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Global Campaign for Education:
SDG4 Spotlight Report

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1. Introduction

This report aims to provide a general overview of some of the critical challenges the world is facing to make progress towards Sustainable Development Goal 4 – SDG4 and subsequently the multiple barriers that people encounter to effectively enjoy the right to education. Drawing on the analysis of contemporary debates in education policy and examples of policy challenges provided by GCE regional and national members, the report argues that the ongoing health pandemic have made more evident deep-rooted inequalities in the world education systems and further limited the most marginalised members of society's opportunities to enjoy the right to education. As expected, the nature and magnitude of the barriers to enjoy one's right to education are context-specific and therefore, the report provides evidence from specific countries and regions for the reader to make better sense of such nuances.

In order to develop the report's overarching argument and in line with the *seven targets of SDG4* and the *five Thematic Action Tracks* established by the [Transformative Education Summit](#) – TES to assess its progress, the report is organised around four thematic areas: transformative education; digital learning and transformation; education in emergencies and crises; and education financing.

The thematic area on *transformative education* is primarily concerned with policy debates around the aims, content and quality of education; inclusion and non-discrimination; and the social, political and cultural structures in which individuals teach and learn. As shown in Table 1, this thematic area resonates with the seven (7) targets of SDG4 and four (4) Thematic Action Tracks.

The thematic area on *digital learning and transformation* mainly engages with policy discussions around the multiple dimensions of the so-called digital divide. It involves, among other aspects, the availability of infrastructure and electronic devices for students to engage with online learning; the quality of online education and its effects on the right to education of marginalised communities. This thematic area resounds with three (3) targets of SDG4 and three (3) Thematic Action Tracks (see Table 1).

The thematic area on *education in emergencies and crises* relates to policy debates around the challenges faced by people to enjoy the right to education whether in the middle or in the aftermath of health, disaster, climate change and conflict-related emergencies. It entails policy discussions around the provision and quality of education for migrants and refugee communities and the education systems' response to the specific needs of students who have fled experiences of violence and human rights abuses. It also gives special attention to the critical challenges of teaching and learning in the context of the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic. As shown in Table 1, this thematic area directly links with three (3) targets of SDG4 and three (3) Thematic Action Tracks.

The thematic area on *education financing* examines the states' international legal responsibility of securing sufficient financial resources to respect, promote and fulfil the right to education for all. In line with the TES' call for a renovated education financing architecture, this thematic area explores the limits of national budgets to secure education for all in countries dealing with protracted emergencies and explore the role of debt alleviation mechanisms to increase financing in countries experiencing debt distress. As the right to education cannot be fulfilled without the governments and international community commitment to allocate sufficient and sustainable financing, this thematic area is related to all the SDG4 targets and TES tracks.

Table 1: Linking SDG4, TES tracks and thematic areas of GCE Spotlight Report												
Thematic area	**SDG4 Targets[2]**							**TES Tracks[3]**				
	4.1.	4.2.	4.3.	4.4.	4.5.	4.6.	4.7.	1	2	3	4	5
Transformative education												
Digital learning and transformation												
Education in emergencies and crises												
Education financing												

The report draws on secondary sources. They include academic and policy-oriented research directly related to the thematic areas discussed above and contributions from GCE regional and national members. Coalitions were invited to provide evidence along the following lines: (i) analysis of the main challenges the region/country is facing to secure the transformation of education systems in order to make progress towards SDG4, with a specific focus on barriers related to the use of technology in education and to overcome the digital divide; (ii) analysis of the critical challenges to secure the right to education in emergency situations and crises, including conflict, climate change, disaster, and the ongoing pandemic-related emergencies; and (iii) analysis of the challenges the region/country is facing to secure sustainable financing for education and the potential and limits of increasing funding through mechanisms such as debt alleviation and progressive taxation. The regional and national coalition inputs were peer-reviewed by the author of this report. Coalitions kindly agreed to make the necessary revisions for their contributions to fit the report's key arguments and provide further evidence. The members' inputs are included in boxes and the names of the contributors and institutional affiliation are provided at the bottom of each box.

Following this introduction, section 2 engages with policy discussions around transformative education and discusses the types of changes that education systems need to put in place to make progress towards SDG4 and effectively protect everyone's right to education. Section 3 examines the challenges related to the use of technology in education and the need to overcome the digital divide within and across countries and regions. Section 4 provides a global picture of the challenges to make progress towards SDG 4 in emergency situations and crises. The analysis involves references to the ongoing health crisis and protracted emergencies related to conflict, disaster and climate change. Section 5 engages with policy discussions about financing and identifies alternative pathways for increasing funding for education through debt alleviation mechanisms and progressive taxation. The report ends in section 6 by summarising and discussing the implications of the key policy challenges that governments and the international community should address to make progress towards SDG4 and to effectively protect and fulfil the right to education for all learners.

2.   SDG4 Targets: 4.1. By 2030, ensure that all girls and boys complete free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education leading to relevant and effective learning outcomes; 4.2. By 2030, ensure that all girls and boys have access to quality early childhood development, care and pre-primary education so that they are ready for primary education; 4.3. By 2030, ensure equal access for all women and men to affordable and quality technical, vocational and tertiary education, including university; 4.4. By 2030, substantially increase the number of youth and adults who have relevant skills, including technical and vocational skills, for employment, decent jobs and entrepreneurship; 4.5. By 2030, eliminate gender disparities in education and ensure equal access to all levels of education and vocational training for the vulnerable, including persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples and children in vulnerable situations; 4.6. By 2030, ensure that all youth and a substantial proportion of adults, both men and women, achieve literacy and numeracy; and 4.7. By 2030, ensure that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including, among others, through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and nonviolence, global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture's contribution to sustainable development.

3.   Transforming Education Summit: tracks to assess progress towards SDG4: Track 1: Inclusive, equitable, safe and healthy schools; Track 2: Learning and skills for life, work and sustainable development; Track 3: Teachers, teaching and the teaching profession; Track 4: Digital learning and transformation; and Track 5: Financing of education.

