



International Parliamentary  
Network for Education

# Countdown to 2030 Actions to deliver SDG 4

A briefing for Members of Parliament to  
mark the International Day of Education

With just 5 years until 2030 when the Sustainable Development Goals fall due, education confronts a series of critical challenges: a challenge of equity and inclusion, as millions are out of school, a challenge of quality, as many of those who are in school are not even learning the basics, multiple challenges posed by humanitarian crises which deprive children of education and the challenge posed by inadequate funding for education.

Given the scale of the challenges and scarcity of resources, countries must concentrate their efforts on proven actions that will close the gap for the furthest behind:

- Guarantee access to education
- Ensure children learn foundational skills
- Support education in crises
- Increase education financing

## Progress seriously off track

Education is one of the best investments societies can make to build a more sustainable and prosperous future. Improvements in learning opportunities contribute directly to the achievement of sustainable development and the promotion of human rights, gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls. Realising the right to education helps to eradicate poverty and makes individuals and communities more resilient in the face of natural disasters and climate change.

Despite this, with just five years until 2030, progress towards achieving Sustainable Development Goal 4 - 'Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all' - is seriously off track.

Given the scale of the challenges and scarcity of resources, countries must concentrate their efforts on proven actions that will close the gap for the furthest behind. If no additional measures are taken, only one in six countries will meet SDG 4 and achieve universal access to quality education by 2030.

International Education Day on 24th January provides parliaments with an opportunity to discuss the state of education and commit to accelerating educational progress in their country and globally.

## Guarantee access to education

According to the [UNESCO Global Education Monitoring Report 2024](#), 110 million more children and youth have entered school since the UN Sustainable Development Goal on education was adopted in 2015, with more children in school today than ever before. Completion rates are also on the rise: 40 million more young people are completing secondary school today than in 2015.

However, during the same period, the out-of-school population has reduced by only 1 percent. As a result of this global stagnation, 251 million children and youth are still not in school worldwide.

Regional disparities remain stark: 33 percent of school-aged children and youth in low-income countries are out of school, compared to only 3 percent in high-income countries.

More than half of all out-of-school children and adolescents in the world are in the sub-Saharan African region.

Access to school is a fundamental right and the fact that millions of school age children are still out of school is a serious failure of collective action.

Countries need to renew their commitment to universal access to education and those countries with credible plans but insufficient resources should be supported by the international community, through renewed solidarity mechanisms between high- and lower-income countries.

## **Ensure children learn foundational skills**

Unfortunately access to school does not guarantee learning.

Acquiring foundational literacy, numeracy and socio-emotional skills are basic, but critically important, skills to succeed in school and later in life.

70 percent of ten year old children in low- and middle-income countries cannot read and understand a simple story. In the world's poorest countries, the level is as high as 90 percent.

Turning around the massive and persistent learning crisis will require a shared understanding of the problem and a commitment to implement collaborative, mission oriented plans to get every child in school and ensure that they are acquiring foundational skills.

IPNEd has identified 5 actions that parliamentarians can support that will help ensure every child learns.

- Acknowledging the extent of the challenge
- Mobilising society wide support for learning
- Ensuring governments are measuring children's learning
- Setting clear and widely understood targets to focus efforts
- Ensuring there is adequate and more focused funding for education

More information on how each of these actions can help ensure that every child learns is set out in '[A 5 point plan to ensure every child learns](#)'.

## Support education in crises

Humanitarian crises, climate change and forced displacement have left more than 224 million children without support for quality education, an increase from 75 million in 2016.

Even those children that do have access to school are not learning to read or do maths.

Evidence shows that more than half of these children - 127 million - are not meeting minimum proficiency levels in literacy and numeracy.

These alarmingly high rates must be reversed to ensure we meet SDG 4.5 and 4.6 which promise equal access to quality education, regardless of a child's circumstances, and universal literacy and numeracy.

Members of Parliament can support the education of children in emergencies by urging their governments to:

- Prioritise education in emergencies in national policies, funding and operations, including ensuring that children have access to quality learning.
- Make a multi-year pledge to Education Cannot Wait to ensure a fully-funded ECW so that the global Fund can meet its objectives by 2026.
- Ensure that education's share of your government's official aid budget is 15 percent and ensure that at least 10 percent of your country's humanitarian spending is dedicated to education in emergencies and protracted crises.

## Increase education financing

Education is severely underfunded.

The annual financing gap for achieving Sustainable Development Goal 4 in low- and lower-middle-income countries now stands at almost 100 USD billion.

