governments and decision-makers to first acknowledge that learning cannot happen when the school community is vulnerable to an array of hazards and vulnerabilities, and when violence is widespread. From recognition, corresponding action must demonstrate that the safety of girls, boys and children and youth in all their diversity is a critical priority to enable learning and ultimately strengthen peace and sustainable development.

Violence in and around school as a global, widespread experience in children's lives

- Violence takes many forms including physical, psychological (including hate speech) and sexual violence – each affecting girls and boys in different ways. Violence can happen at school, on the way to or from school, or online. Peers of all ages, teachers, strangers or school personnel can be perpetrators. Children who appear different are particularly vulnerable to victimization. This is especially true for children with disabilities.¹
- Violence is highly traumatic and negatively impacts children's healthy development and learning outcomes.
- 246 million girls and boys experience violence in and around school every year. In some countries, up to 54% of children report experiencing physical and/or sexual school-related violence.² One in three learners have been bullied at least once at school over the last month.³ Half of all school children aged 6-17 years (732 million) live in countries where corporal punishment at school is still not fully prohibited.⁴
- During conflicts and humanitarian crises, risks of violence, in particular gender-based violence, are exacerbated – increasing the challenges already faced by affected communities. Girls who live in conflict zones are 2.5 times more likely to be out of school than those who do not. Out-of-school girls are at greater risk of violence, sexual abuse, early and forced marriage, and human trafficking. In 2020, the Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack (GCPEA) identified over 2,400 reported attacks on education and military use of schools and universities that harmed over 2,700 students and educators globally; attacks on education increased by one-third in 2020 as compared to the previous year.⁵



Given the multipronged and long-term consequences that violence has on children’s learning outcomes and healthy development as well as its enormous economic cost (estimated at US\$11 trillion⁶), addressing the learning crisis can only be done effectively if education systems both ensure the safety of all students and strengthen students and teachers’ skills towards tolerance, gender equality, emotion management and positive conflict resolution. Reversing the learning crisis and preventing violence are complex endeavours, but achievable if done in concert. Indeed, schools and learning environments provide the most powerful protective factor to violence.

Transforming education:

What can we do for safe schools and learning environments?

Decisive action is needed to make education systems safe and true vehicles for sustainability, resilience and peace, even more so as the world faces an unprecedented number of crises. For this, education systems must take every opportunity to mitigate drivers for violence. Among those, gender inequality and discrimination that sustain the use or abuse of power over others are at the root of all forms of violence and need to be prioritized. All efforts to enable learning and make learning environments *inclusive, equitable, safe and healthy* need to be gender-transformative and challenge ingrained patriarchy that is still present in too many settings.

Governments and decision-makers have the responsibility to use over 30 years of research and practice to guide their action.

Examples of evidence-based and best practices interventions

Depending on the context, type of violence, gender and age group, several interventions have proven very effective. The below are just a sample of examples. Many more are readily available⁷ from UNESCO, UNICEF, UNGEI, WHO, the United Kingdom’s What Works: Impact at Scale programme, Save the Children, World Bank, Malala Fund, Safe to Learn and other resources.

- *The Finnish evidence-based KiVa antibullying programme* engages students directly with a range of preventative actions and solution-focused tools to tackle bullying, leading to significant and sustained reductions in self- and peer-reported bullying.⁸
- The Uganda National Teachers Union undertakes *training programmes to support teachers to adopt positive discipline*, helping to keep children in school and improve academic results.⁹
- The Government of South Sudan’s *General Education Sector Plan* includes a strategy for providing safe learning spaces, promoting schools as zones of peace and sensitizing communities on school-related gender-based violence (SRGBV).¹⁰
- Detailed guides for teachers, online teacher training courses and animated videos to use in classrooms, aimed at preventing and responding to violence in schools, have been adopted and widely disseminated by governments in Ukraine, Kyrgyzstan and other states in this region – more than 4,000 teachers and counsellors have already used the online training package.
- The Comprehensive School Safety Framework (CSSF) 2022-2030 – endorsed by more than 60 countries since 2015 through the Worldwide Initiative for Safe Schools - supports policymakers,



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planners, school administrators, and their partners to promote child rights, sustainability and resilience in the education sector. The framework provides a comprehensive, all-hazard approach to resilience and safety, based on a three-pillar approach focusing on safe learning facilities; school safety and educational continuity management; risk reduction and resilience education.