2.   Transformative Education

Contemporary debates in education policy have embraced the idea of transformation as a key feature to advance the world education systems and to fulfil the promises of both SDG4 and international human rights law related to the right to education. However, there is no consensus concerning the aspects that need to be transformed and how such transformations can be implemented. They are somehow context-specific and largely depend on the structural constraints people deal with in everyday life to enjoy the right to education. In order to set the discussion and better understand the coalitions contributions, it is therefore worth explaining how GCE understands the notion of transformative education and making explicit its connections with ideas of transformation and, in particular with the idea of transforming education systems, which is the term being used in ongoing debates around the TES.

The idea of transformative education unfolds from two different but interrelated disciplines: development studies looking at ideas of justice and positive social change; and transformative learning theories addressing questions around how and for what people learn (Perez Murcia & Muñoz, 2021). Concerning the former discipline, pioneering development economists, notably Amartya Sen (1997), have highlighted the intrinsic value of education for the satisfaction of all human rights and its role in bringing positive social change. Sen has stressed the value of education for reducing poverty, and inequality and making societies fairer, and his work has contributed to broadening the ways in which education, as a human right, can be integrated into international policy frameworks. This has notably influenced the United Nations Human Development Programme's call for integrating a human rights-based approach to all social policies, including education (UNDP, 2000).

Concerning the second discipline, most contemporary debates on transformative education are inspired by Mezirow's (1991, 2004) transformative learning theory (see also Hoggan & Kloubert, 2020). Mezirow's notion that the initial stages of one's life is the time for formation, and further stages, for transformation has been inspiring the search for positive change in education systems worldwide. The overall ambition is to make them respond better to the multiple ways individuals learn and to address the barriers they face to effectively learn, achieve educational outcomes and above all, contribute to the positive transformation of our societies. In short, the notion of transformative education is closely related to all the educational practices and education environments that need to be questioned and redesigned to reimagine the role of education in our societies. Thus the idea of transformation should depart from the very questions of what education is for, how people learn and how our education systems can contribute to all students to perform their potential to positively transform their lives as well as those of their families and communities.

These conceptual debates should be at the core of any education policy aiming to promote and fulfil everyone's right to education. These debates should underpin the way education practitioners understand the role of education in their respective societies and contest for positive transformation. It is related to for example ongoing debates that call for decolonising education systems through the decolonisation of curricula (see the example of Zimbabwe in Bhurekeni, 2020) and the call for introducing alternative ways of teaching and learning to be fully aligned with democratic principles (see the example of Tanzania in Kalungwizi, Gjøtterud, and Krogh, 2019). It is also related to the call for eradicating hate and intolerance against any social group, notably against minority ethnic and religious groups in all education systems (see Arvisais & Guidère, 2020; Sabic-El-Rayess, 2020) and members of the LGBTQIA+ community[4]; to the urgent need to make schools and the whole education systems a safe space for all (Ferrara et al., 2019); and among other policy issues, to overcome the multiple inequalities associated with the use of technology in education. Overall, as illustrated in box 1 below, all these multiple dimensions of the notion of transformative education have a practical implication for a human-rights based education planning approach.

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4.   LGBTQIA+ is an acronym that represents those people who are not heterosexual or more generally those who do not conform with the gender identity ascribed to them at birth. Respectively, the letters stand for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex and Asexual. The plus sign signifies others who do not fit any of these categories. See the Hague Peace Projects. https://thehaguepeace.org/site/lgbtqia-inclusivity-an-introduction

The notion of transformative public education in the context of Latin America and the Caribbean – LAC primarily draws on the legacy of Paulo Freire and the popular education movement. Freire stressed the need for education to forge conscious and critical individuals able to promote social and collective transformation towards social justice. Additionally, the region has been learning from social and indigenous movements that highlight that such transformation has to consider environmental justice and good living (*buen vivir*).

Such a legacy remains not only conceptually relevant; but also a practical tool to read and understand the challenges to secure the right to education in the LAC context, which is deeply marked by injustice, inequalities, racism and discrimination. Those principles guide CLADE's political action towards challenging the emergent information and communication technologies, fake news and hate speeches, the complexity of power relations involved, all for-profit attempts in education, concerns on climate change and gender inequalities.

The horizon of transformative education additionally relates to the notion of inclusiveness and the need to meet SDG4 for all. According to the GMR 2020 regional report[5], in the LAC region students from the richest quintile of the population are, on average, five times more likely to complete upper secondary school than those from the poorest 20%, which reveals the urgency of ensuring free of charge education for all. The school attendance rate among afro-descendant adolescents between the ages of 12 and 17 is lower than that of non-afro-descendant groups in 7 of the 11 countries where data is available – and at this point the lack of data is another element of concern. In 7 countries with available data, LGBTQIA+ students report experiencing hostility and discrimination at school. Only 16% of the countries provide inclusive education for people with disabilities. Most countries still are implementing policies which tend to segregate students with disabilities and therefore do not adequately respond to an education from a human rights-based perspective. Moreover, multiple studies show that the rise of privatisation trends undermines educational public systems and deepens segregation and inequalities[6].

The pandemic, in turn, highlighted the digital gaps in the region. According to ECLAC, in 2020, 46% of girls and boys between the ages of 5 and 12 in the region did not have access to the internet. The scenario was even more dramatic in the lowest-income households in Bolivia, El Salvador, Paraguay and Peru, where more than 90% did not have access to the internet, indicating the urgency of policies to democratise connectivity, particularly in rural and marginal urban areas, and in the Amazon region. Digital rights indeed involve a new vocabulary to educational policies, which includes the creation of public platforms with open access, security and protection of data, as well as new pedagogical strategies.

Furthermore, it is also important to mention that discourses that reduce education to measurable learning outcomes, are still prevailing in the region. Advocating for transformative education means shifting the paradigm that links education exclusively to the development of human capital, usually through very basic learning processes that can be measured through international standardised tests.

Finally, it is worth mentioning that conservative and authoritarian waves coexist among many governments in the region. The absence of dialogue and participation is concerning in countries such as Brazil and Nicaragua. In this sense the call for transformative education is also a call for strengthening democracy as the meaningful participation of students, teachers, parents, communities and civil society organisations in education policy improves the governance of education systems.

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Although with their own context-specific internal dynamics, similar challenges can be observed in education systems all across the world, including G7 countries. The case of the United States of America included in box 2, illustrates best the needs for all education systems to embrace a transformative approach to make schools a safe place for all and effectively protect children, youth and adults' right to education.

5.   Informe de seguimiento de la educación en el mundo, 2020 – América Latina y el Caribe: inclusión y educación: todos y todas sin excepción, UNESCO 2020.