One in four countries do not meet either of the international benchmarks of allocating at least 15 percent to 20 percent of total public expenditure, or 4 percent to 6 percent of GDP to education.

In 2021, in low-income countries, government education spending as a share of GDP increased from 3.1 percent in 2012 to 3.6 percent in 2021, but it decreased in middle-income countries. Families in low- and middle-income countries spend significant portions of their funds on education; more than one third of total education spending is from households.

The growing funding gap for education is also caused by worsening debt burdens which threaten even further the ability of low- and middle-income countries to finance education as countries are forced to spend enormous amounts on external debt.

Today one in six of the world's poorest countries pay more on debt than on education.

## **Aid to education in decline**

Whilst increasing national spending on education is key to achieving SDG 4, aid to education is vital in helping to close the financing gap, especially in the poorest countries.

Donor countries are encouraged to spend 0.7 percent of their Gross National Income (GNI) on Official Development Assistance (ODA).

ODA for education continues to be important for the development of low-income countries, accounting for 13 percent of 90 percent of their total education expenditure.

However, today the proportion of ODA devoted to education continues to decline. In recent years ODA for low- and middle-income countries fell by 7 percent, from 19.3 billion USD in 2020 to 17.8 billion USD in 2021.

Only 30 percent of direct aid to education among the ten largest donors to sub-Saharan Africa goes straight to recipient countries; the remainder is funneled through donors' aid agencies, international and domestic non-governmental organisations, and multilateral organisations. One of the countries that reduced its ODA in recent years is the UK.

In 2021, the UK reduced the ODA from 0.7 percent of GNI to 0.5 percent, marking the first time ever when the country has not met the ODA 0.7 percent target.



Moreover, education remains one of the most underfunded areas of humanitarian aid, receiving only around 3 percent of global humanitarian funding.

Parliamentarians in both donor and low-income countries can encourage their governments to help protect education financing by:

- Strengthening domestic revenue mobilisation and increasing the share of expenditure for education in their country.
- Protecting and increasing ODA and the proportion of funding that is devoted to education.
- Strengthening international coordination to address the debt crisis.

## The path to progress

The 2024 Global Education Meeting hosted in Fortaleza, Brazil fostered multilateral, cross-sectoral and multi-stakeholder dialogue.

It recognised education as a social equaliser and main driver to the achievement of other SDGs.

Global leaders recognised that accelerating progress towards SDG 4 requires sustained political will and evidence-based, targeted actions.

The Fortaleza Declaration also outlines the need to prioritise education at the global, regional and national level, as well as for effective cooperation and higher, more equitable and efficient financing to unlock the transformative potential of education.



# Parliamentary action in support of education

The International Day of Education provides an opportunity for parliamentarians to shine a light on education in their respective parliaments and take action to close the gap for those furthest behind.

## **Submit a parliamentary question** on education

- Ask what your government's policy is on your nation's targets to meet SDG 4
- Ask your government where it prioritises foundational literacy and numeracy to ensure every child is equipped with the basic skills to read, write and do maths by the end of primary school
- Ask your government what steps it is taking to ensure every child has access to a nutritious meal at school
- Ask your government how it ensures inclusive, equitable education to support the most marginalised children and families
- Ask your government to provide detailed budgetary information on how education is spent and where it needs to be increased
- Ask your government what its plans are for Overseas Development Assistance (ODA) including whether they support the world's two global funds for education, the Global Partnership for Education and Education Cannot Wait.

## **Host a debate**

Ask for a debate in your parliament on SDG 4 and the importance of ensuring we are on target to meet the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030, as well as on other topics such as financing and ODI, foundational learning, school meals and education in emergencies.

## **Table a motion**

Set out your concerns and urge your government to act to ensure we can fulfil SDG 4 by tabling a motion in your parliament.

## **Make a statement**

Call attention to the challenges which education faces both in your own country and internationally.

You could work with other like-minded colleagues to issue a joint public statement. This can engage media interest and also bring issues to a wider audience both locally and internationally.

### **Use social media to advocate for education**

You can share messages in support of education in general and the importance of ensuring we are on track to the 2030 Agenda on social media in the lead up to and on the International Day of Education, using #InternationalDayofEducation and #CountdownTo2030.

Be sure to tell us and tag us on [LinkedIn](#), [X](#) and [BlueSky](#) so we can amplify what you do.



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### **International Parliamentary Network for Education**

The International Parliamentary Network for Education supports parliamentarians from around the world who are working to achieve Sustainable Development Goal 4 - Quality Education for All.

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