Recommendations: A Call to Action to accelerate progress for all children to be able to learn safely and be agents of change and peace

If we do not act now, the future of a generation and the world's peace is at risk. Governments have the power to prevent this. By closely working first and foremost with children and youth themselves as agents and leaders of their own future – but also with teachers, school personnel and professionals, as well as with partners such as financial institutions, businesses, United Nations agencies, civil society, and other sectors including law enforcement, justice, social welfare, health, and child protection systems – **decision-makers can show that the TES is not only about appearances, it is about tangible change. This change can be seen in the short term when governments:**

- **Accelerate the Implementation of policies and legislation:** All governments must show leadership and political commitment by prohibiting corporal punishment and endorsing international standards to ensure schools are safe for all students, including the *Comprehensive School Safety Framework*,¹¹ *Safe Schools Declaration*,¹² *UNGEI minimum standards on school-related gender-based violence (SRGBV)*,¹³ and the *Safe to Learn Call to Action*.¹⁴ Parties to armed conflict should refrain from using schools and universities for military purposes, including by incorporating the *Guidelines for Protecting Schools and Universities from Military Use during Armed Conflict*¹⁵ in military doctrine, national policies and training.
- **Strengthen prevention and response at the school level, online, and in emergency settings:** All governments must strengthen and scale up **evidence-based prevention approaches** such as emotional learning, gender-transformative and trauma-informed approaches in curricula and teacher training **as accelerators to violence prevention and learning**. All governments must strengthen **child-friendly referral systems to respond to violence effectively, ethically, and in a timely manner**.
- **Shift social norms and support behaviour change:** All governments must **adopt a whole-school approach to challenge discriminatory and violence-conducive or -condoning social norms**, and promote gender equality, inclusivity, non-discrimination and non-violent behaviours. This includes by working with men and boys to promote gender equality and compassionate masculinity.
- **Increase resources and target investments:** All governments must **commit to earmarking, increasing and sustaining resources in effective violence prevention and response approaches, and for inclusive access to schools and other learning environments**, especially in the context of COVID-19 recovery, including by ensuring that long-term flexible funding for education activists is accessible.



- **Generate and use evidence:** All governments must commit to **undertaking high quality, ethical data collection and monitoring and evaluation efforts**, including **strengthening monitoring and reporting of attacks on education**.

Particular thanks are made to Chloë Fèvre of the Safe to Learn Global Initiative for coordinating and drafting this sub-thematic paper for Action Track 1.

Sources for paper on safe schools and safe learning environments

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⁷ Additional examples include:

- The Government of Mozambique, with support from the Global Partnership for Education, is working with partners to *promote school-parent communication* aiming to keep students motivated and to ensure psychosocial support and prevent violence against girls.
- In partnership with the Forum for African Women Educationalists Zimbabwe and UNICEF Sierra Leone, the UN Girls' Education Initiative (UNGEI) piloted the whole school approach minimum standards to prevent SRGBV. The whole school approach takes an intentional focus on dismantling harmful gender norms and breaking the silence around SRGBV. The minimum standards have been included in education sector processes, led by the Ministry of Education in both countries.
- In Bhutan, UNICEF is working with the Ministry of Education to roll out the *Caring for the Caregiver training package initiative*, with support from LEGO Foundation. The initiative focuses on enhancing parent and caregiver mental health and well-being, to prevent violence and neglect, and foster healthy parent-child attachment and relationships, which are critical for children's well-being, development and learning outcomes.
- *Malala Fund Champions* advocate for better protections for girls from violence in and around schools, including harmful gender norms that drive girls' vulnerability.
- In Brazil, Andréia Martins de Oliveira Santo, a member of the Malala Fund's Education Champion Network, is advocating for policy change to better support schools and girls affected by gang violence in Maré, the largest community of favelas in Rio de Janeiro. See more [here](#).
- The UK's *What Works to Prevent Violence* programme conducted a rigorous evaluation of school-based interventions in Afghanistan and Pakistan, concluding schools have unique potential to address violence at scale.
- The E-mentores and E-pana educational platforms in the Dominican Republic, supported by End Violence Fund and developed in partnership with the MoE, Fundación Paniamor, Plan International and UNICEF, reached 50,000 adolescents and 70,000 caregivers. Around 90% of caregivers increased their knowledge.
- UNESCO, UN Women and partners are working in several countries across Asia-Pacific and Eastern and Southern Africa to integrate curricula aiming to increase awareness about gender-based violence and motivate students to take action, including increase peer support and help-seeking skills.