6.   See https://redclade.org/artigos/mapeo-sobre-tendencias-de-la-privatizacion-de-la-educacion-en-america-latina-y-el-caribe/;https://redclade.org/noticias/escuelas-privadas-como-impulsoras-de-la-segregacion-social-por-que-hay-que-regularlas/;https://redclade.org/noticias/los-efectos-de-la-creciente-participacion-de-actores-privados-en-la-educacion-inclusiva/ Retrieved on September 10 2022.

There are still several challenges that the U.S. public education system faces to positively transform its education system and protect everyone's right to education. For example, as outlined in the 2022 Right to Education Index US (Global Campaign for Education-US, 2022), while primary and secondary public education is legally universal in the United States, early childhood education – which research has shown is a critical period for brain development for children from age 0-5 years – still lacks universal funding and effective implementation. One of the primary reasons blocking President Biden's $1.8 trillion American Families Plan, which proposes to create quality universal preschool for 3- and 4-year-olds, remains the lack of bipartisan support. Therefore, it is important for the US to establish and fund laws, policies, and curriculum to support holistic development of emotional, cognitive, and physical needs in order to build a solid foundation for lifelong learning and wellbeing.

School related violence and school safety remains to be another major nationwide concern, with the most recent school shooting killing of 19 students and two teachers in Uvalde, Texas. In fact, according to Education Week (2022), there have been 121 school shootings since 2018, more than any other country in the world. With political divides on how to best address this issue through legislature, school safety remains a constant fear for students and families across the nation. School related violence and school safety have implications on student attendance and learning, as it is linked to student learning outcomes. Additionally, a recent study by Alexander (2021) shows that students who have experienced school violence or school shootings often do not have support systems in their schools such as trauma counsellors, guidance counsellors, and crisis plans. Indeed, the study shows that only 16.9% of respondents indicated their schools have trauma or crisis plans that address issues related to school shootings.

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3. Digital learning and transformation

Acknowledging the multiple dimensions of the notion of transformative education and the disparate ways in which this concept can influence education policy, this section gives special consideration to the analysis of the challenges related to the use of technology in education and the need to overcome the digital divide between within and across countries and regions to make progress towards SDG4. This choice is partly influenced by the Transformative Education Agenda (United Nations, 2022)[7].

Setting the context of the use of technology in education and the digital divide

Education technology has increasingly been used during the last seven decades to expand access to education in many regions of the world, particularly in universities (Watters, 2022) and for those students living in remote regions or emergency situations lacking school facilities and qualified teachers (Cant, 2020). With the Covid-19 outbreak and subsequent lockdown of schools in most countries of the world, the use of technology to deliver lessons has become part of most learners' everyday life. Its use has helped to mitigate the impact of school closures and gives continuity to learning activities (United Nations, 2022). However, neither all countries nor all learners have the same capacity to successfully engage with online learning and in this sense the pandemic has further unveiled deep-rooted inequalities in education systems across the world (Murat and Bonacini, 2020; Azubuike, Adegboye and Quadri, 2021; Boly-Barry, 2022). Those inequalities, which are often framed around the concept of 'digital divide', can be perceived within and across countries. The term digital divide comprises several interrelated dimensions of inequality: access to technological devices and the internet, digital skills, teacher skills, parental support to use technology, and adaptation and management of the learning environment (Coleman, 2021; Železný-Green & Metcalfe, 2022)[8].

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7. TES identified four main areas in which changes are needed to positively transform the world's education systems: educational exclusion; safety and health (especially mental health); the teaching profession, curricula and pedagogies; and digital transformation for just and equitable learning. United Nations (2022). Transforming Education Summit 2022 - Concept and Programme Outline.
8. The term digital divide also encompasses questions about the distribution of power between countries and regions. While the lack of technological devices and skills to use technology dominate policy debates in countries of the Global South, the development of technology and its commercialization, as well as the perpetuation of colonial practices to make low-income economies dependent on the technology developed in wealthy economies, prevail in policy debates in the Global North.

The multiple dimensions of the digital divide are interrelated and can be appreciated in all four dimensions of the right to education: availability, accessibility, acceptability, and adaptability. To begin with *availability*, the closure of schools revealed further inequalities associated with the lack of digital infrastructure for sustainable, fair, and inclusive online learning. This dimension includes lack of electricity, electronic devices, internet connection, and qualified teachers to deliver online lessons and follow students' work (see NORRAG, 2022; Železný-Green & Metcalfe, 2022).

Accessibility to those resources are also compromised and therefore, those who had been historically excluded from education have seen their learning opportunities further compromised. Girls and women are often excluded from the use of the limited technology available in families living in low-income and patriarchal societies (see Karalis, 2020; Sahlberg, 2021) and are often subject of online abuse (UNICEF, 2021). Similar gaps have also been identified to reach students with disabilities (Disability & Development Consortium, 2020; Humanity & Inclusion, 2020; Singal, 2022), ethnic minority groups (Prehn, 2022) and people living in emergencies, notably those on the move, affected by conflict and climate change-related emergencies (see Shohel, 2022).

As Kwani (2022) argues, and is further illustrated in box 3 below, all these multiple inequalities intersect, and therefore governments and policymakers must embrace an intersectional approach to effectively eliminate digital divides. Concerning *acceptability* of education, online learning often fails to fulfil minimum standards of quality, associated, for example, to a lack of qualified teachers and training for teachers, parents and students (Železný-Green & Metcalfe, 2022). As Anand (2022) argues, the different skills individuals have to control and adapt to a digital world influence the quality of education and its inclusiveness.

Teachers with limited digital skills tend to be more focused on the use of technology than implementing pedagogical strategies to meet the needs and abilities of students. Although education technology companies are supposed to support schools to overcome the 'pedagogical vacuum', there is little evidence that these companies offer solutions for hard-to reach children (Anand, 2022). Lastly, concerning *adaptability* of education, online teaching has been rarely adapted to the specific needs of children with disabilities and consequently children who are deaf or hard of hearing can struggle to access the same educational content either by computer online lessons or radio (EASG 2022; Singal, 2022). Children from minority ethnic groups who do not communicate in the country's official language can be also excluded from the benefits of online teaching or TV/radio educational programmes (see Prehn, 2022).