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Paper 4: The Case for School Health and Nutrition: Investing in the Condition of the Learner

Context

The context for this paper is underpinned by the multiple crises that are concurrently threatening the world, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, increasing food insecurity and hunger triggered by conflict, and the climate emergency. School closures during the pandemic intensified an already severe learning crisis, with the greatest consequences for socio-economically vulnerable children who had the least access to remote learning. Poverty and malnutrition, infectious diseases, early and unintended pregnancy, poor mental health and school violence are but a few of the significant barriers to learning and set to increase even further because of such crises. This combination creates the perfect storm to curtail progress in education with further learning losses, rising inequality, and increased drop-out rates.

This paper argues that interventions to address health, nutrition and well-being are among the most effective (and potentially cost-effective) approaches available to governments and non-governmental organizations seeking to transform education systems, making them more inclusive, gender responsive, equitable, healthy and safe. They also help in response to other interrelated issues such as climate change, more sustainable food systems and shifting of harmful social norms that underpin poor health and well-being. Warming temperatures and changing climate will change the prevalence and duration of disease, and potential epidemics. It will severely impact food systems and will have disproportionate adverse effects on girls and young women. School health interventions can be responsive to climate change – or climate adaptive – making education systems more resilient to other outbreaks and climatic events. Such interventions also promote the knowledge, skills and attitudes that learners need to develop healthy and health-seeking behaviours, both at the individual and peer-group level.

Investing effectively in learners' health, nutrition and well-being through programmes that link the education, health and food systems, is at the heart of the 2030 agenda. This multisectoral approach contributes to achieving at least ten of the Sustainable Development Goals related to poverty (SDG1), hunger (SDG2), health (SDG3), education (SDG4), gender equality (SDG5), clean water and sanitation (SDG 6), economic growth (SDG8), reduced inequalities (SDG10), peace, justice and strong institutions (SDG16), and strengthened partnerships (SDG17).



School health and nutrition – a definitionⁱ

School health and nutrition is understood in this paper as an integrated, multi-sectoral approach to design and deliver coordinated and comprehensive strategies, activities and services within the education system for protecting and promoting the physical, emotional and social development, health and well-being of students and the whole school community. Essential components include: health-related policies and practices that address equity, social inclusion and violence prevention in education; health promoting environments conducive to positive physical and psychosocial learning and development – including sanitation and safe water; skills-based curriculum on health, nutrition and comprehensive sexuality education; and school-based and school-linked health and nutrition services, including school meals, micronutrient supplementation, vaccination, oral health promotion, vision screening and treatment, malaria control, deworming, sexual and reproductive health services, and menstrual hygiene management.

What does transformation look like?

Transforming education by investing in the learner

There is growing international recognition of the relationship between education, health and well-being: well nourished, healthy and happy learners learn better, while poor health and well-being has a detrimental effect on school attendance and academic performance, with long-term and intergenerational impacts. The COVID-19 crisis and resulting school closures has reminded us more than ever that schools play a vital role in assuring the health and well-being of learners.