Box 3: The multiple dimensions of the digital divide: Examples from the Asia Pacific Region

The rapidly changing contexts in today's world have critical implications for education systems. While some progress has been made in making education more accessible over the past decades, persisting issues in access, equity, inclusion, quality, and financing remain and significant disparities exist. In Asia, youth and adult literacy rates have continued to rise, yet 27 million youth remain illiterate- 95% of whom live in South Asia (UNESCO & UNICEF EAPRO, 2021). The region also hosts about half (124 million) of the world's out-of-school children and youth of primary and secondary school age.

Intersecting factors, such as socioeconomic status, identity, gender, disability, location, migrant status, religion, ethnicity, caste, and language, affect one's access to education. Girls and women, learners from low-income families, persons with disabilities, learners from rural and remote areas, *Dalits*, adult learners, migrants and refugees, LGBTQIA+ learners, and religious, ethnic, and linguistic minorities face systemic marginalisation and discrimination, as well as structural and environmental barriers to quality education and lifelong learning opportunities.

At the peak of the pandemic, 3.1 million schools shut down in the Asia Pacific region. While school closures decreased in East and Southeast Asia countries from May to June 2020, all schools remained fully closed in South and West Asia until the end of June 2020. According to UNESCO (2020), the education of more than 1.6 billion students worldwide was disrupted. By April 2020, 850 million students in the region could not attend school (UNESCO & UIS, 2021). Prolonged closures of schools and learning centres ushered in online and distance learning solutions. However, the widening digital divide has exacerbated inequities in education. The lack of required technologies, gaps in digital literacy skills, the absence of IT infrastructure, and inconducive learning environments place the most marginalised and vulnerable groups at a greater disadvantage.

In the Asia-Pacific region, nearly 40% of the population was unconnected in 2021. According to the International Telecommunications Union (ITU), they are mostly girls and women and the elderly and are located in rural and remote communities, according to the International Telecommunications Union (ITU). In Vietnam, learners with disabilities, particularly deaf learners, could not continue their education in non-formal learning centres, which had to close for some time because of the lack of devices and a stable Internet connection (VAEFA, 2022). In the Philippines, modest budget gains to support learners with disabilities and child workers were not maximised due to the failure to adjust given the new realities brought about by the pandemic. With the increased use of digital online learning platforms and technologies as tools for learning continuity, Education Technology (EdTech) corporations continue to proliferate. These companies have aggressively marketed their products and expanded their involvement and influence in education provision and even in decision-making, which will further push the commercialisation of education and exacerbate inequity (EI, 2020).

Currently, curricula content, education pedagogy, and learning materials do not promote diversity, equality, inclusion, and gender equality as they should. Aside from focusing heavily on academic skills, the curricula are not sufficiently relevant to the learners' culture and diverse learning needs. In Sri Lanka, the education system is highly criticised for its exam-centred curriculum, which fails to foster values of global citizenship (CED, 2022). The curriculum also overlooks gendered issues that remain in the country and neglects to take measures to address gender inequality through education.

Learners are not the only ones affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. According to UNESCO (2020), 43 million teachers in the Asia Pacific region have been affected by school closures. In Mongolia, like many other countries in the region, teachers and educators continued to teach during the pandemic "without any form of support and assistance" (AFE Mongolia, 2021). Many lacked mobile phones, computers, and a stable Internet connection. Training for effectively employing distance learning and required devices and infrastructure are lacking, resulting in multiple challenges in teaching and learning during the pandemic.

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The multiple dimensions of the digital divide can be further illustrated with the cases of the Middle East and with the case of Zambia in boxes 4 and 5.

Box 4: The digital divide in the Middle East and North Africa

Lack of access to technological devices and Internet connection are critical challenges to secure online learning in many countries of the Arab region. Following 2020's Covid-19-related school closures, for example, it is estimated that over 37 million students were not reached by any remote learning initiative and, therefore, could not continue their education.

Although in response to the pandemic, most governments in the region adopted a distance learning policy, many students, notably girls and students with disabilities as well as those living in rural areas and coming from low-income families, lacked access to electronic devices and internet connection to effectively engage with distance learning (EFSD, 2022). Indeed, the development of digital infrastructure in the region continues to lag behind the rest of the world, holding back its digital transformation (Farley and Lutgendorf, 2021).

Ministries of Education across the region, with the support of education stakeholders, implemented several strategies to bridge the digital divide within both the student and teachers population. These initiatives aim to enable all students, especially the most vulnerable, to take part in e-learning activities, particularly where devices and connectivity are limited (UNESCO, 2021). For example, Jordan and Morocco had provided teachers with training needed, building E-platforms; creating digital resources; providing ICT infrastructure to schools and universities, equipping schools and universities with IT devices such as Tablets and personal computers, and integrating emerging technology into teaching and learning (Liu et al., 2021).

The Middle East and North Africa countries (MENA region[9]) are projected to have 160 million potential digital users by 2025. However, as access to the Internet remains highly unequal, and the digital gender gap in Arab states is the largest in comparison with other world regions, with women being 12% less likely than men to use the Internet, this demands serious and real interventions from all relevant parties to secure the right to education (Farley and Langendorf, 2021).

Among others, the following are the possible interventions to address the digital divide in the region: mainstreaming of digital skills to reach students and teachers in all public schools, provision of support for the development of digital skills in low-income areas, and establishment of partnerships to provide communal facilities with fast Internet access.

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9.   MENA countries consist of Algeria, Bahrain, Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Israel, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Tunisia, United Arab Emirates and Yemen.

Box 5: Harnessing Education Technology: The Case of Zambia

The effects of COVID-19 in Zambia were particularly severe on the most vulnerable, such as those with disabilities. This is because their access to education was completely compromised due to the prolonged school closure (World Vision Policy Brief, 2020). In its response to curtail the effects of COVID-19, the government of Zambia tried to mitigate the crisis of the school closure by introducing several Alternative Modes of Education Provision (AMEP) which included distance learning, secondary education, and skills training and made Educational Broadcasting Service (EBS) available on radio and television.

The Education for All Campaign, Vision 2030, Millennium Development Goals, and the Sustainable Development Goals underline Zambia's inclusion policies which aim to increase access, participation, and achievement for all learners, including children with disabilities.