There is clear evidence that SDG4 will likely be unachievable without investment in learners' health, nutrition and wellbeing. In low- and lower-middle-income countries, about 300 million schoolchildren have iron-deficiency anaemia, causing them to lose some six IQ points per child;ⁱⁱ and about 370 million primary schoolchildren lost access to meals during the pandemic, with 150 million still not having access today.ⁱⁱⁱ In Ecuador, 32% of grade repetitions are attributable to undernutrition.^{iv} These conditions translate into the equivalent of between 200 million and 500 million schooldays annually lost because of ill health.^v Around the world, poor mental health is a significant and often ignored cause of suffering that interferes with children's and young people's health and education and their ability to reach their full potential.^{vi}

Health and nutrition have particular relevance to girls' education and gender equity. Some of the most common health conditions affecting education are more prevalent in girls, and gender inequalities and exclusion can place girls at greater risk of ill health, neglect and hunger.^{vii} For example, women and girls are, for physiological reasons, more likely to experience higher rates of anaemia, than are men and boys, and they may miss school due to menstruation and limited personal hygiene management opportunities.^{viii} As the COVID pandemic demonstrated to tragic effect, when girls are out of school they are more vulnerable to forced marriage, early pregnancy and violence.^{ix} At least 10 million unintended pregnancies occur each year among adolescent girls aged 15–19 years.^x For many girls, this spells the end to their formal education and possibly the perpetuation of a cycle of poverty, or poor health for their own child. While adolescent



childbearing is declining in most regions, it remains high in many countries and maternal conditions remain the top cause of mortality among girls aged 15-19 globally. Other sexual and reproductive ill-health that affects girls more than boys, includes HIV, with five in six new HIV infections in Sub-Saharan Africa among girls aged 15-19.^{xi} Compared with girls, adolescent boys experience substantially higher mortality due to unintentional injury, interpersonal violence, alcohol and other psychoactive substances, suicide, and a higher prevalence of harmful drinking and tobacco smoking.^{xii}

Other important drivers of inequity, such as poverty and disability are barriers to education in many countries, and can also be ameliorated by school health and nutrition interventions. Evidence shows that where families undervalue education for girls, especially adolescents, increasing other values of schooling, such as providing food or health services, has a disproportionately positive impact on their attendance and enrolment.^{xiii} Evidence from many countries shows health education that promote skills-based learning, and focus on addressing social drivers of inequality as well as promoting good health (such as comprehensive sexuality education (CSE)) play a vital role in promoting the health and well-being of young people. These approaches contribute to preventing unintended pregnancies, and CSE in particular is a core part of any HIV prevention programme, promoting healthy relationships, and gender equality.^{xiv}

School health and nutrition programmes deliver education outcomes

- School health and nutrition interventions for poor girls and boys, where worms and anaemia are prevalent, could lead to 2.5 years of additional schooling.^{xv}
- Malaria prevention interventions can lead to a 62% reduction in absenteeism.^{xvi}
- Nutritious school meals increase enrolment rates by 9% on average, and attendance by 8%; they can also reduce anaemia in adolescent girls by up to 20%.^{xvii}
- Hand-washing promotion reduces absenteeism due to gastrointestinal and respiratory illnesses by 21% -61% in low-income countries.^{xviii}
- Screening in schools is a cost-effective way to detect and correct impairments that may affect children's ability to learn. Free screening and eyeglasses have led to a 5% higher probability of passing standardized tests in reading and math.^{xix}
- Comprehensive sexuality education encourages the adoption of healthier behaviours, promotes sexual and reproductive health and rights, and improves sexual and reproductive health outcomes, such as HIV infection and adolescent pregnancy rates.^{xx}
- Improving water and sanitation services and supplies in school, as well as knowledge on menstrual hygiene, equips girls to maintain their body hygiene and health with dignity, and may limit the number of school days missed during menstruation.^{xxi}



Recommendations: What does this transformation look like in practice and what would it take?