Despite having adopted these and other progressive policy frameworks, the issues listed below were the key factors that affected the success of the adopted e-learning strategies:

• Contents were not adapted to enhance accessibility by children with disabilities;
• Lack of a digital infrastructure and a comprehensive policy framework;
• Lack of or limited internet connectivity in basic education facilities (rural vs urban); and
• Lack of or limited knowledge and skills to use ICT among teachers, learners and parents and limited availability of digital content.

ZANEC's intervention and results

Through the GCE's Harnessing EduTech Project funded by GIZ, ZANEC undertook a study entitled, "Status of Education Technology and Digital Literacy levels Among Teachers, Learners and Parents in Zambia". The study assessed and documented the status of education technology and digital literacy among teachers, parents and learners in Zambia.

The study examined the Alternatives Modes of Education Provision (AMEP) used by education providers during Covid-19 pandemic and identified plausible mitigation measures to ensure learners are all accessing learning without leaving anyone behind. These included:

• The need to conduct a proper evaluation of the level of digital literacy skills of teachers, learners and parents before polices and mitigation strategies are drafted;
• Development of blended learning technologies that maximise the advantages of both face-to-face and technologically based learning methods to improve overall learning outcomes and the adoption of clear guidelines that assist the progressive adoption of digital learning, especially in areas where learners have little access;
• Upgrading the existing Educational Broadcasting Services (EBS) community radio licence to national status, as well as the existing infrastructure and equipment by engaging partners and the private sector to expand coverage and outreach -given that Radio is the most feasible mode of distance learning dissemination in Zambia;
• Developing content suitable for TV broadcasting to be included in the national broadcasting system. Relying on decoders provided by the private sector is a barrier and exclusion mechanism for the needy and disadvantaged;
• Development of an all-inclusive digital learning content aligned to the national curriculum in collaboration with education stakeholders. Content should be accessible to children with disabilities, for instance through incorporating sign language, audios, bigger fonts and braille; and
• Optimising learning platforms and interfaces for mobile phone use given that mobile phones are the most widely used devices by teachers, parents, and learners to access the internet.

As a result of ZENAC's interventions, there are on-going engagements with Members of Parliament and regulators on making remote learning available to all learners. Dialogue with service providers on how to make digital learning accessible through reduced costs or zero rating is on-going. The government, civil society, schools, parents, and partners have partnered to effectively put in place structures to mitigate the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the education sector, by particularly ensuring that no one is left behind because of COVID-19 broad effects. Bearing in mind various concerns, that were raised before and after the Transforming Education Summit (TES), there is need for Zambia to increase its education budget in line with regional and international best practices, increase its engagement with stakeholders in the education sector, formulate and implement an effective and comprehensive EduTech policy, increase distribution of technological gadgets, enhance its internet infrastructure and capacitate teachers, learners and parents in using ICT and related gadgets.

Although the multiple dimensions of the digital divide are more prevalent and widespread in countries of the Global South, as illustrated with the case of Zambia above, they are also important to be acknowledged and addressed in countries of the Global North. Recent evidence for the United Kingdom, for example, reveals that children and youth from black and Asian families did not only struggle to access technological devices but also to access a reliable internet connection to attend online teaching during the Covid-19 school closures (Coleman, 2021). As illustrated in box 6, similar problems were identified in the case of Georgia.

Box 6: The digital divide in Georgia

The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated the digital divide in Georgia. While it is considered that IT penetration is good in the country (World Bank, 2022), in March 2020, 12% (63,272 students) did not have access to the internet, and 14% did not have a computer at home (MoES, 2020). Overall, 88% of students had access to fixed internet and 53% to mobile internet (Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sports of Georgia, 2020). Access to the Internet differed depending on the place of residence and social-economic status: while 94% of students living in the city could use the Internet, this figure only reached 75 % in rural areas. When looking at the data considering the socio-economic status and ethnic belonging of students, 48% of students from low-income families do not have access to the Internet (Mizunoya, and Mishra, 2020). This figure is 35% for ethnic Azerbaijani students (UNICEF, 2020).

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Overall, by overlooking the exclusion of low-income families and minority ethnic groups in middle and high-income economies, the international community is not only perpetuating the idea of the 'so-needed' developing countries but also leaving the educational needs of those millions of children and youth living in those contexts unattended.

4.   Education in emergencies and crises[10]

Conflict, disaster, and climate change-related emergencies have become part of everyday life for millions of students in both countries of the Global South and the Global North despite 115 countries signing safe schools declarations to protect schools during a military attack. In many countries, with Bangladesh and Somalia as only two worthy examples, conflict, and climate-related emergencies consistently interplay, disrupting the right to education of local residents, internally displaced people, and those seeking asylum (see Oberg, Hodges & Masten, 2021; Shohel, 2022). Although related, the disruption of education in these two countries responds to different dynamics. While in Bangladesh it is largely associated with financial barriers for the Rohingya refugees to afford school fees, as well as legal and language barriers to accessing education (Mahmud and Nalifa, 2020), in Somalia hunger and starvation, as well as forced recruitment of children and youth by illegal armed forces and in many cases their radicalisation, are behind of the significant school dropout (see Burde, Lahmann & Thompson, 2019).

Although conflict, violence and climate change affect the right to education of all learners and indeed of entire families and communities, evidence for Afghanistan, Myanmar and Pakistan (see box 7) suggests that women, girls, students with disabilities, and those with refugee background, are often among the most affected.

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10.   This part draws on the section Education in emergencies: Old and new inequalities that compromise the right to education for those affected by emergencies drafted by Luis Eduardo Perez Murcia and Vernor Munoz Villalobos for the Education and Academia Stakeholder Group's Sectorial Paper HLPF 2022. The main arguments however have been refined and new evidence and examples have been added.

Climate change is an existential threat to people and the planet. The Asia Pacific is more vulnerable to climate change than the rest of the world and the region is already facing its impacts, such as increasing temperatures, rising sea levels, worsening flood disasters and droughts, and declining biological diversity (UNDP, 2019; Fetzek & McGinn, 2020). There are risks posed to water, food, energy, and economic security that may intensify instability and conflicts in fragile countries (UNESCO Courier, 2018). The marginalised and disadvantaged groups will disproportionately experience worsening impacts and it is their education that will be affected the most.

Pakistan, for instance, emits less than 1% of the world's greenhouse gas emissions, but it ranks 8th on the Global Climate Risk Index's list of countries that are most affected by extreme weather events (Eckstein, Künzel, & Schäfer, 2021; PCE, 2022). This will likely impact girls and women, children, farmers, migrants, internally displaced peoples (IDPs), and coastal communities more than other groups (IFRC, 2021; PCE, 2022). Unfortunately, there is a lack of government initiative to address environmental degradation. It is strongly recommended to leverage education by enhancing the curriculum to "include awareness-building interventions around climate change and provide climate-smart solutions that are simultaneously good for human health and environmental wellbeing" (PCE, 2022). However, it recognises that many children and youth are out of school due to climate change-related impacts.

Alongside issues posed by climate change and other emergencies, some countries in the region, such as Myanmar and Afghanistan, are facing conflict. Climate change is one of the drivers of conflict and an impediment to peace-building efforts, with existing literature showing complex intersections between climate change and other crises (UNOCHA, 2016; Mercy Corps, 2021; Walker, Glasser, & Kambli, 2012). Climate change places pressure on natural resources. When further layered by economic and political pressures, conflict dynamics may increase. Myanmar is currently suffering under a military takeover (TCF, 2021). Junta forces have "killed more than 2,000 civilians, arrested more than 14,000, displaced more than 700,000, driving the number of internally displaced persons well over one million, and plunged the country into an economic and humanitarian crisis…" (UNHCR, 2022a). Schools are bombed, children are killed, young people are detained, and teachers are threatened and arrested (TCF, 2021). Out of 14 million, an estimated 12 million children and youth in Myanmar have not had access to education.

There are also gendered issues brought about by the impacts of climate change, conflict, and other crisis. In Afghanistan, 3.7 million children are out of school or 42% of the school-age population, of which girls make up 60% of children out of school (ANEC, 2021). The Taliban took over the country in August 2021 and has from then on restricted freedom, reversing their earlier promise and prohibiting girls from continuing their education. Afghan women and girls will miss out on learning critical skills that could lead to employment opportunities and personal and financial independence (ASPBAE, 2022a). Some are fleeing to other countries for safety and others remain internally displaced by the country. The country also faced violent flash floods that destroyed lives, crops, and homes (MPI, 2022).

Climate- and conflict-related emergencies have an array of direct and indirect impacts on education. Myanmar and Afghanistan are among the countries that have the lowest secondary completion rates in the region and exhibit the widest disparities in education access (ASPBAE, 2022b). Climate change-related events can severely damage schools, learning centres, and essential infrastructures. It can also lead to increased dropout rates and absenteeism, worsening mental health and well-being, and learning disruptions. Wars and violent conflicts lead to famines, malnutrition, outbreaks of diseases, mental stress and trauma, and poverty traps. Both climate change phenomena and conflict come at the cost of lives and livelihoods and massive displacement and migration.

Authors: Raffiela Lae Santiago and Rene Raya, Asia South Pacific Association for Basic and Adult Education (ASPBAE), based on the Civil Society Spotlight Reports on SDG4 drafted by ASPBAE coalition members.

Along with conflict, disaster, and climate change-related emergencies, the ongoing global pandemic and the subsequent closure of schools and universities all across the world have further affected people's right to education (see Karalis, 2020; Sahlberg, 2021). The everyday experience of going to school/university was temporarily suspended for over one billion learners (Onyema et al, 2020), and for many, the reopening of education infrastructure did not mean a return to the classroom (Moscoviz & Evans, 2022). As in the case of climate and conflict-related emergencies discussed above, girls and women, students with disabilities, people living in remote areas, families with low income, as well as students with migratory or refugee backgrounds, are among the most severely affected by the pandemic. What the exclusion of these social groups indicates is that the negative impacts of the pandemic on education are far from equally distributed (Murat and Bonacini, 2020). As has been also observed before the pandemic (World bank, 2018; OECD, 2019; Rogers & Sabarwal, 2020), those who have been largely

excluded from the benefits of development and economic growth, and those who have been historically marginalised and discriminated against, such as girls and women in societies such as Afghanistan (Shayan, 2015; Arooje & Burridge, 2020), Kenya and Nigeria (Moscoviz & Evans, 2022), have been the most negatively affected by the pandemic. What these studies and the evidence gathered by GCE national and members reveal (see boxes 8, 9, and 10 below) is that multiple forms of disadvantage intersect. In fact, gender, ethnicity, age, socio-economic background, and place of residency, among other social markers and structures, influence the impact of crises on students' wellbeing (Tarricone, Mestan and Teo, 2021) and the distribution of educational opportunities and skills (Blundell et al, 2021).

Box 8: The intersection of multiple crises in Somalia and Yemen

Protracted conflicts and hostilities continue to affect children and youth in the MENA region. By 2022, the number of internally displaced people and refugees is estimated at 19.9 million and the figure is expected to increase due to ongoing emergencies in the region.

In Yemen, as for the years 2020-2021, GCPEA reported 48 attacks on schools, 49 schools were used for military purposes, and 24 incidents of attacks on higher education. Over 60 percent of children whose schools were attacked in the same period dropped out of schools and the number of children who left school due to the ongoing conflict has reached two million. School closures due to the Covid-19 pandemic affected the school opportunities of 5.8 million children, between March and October 2020.

In Somalia, conflict compounded by other acute crises, including seasonal floods and a locust infestation during the years 2020-2021, have left approximately 3 million Somalis living in conditions of displacement, and many girls and boys have been forced to live and learn in refugee camps, apparently in separate tents, without proper school infrastructure and teachers (see photos 1 and 2 below). Between 2019 and 2020 cases of conflict-related sexual violence increased by nearly 80%. Before the pandemic, over 3 million children were out of school due to conflict, poverty, and other barriers. Following the school closures-related to the pandemic, it is estimated that one million additional children left school (Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack, GCPEA, 2022).

Photo 1: Internally displaced girls learning at Ibnu Abbas Education Center in Kahda district in Mogadishu, Somalia. Photo courtesy of Education for All Somalia Coalition.

Photo 2: Internally displaced boys learning at Ibnu Abbas Education Center in Kahda district in Mogadishu, Somalia. Photo courtesy of Education for All Somalia Coalition.