1. *Action should be taken in all countries and for all children with a twin track approach that provides integrated and relevant school health and nutrition for all learners, as well as targeted actions to reach those furthest behind as early as possible.*

Priorities would be to:

- Put in place inclusive and multisectoral policies and coordination: Recognize that health and well-being is a core mandate of education and acknowledge the school as a system that protects and promotes learners' health and wellbeing. The health, nutrition and wellbeing of all learners needs to be reflected in national education sector policies and plans and these need to be complemented with policies from the health, social protection and agriculture sectors. To ensure policies are implemented, heightened efforts on coordination between sectors are needed to deliver the required multi-component programmes, focusing on shared roles and responsibilities and budgetary needs, so that the burden does not fall solely on the education sector. In all countries, policies and implementation should pay special attention to girls, children living in fragile contexts and emergencies, children living in poor households and rural areas, and children living with disabilities with the purpose of preventing discriminatory attitudes and behaviors and building an inclusive society. Promote healthier environments: Put in place education environments that protect and promote learners' health and wellbeing, promote equity, and enable learning, as part of all learners' right to inclusive, quality education. Globally, 19% of schools have no drinking water, and 23% have no sanitation services, clearly much more need to be done in this area.^{xxii} Efforts to prevent violence must also be integrated given the negative impacts of violence on health and wellbeing. Also, putting in place effective nutrition and physical education, creating healthy school environments and integrating school-based monitoring of children's growth can combat the double burden of malnutrition and obesity.
- Ensure integrated services: Ensure that all school-aged girls and boys and adolescents have access to integrated school health and nutrition services. The specific set of school health and nutrition interventions will vary depending on each country and context. Options can include providing school meals, deworming, micronutrient supplementation, vision screening, malaria prevention, access to sexual and reproductive health services or referrals, water and sanitation, menstrual health related products, psycho-social support and mental health services; among other key actions.
- Ensure good quality, skills-based health education curricula are delivered from a young age: Evidence demonstrates the positive impact of health education curricula, delivered by trained teachers. This should be focussed on building skills for health and wellbeing, and addressing



structural drivers of poor health including gender inequality, harmful social norms etc. Topics would include nutrition, violence and safety, substance use, mental health, peer pressure and risk taking, sexual and reproductive health (especially pregnancy and HIV prevention). Evidence-based models such as comprehensive sexuality education are one recommended approach.

2. *A special effort by the international community to reach the children who are being left behind in the poorest countries is needed, with an emphasis on fragile and humanitarian contexts, countries in conflict or dealing with disasters. This includes providing targeted research and policy advice, mobilizing technical assistance, promoting south-south cooperation and making funding available to cover for the reduced fiscal space in these contexts.*

- **Reach those we missed:** It is estimated that even before the pandemic, there were 73 million children living in extreme poverty, ill health, food insecurity and hunger in 60 countries that were not being reached with school health and nutrition interventions.^{xxiii} This estimate includes 40 million children in crisis or humanitarian settings, 29 million children in stable low- and lower-middle-income countries, and 4 million children in need in middle-income countries. About 84% of them live in Africa. Also, six out of seven new HIV infections among adolescents aged 15–19 years in sub-Saharan Africa are among girls, and 4200 adolescent girls and young women between 15 and 24 years became infected with HIV every week in 2020.^{xxiv}
- **Mobilize additional funding for low-income countries:** While developing country governments could - and should - do more to finance school health and nutrition programmes, slower growth and rising debt have limited the fiscal space available for investment in this area. Aid donors could increase the reach of these interventions through modest aid investments backed by the mobilisation of additional funding through the Multilateral Development Banks.

Increased political momentum for action

The case for this investment in school health and nutrition is increasingly recognized by countries and agencies alike and this creates a favourable environment as the Transforming Education Summit builds momentum. In fact, there has been a shift in global awareness and priority given to school health and nutrition by governments. For example, in response to the learning crisis exacerbated by COVID-19, school health and nutrition was mentioned as a priority by ministers of education during the Global Education Meetings of 2020 and 2021; it is also a priority thematic area for the Global Education Forum (GEF) since late 2020 and will feature prominently in GEF discussions in April, in preparations for the TES.^{xxv}

Also in 2021, countries rallied around the topic of healthy and sustainable diets for children and adolescents during Food Systems Summit and the Nutrition for Growth Summit. For example, the 66 governments and 65 partner organizations that have joined the School Meals Coalition^{xxvi} since the Summit, did so with the objective of massively scaling up school health and nutrition interventions as



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cross sectoral transformative platforms for more sustainable food systems and more effective and equitable education systems.

On the 1st of March of 2022, the African Union (AU) issued a declaration calling on AU Member States, the AU Commission, the AU Development Agency (AUDA-NEPAD), and development partners to “mobilise collectively ahead of the Education Summit to ensure Home Grown School Feeding is placed on the Summit's agenda, and be included on a transformed, resilient and responsive education system that prioritises investments in both the learning and learner.”^{xxvii} More recently, on the 8th of April of 2022, 21 Latin American countries issued the following call to action in an event hosted by the government of Colombia: “With the conviction that school feeding programmes are a fundamental pillar to promote democracy, trust in the state, social cohesion and access to public services such as education and health, we call to position this issue in the upcoming Transforming Education Pre-Summit and Summit as a priority and ensure that these contributions are reflected in the final agreements.”^{xxviii}

Increasing commitments and recognition of the central role of education in addressing children’s health and wellbeing are being made through multi-sectoral programmes and initiatives such as Health Promoting Schools,^{xxix} the groundbreaking Conceptual framework for adolescent well-being^{xxx} or the Nurturing care framework for early childhood.^{xxxi} With their focus on multi-sectoral collaboration, and a vision of coordinated engagement from health, education and social services, these approaches reflect political commitments in Africa, Latin America and other regions that engage Ministries of Health and Education to scale-up good quality education and health services in the regions with a focus on preventing HIV, unintended pregnancy and gender-based violence.^{xxxii}

Given the level of political commitment, the time is ripe to recognize that investing in schoolchildren is investing in the future. The COVID 19 crisis has taught us that the education system is perhaps one of the most important pillars of our communities, and fundamental to how societies are structured: that schools support both learning and the learner. As the world responds to and recovers from the pandemic, it is time to expand the concept of education to address the health and well-being of children, and to build back equitable, quality school-based health and nutrition services in every school for every schoolchild.

Particular thanks are made to Carmen Burbano of the World Food Programme (WFP) for coordinating and drafting this sub-thematic paper for Action Track 1.



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Paper 5: Education in Emergencies and Protracted Crises

Overview

Without urgent, collective effort to transform the provision of inclusive, gender equitable, and safe quality education and lifelong learning for the furthest behind in emergencies and protracted crises, the world will fail to realise SDG4 and the fulfilment of the Sustainable Development Agenda 2030. Education in emergencies and protracted crises should be reflected across all elements of the TES agenda and commitments.

Context

The world is witnessing an alarming increase in the number of people affected by violence, armed conflict, forced displacement, climate-induced disasters, and other crises. The COVID-19 pandemic acted as a risk-multiplier, exacerbating pre-existing inequalities, including gender inequalities. The number of forcibly displaced people reached a record high in 2021 at 82.4 million people, among them nearly 26.4 million refugees, around half of whom are under the age of 18. Between 2015-2019, there were more than 11,000 reported attacks on schools, universities, students, and personnel, harming more than 22,000 students and educators in at least 93 countries.¹ In 2020 alone there were over 2,400 cases of attacks.

These trends are having a profound impact on access to quality education in emergencies and protracted crises. It was estimated that in 2018, even before the COVID-19 pandemic, 128 million children were out of school in crisis-affected countries². The true figure is likely greater given the lack of accurate data³. In 2020, only 52 percent of refugee children and young people were in school; only 31 percent reached secondary school and just 5% to tertiary education. Girls are 2.5 more likely to be out of primary school if they live in conflict-affected countries⁴ and it is estimated that up to 50 percent of refugee girls who were attending secondary school may never return following COVID-19 enforced closures.⁵ Further, in low- and middle-income countries, the share of children living in Learning Poverty⁶ – already over 50 percent before the pandemic – will rise sharply, potentially up to 70 percent.