Authors: Rand Wahsh and Refat Sabbah, Arab Campaign for Education for All (ACEA)

Box 9: The intersection of multiple crises in the United States

Climate-related crises, such as the winter storm in Texas, the wildfires on the West Coast, and among others floods in California and Louisiana, have left a significant impact on school closures (Gallagher, 2021), as the United States experienced a record high 20 weather or climate disasters that resulted in at least $1 billion in damages in 2021 (Smith, 2022). For example, over 45,000 students in Louisiana were out of school in 2021 due to Hurricane Ida, and as the climate crisis continues to impact the United States, schools across the nation are having to close, impacting more than 1.1 million students in 2021 alone (Gallagher, 2021).

Furthermore, the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has had a devastating impact on the country's education system. The pandemic over the past two years resulted in nationwide school closures that have left negative, lasting effects for students, their families, teachers, education support professionals, and education leaders. A recent assessment found that test scores for 9-year-olds have significantly dropped in maths and reading, the lowest it has been since 1990, as students are trying to catch up on the learning loss (National Centre for Education Statistics, 2022). Even more concerning, test score gaps between students in low-poverty and high-poverty elementary schools grew by approximately 20% in maths and 15% in reading throughout the 2020-2021 academic year according to Brookings Institution research (Kuhfeld et al., 2022). Additionally, many teachers left the profession as a result of the lack of support and funding, exacerbated throughout the pandemic. In fact, there have been several teachers strikes as the 2022-2023 school year has begun (Wolf, 2022), with teachers demanding more pay, school funding, and resources for their classrooms to assist students in closing their learning gap.

Author: Stephanie Peña, Global Campaign for Education-US.

Furthermore, what can be argued is that long-term rooted humanitarian emergencies and the ongoing health pandemic pose significant challenges for the countries to make progress towards SDG4 and to effectively protect and guarantee everyone's right to education. As illustrated with the case of Georgia (see box 10), emergencies make (in person) education temporarily unavailable for all types of learners and in some cases, as already stressed, those who belong to the most disadvantaged communities never go back to school/university/education facilities. As Baytiyeh (2018: 215) has pointed out in the analysis of school closures in the aftermath of climate change-related hazards such as earthquakes, hurricanes and floods, "the longer children are out of school, the less likely they are to return".

Box 10: The intersection of multiple crises in Georgia

The Georgian Education System went through several vast crises during the last 2 decades (Chanturia, et.al, 2020). In 2008, as a result of the Russo-Georgian war, 55 educational institutions were destroyed or damaged by military actions and 171 schools were used as internally displaced people shelters. The number of displaced children was estimated at 28,028 alongside the 9,500 displaced school teachers. It was predicted that many of these children would face the risk of dropping out of school, academic failure and post traumatic disorders (Ministry of Education and science, 2008). Nonetheless, the medium and long-term impact evaluation has not been conducted and large-scale mental health services for children in war-affected areas have not yet been developed.

The second biggest disruption of the Georgian education system was caused by the COVID-19. The country had to temporarily stop face to face teaching for nearly 43 weeks from March 2020 to June 2021 (Kadagidze, 2021). In response to the pandemic, the Georgian government offered free Microsoft teams services to all students and teachers, launched the TV School Program also known as "Teleskola," in collaboration with the Georgian Public Broadcaster, and developed and disseminated the e-resources through online platforms. However, the process was more oriented towards technical issues and continuity of education rather than quality as well as strengthening and supporting schools in terms of developing the timely remedial actions (Kadagidze, 2021; Kobakhidze and Eradze 2022).

Limited access to quality internet and devices left some students without access to remote education (MoES, 2020; Chanishvili, 2020; Mizunoya, and Mishra, 2020) and many teachers lacked the online pedagogical skills to deliver quality lessons. According to focus group discussions conducted with teachers and parents, while teachers were using online platforms such as teams, they were trying to "mirror" (copy) traditional lessons, which made the students frustrated and deepen their knowledge gaps (Kadagidze 2021).

While there has been no formal assessment on the impact of the COVID-19 on learning outcomes, international evidence predicts that students will experience the major learning and the earning losses (World Bank 2022). Local evidence already indicates the deprivation of skills in reading and maths, especially at the primary and lower secondary level (World Bank, 2022; Kadagidze, 2021).

Authors: George Chanturia and Meri Kadagidze, Education Coalition in Georgia

Moreover, the reconstruction of schools whether by war as in the case of Somalia, Yemen, Georgia or the ongoing war in Ukraine to name but a few examples, or disasters and climate-change related events in contexts such as Haiti, Nepal or Australia take a significant number of years if not decades. However, while in wealthy economies financial resources can regularly be allocated within a few years to secure the safe return to school, children and youth in contexts such as Nepal have been waiting to go back to school for several years (see Westoby, Wilkinson and Dunn, 2021). In short, the wealth of the country, as well as its possibility to implement rapid and sustainable responses to emergencies, play a critical role for securing access to education and learning. Therefore, as stressed by CLADE in box 11 below, additional financial measures such as progressive taxation to increase the size of education budgets as well as international cooperation are urgent to support low-income countries to rebuild their education systems in the aftermath of emergencies.

Box 11: Education in emergencies in Latin America and the Caribbean

Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC), the most unequal region in the world, is experiencing situations of conflict and emergencies that constitute real obstacles to achieving a dignified life for its people. The region has the highest homicide rate in the world, more than double that of any other region (UNICEF, 2021). In this context of violence, at least 4,091 women were victims of femicide in 2020 (ECLAC, 2021). This situation and the high poverty rates have led to forced migration through dangerous routes in which children and adolescents are exposed to all kinds of rights violations and risks to their lives. In terms of environmental issues, LAC is the region with the highest concentration of environmental conflicts; four out of the ten most violent conflicts in the world are located in Brazil, Honduras and Guatemala (EJAtlas, 2020). Also, 34 million people throughout the region were affected by natural phenomena in the last 20 years (UN, 2020, see EJAtlas, 2020).

On the other hand, the subregion of Central America is experiencing an expansion of street gangs and drug trafficking networks, which has a direct impact on the life trajectory of young people (UN, 2019). In countries such as Colombia and Peru, to cite just two examples in the region, networks associated with crimes such as human trafficking, cocaine trafficking, arms sales and others, significantly impact rural and indigenous communities and populations living in low-income urban sectors. In Venezuela, about 93 thousand protests have been registered between 2011-2021 for economic and social rights (OVCS, 2021).