The occurrence of disasters is a significant concern for the education sector, considering their ever-increasing intensity, frequency and the severity of their impacts on access to continuous inclusive, quality and safe education for vulnerable communities. Between 2000 and 2019, at least 60 major disasters disrupted education for more than 11 million children; within this timeframe, nearly 35,000 children lost their lives in schools and over 30,000 were destroyed.⁷

Between 350 and 500 medium- to large-scale disasters occurred every year over the past two decades.⁸ This number is projected to reach 560 a year – or 1.5 each day by 2030. In addition, each year seems to break climate records; the most recent seven years (2015-2021), are the seven warmest ever recorded.⁹

Despite increased levels of educational need, education appeals receive less than 2.5% of humanitarian funding¹⁰. International attention and financing is often skewed towards high-profile crises, resulting in 'forgotten crises' that remain severely underfunded, often for many years. Following the outbreak of COVID-



19, education only received 3% of total stimulus packages in response to the health crisis,¹¹ and only 0.7% of funds requested under the COVID-19 Global Humanitarian Response Plan.¹² The economic consequences of the pandemic, including significant reductions in remittances, have also squeezed household expenditure, domestic financing, and international aid to education in low-income countries at a time when they are most needed.

The lack of standardized, disaggregated, timely and reliable education in emergencies data and evidence on what works, for whom and at what cost. are some of the most pressing challenges in guiding emergency preparedness, response and post-crises recovery and development processes. Further, data challenges lead to misalignment in humanitarian and development responses and programming, which contribute to the ineffective allocation of already scarce resources and the possible exclusion of the most vulnerable populations in crises settings.

Transforming Education in Emergencies and Protracted Crises

Governments and their partners must urgently address the three interlinked gaps in financing, planning and coordination, and invest in high-impact interventions needed to deliver quality education and lifelong learning at scale to those furthest behind in emergencies and protracted crises, and disaster contexts.

Financing: There is a pressing need for increased predictable, flexible multi-year financing, including from the private sector and philanthropists, to reduce risk and accelerate climate change adaptation in the education sector, and strengthen the triple nexus and harmonize acute emergency education responses with longer-term education system resilience and peacebuilding efforts. Key action areas include:

- Protecting and increasing education budgets in countries affected by emergencies and protracted crises and ensuring displaced populations are included in costing exercises and allocations.¹³
- Increasing official development assistance to education in countries affected by emergencies and protracted crises, prioritizing increased financial contributions to initiatives which target the furthest behind populations.
- Increasing humanitarian aid to education to reach 10% of humanitarian finance, including increased multi-year investment in the institutional capacities of local and national responders.

Planning and coordination: Strengthen and transform education systems to be resilient against crises, inclusive of forcibly displaced populations, gender-responsive and gender-transformative, and coordinated with humanitarian response efforts.

- Strengthening coordination systems across the development humanitarian nexus, and ensuring education is represented in humanitarian response and anticipatory action
- Integrating gender-responsive disaster risk reduction and emergency preparedness measures into education sector planning, including climate change learning, equity and adaptation and conflict-sensitive education.
- Prioritizing education in humanitarian preparedness and response. Where crisis-affected populations are left behind in complex contexts, this includes the humanitarian system supporting immediate needs, while promoting coordination and planning with longer-term development and peacebuilding efforts.



- Strengthening gender-responsive data systems and approaches to better identify and include displaced and host communities in education and child protection/gender-based violence systems and services, and to better monitor and report on attacks on education.
- Implementing alternative, flexible, inclusive, and gender-responsive pathways for adolescents that support the development of the full range of skills, including through accelerated education, catch-up and bridging programmes, and through use of digital learning solutions and platforms.
- Including refugee and vulnerable migrant children in national education system planning and costing including through the continued implementation, as applicable, of the Global Compact on Refugees and the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration.
- Investing in multi and cross-sectoral responses that minimize duplication and maximize impact of education in emergencies and protracted crises.
- Investing in strengthening systems and processes to produce better and standardized data and information for education in emergencies and protracted crises.

High-impact interventions: There is a need to scale and mainstream high-impact interventions into policy and planning efforts and where evidence lacks, greater investments are needed to uncover the interventions and innovations required to reach crisis-affected populations at scale.

- Teacher capacity, qualifications and retention. Evidence has shown that investing in retention, capacity development and the recognition of qualifications for teachers and administrators are cost-effective means to increase learning in crises.¹⁴ Displaced teachers should be included in national teacher management and development systems. Guidelines exist to support teacher training in crisis settings, e.g., INEE’s Minimum Standards and the Core Resource Package for Gender in EIE.¹⁵ More evidence is needed to determine the impact different interventions have on learning outcomes.
- Community participation. Evidence from crisis-affected countries shows that community participation is associated with significant increases in student achievement. Evidence supports non-formal and community-based education, participatory community monitoring to increase academic achievement,¹⁶ the meaningful engagement of local women organizations,¹⁷ and conditional cash transfers and social protection to incentivize attendance where the opportunity cost of education is higher during crises.
- Gender equality and inclusion. Investing in locally driven gender analysis and designing gender responsive and gender transformative interventions¹⁸ is essential to address structural barriers and gender norms that prevent children and adolescents, including children living with disabilities, from accessing and completing their education.¹⁹ Investments in gender equality and inclusion promote human rights, tolerance, the strengthening of the triple nexus and wider social cohesion / conflict prevention.²⁰
- Early childhood education. Investing in early learning and all aspects that contribute to a healthy child development should be a core component of any humanitarian response. It can have a powerful amplification effect and adding one to two years of pre-primary learning opportunities and embedding innovative pedagogies such as playful learning has shown to increase holistic learning outcomes in children, especially for those facing multiple risk factors in crises. It is recommended that governments and donors invest at least 10% of their education budgets on pre-primary education.
- Mental health and psychosocial support is critical in humanitarian emergencies for both students and teachers. Evidence shows it can lead to a reduction in distressing emotions and physical illness, an increase in interest in attending school and completing homework, an increased sense of safety,²¹ and can support development of critical social-emotional skills and other nonacademic skills.



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- Protection. Evidence points to the need to support a range of strategies to make schools safe and accessible, and to prevent violence and association with armed groups or gangs. This includes endorsement and full gender-responsive implementation of the Safe Schools Declaration and the *Guidelines for Protecting Schools and Universities from Military Use during Armed Conflict*,²² as well as the *Comprehensive School Safety Framework*.²³
- Education technology and innovation. Where education systems are stretched and reaching all crisis-affected children would require a massive expansion of public systems, some evidence has revealed that education technology can enhance the quality and effectiveness of teaching. However, evidence around education technology is scarce and more evidence is needed on how to increase equitable, safe, and gender-responsive access to high-, low-, and no-tech remote learning solutions.²⁴
- Teaching at the right level is critical for populations that have missed education in crisis contexts. Accelerated education programmes – flexible, inclusive, gender and age-appropriate programmes, run in an accelerated timeframe, have been shown to increase integration into national education systems in Jordan,²⁵ Turkey²⁶ and Uganda.²⁷ Further evidence exists on targeted language support improving relations between refugee and host community students²⁸ as well as targeted catch-up classes.
- Youth empowerment, engagement and partnerships is a powerful tool to raise awareness of the education needs in crisis contexts and convince decision makers of the value of greater investments in solutions. The voices of children and young people affected by crises - including adolescent girls, and more broadly communities affected by crises, should be front and center of the TES.

Particular thanks are made to Nasser Al-Faqih of Education Cannot Wait (ECW) for coordinating and drafting this sub-thematic paper for Action Track 1.



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