The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated structural inequalities, and has generated the worst educational crisis in the region in its entire contemporary history. It was the region that took the longest time to open its schools, leaving 114 million students without face-to-face schooling (UNICEF, 2021). The consequences included increased risk of sexual abuse and exploitation, trafficking, and psychosocial problems in children and adolescents (UN Women, 2020). Furthermore, as illustrated with photos 3 and 4, the reopening of schools did not mean that everything went back to 'normal'. The taking of temperature and social distancing became ordinary practices in school settings.

Photo 3: A teacher taking a student temperature in a Brazilian school. Photo courtesy of Camila Lima, Agência Brasil.

Photo 4: Observing social distance. Photo courtesy of Fabiane de Paula, Agência Brasil.

Against this context, there is a growing need to strengthen the performance of education systems in emergency situations. Education should be recognized as one of the first measures of comprehensive protection in humanitarian emergencies that, by providing physical and psychosocial support, can save lives. When children and young people are in a learning environment, it reduces the risk that they will be recruited by gangs or armed groups; and in the case of girls and female adolescents, it protects them from violence and sexual exploitation. It also provides the educational community with a sense of normalcy in routines, structure and hope for the future. It is essential to ensure educational continuity and, to this end, it is paramount to guarantee sufficient and sustained public investment in public education systems. Only with sufficient and sustainable investment will students be able to count on temporary spaces, equipped with basic infrastructure (toilets and water), printed materials, new and traditional technologies that facilitate their educational process and that are adapted to the characteristics of the emergency and their educational needs. This investment is also vital to promote teacher training that encompasses notions of caregiving and survival to create safe spaces where students can communicate their feelings and concerns, as well as psycho-social support for the teachers themselves. Finally, the orientation of the entire educational system towards respect for human rights, social justice and a culture of peace is fundamental; education plays a vital role in the reconstruction of the social fabric and the prevention of new conflicts, with a view to promoting a life of dignity and freedom from violence for all.

Authors: Giovanna Mode and Gabriela Arrunátegui, CLADE.

Closely related to the issue of planning and sufficient and sustainable financing to address the multiple impacts of emergencies on education systems, it is the possibility to secure qualified staff to provide education even without school infrastructure. Countries with already existing gaps in the provision of qualified and fairly remunerated teaching and education support staff, are expected to deal with more challenges to secure all learners' education after an emergency. As Perez Murcia (2014) shows in the case of Colombia, teaching staff and school personnel lack often the qualifications required to address the multiple needs of students who have first-hand experience of multiple forms of violence and who have been forcibly displaced. Here the challenge is not only related to the provision of adequate infrastructure, including school facilities, desk and chairs, books and pedagogical materials. The challenge is also providing training for teachers and emotional support for families, students and in general all of those who play a role in education.

Beyond making education available, accessibility is a critical challenge for securing the right to education of those living in emergencies. Discrimination and exclusion dominate the narratives of displaced populations and school, universities and vocational institutes often fail to fight racism and racial discrimination within education systems (Block and Hirsch, 2017; Onsando & Billet, 2017). As Baak (2019) has shown in the case of South Sudanese heritage students in Australian schools, racism and exclusion are part of the everyday school experience of refugees. Racism is often systematic and shapes the relationships between 'peers', teachers, the school and the entire community. Similar

experiences of discrimination against, racism and exclusion are often experienced by multiple migrant and refugee communities as the study of Cadenas (2018) shows in the case of Venezuelans in the United States. Closely related, students with migratory and refugee backgrounds often find themselves in a position in which due to the local communities' perception of them as either vulnerable victims or threats to the economic and cultural integrity of the so-called 'host' country, education obstructs rather than creates their opportunities for social mobility (see Lems, 2020). In short, the implication of these examples is that policymakers should adopt comprehensive policy frameworks that first of all recognise diversity as an element that enriches educational communities and subsequently promote the inclusion of students with migratory backgrounds within education systems. This is certainly a prerequisite for countries to advance towards achieving SDG4.

Making education acceptable in terms of quality and content is also critical in contexts of emergency. Education Cannot Wait (2022) estimates that approximately 222 million school-aged children are affected by crises, of which 78.2 million are out of school; 119.6 million are not achieving minimum competencies in mathematics and reading despite attending school; and 24.2 million children are achieving minimum proficiency in these areas but are still affected by crises. The figures become even more critical when examined by educational levels. In Early Childhood Care and Development Education – ECCD, for example, UNICEF (2019) estimates that 23% of the world's pre-primary-age children (over 82 million) live in 33 countries affected by emergencies. The gross enrolment for ECCD in these countries accounts for only 31% while the average global rate accounts for 50%. Enrolment rates for primary, secondary and higher education are also considerably low: 68%, 34% and 5%, respectively (UNHCR, 2022). The enrolment rate for higher education for refugees is far below the global average of 40%.

Although the provision of quality ECCD is expected to have a significant impact on the wellbeing and ability to learn of all children, including those affected by emergencies, it is rarely secured for immigrant, refugees and asylum seekers population (see Bove & Sharmahd, 2020). There is indeed a significant gap between the legal recognition of displaced people and refugees right to education and their effective inclusion within education systems (Pérez Murcia, 2014; Dryden-Peterson, 2015; O'Rourke, 2015) and a lack of academic and policy attention to the specific needs of children on the move in ECCD. Those inequalities and policy challenges have become even more critical due to the ongoing health crisis. Recent research suggests that the disruptions created by the pandemic and subsequent lockdowns on ECCD are likely to widen existing inequalities further. This is because low-income families struggle to provide the required learning environment for children to expand their cognitive, social and cultural skills (Kim et al, 2021). Furthermore, many families do not have the time or income to engage in activities that stimulate their children's social and cognitive skills (Pattnaik & Jalongo, 2021). It is also worth noting that the pandemic disruption did not only affect children and parents. Early childhood educators have also seen their physical and mental health, and in many cases, their finances, negatively affected (Swigonski et al, 2021; Eadie et al, 2021), and online learning is full of difficulties many of them can neither predict nor successfully address (Steed, Leech & Shifting, 2021).

Embracing the multiple challenges that emergencies pose to secure quality education for all at all education levels therefore requires both an in depth understanding of the multiple dimensions of refugees exclusion, including legal, financial and language barriers, as well as prejudice, racism and discrimination, and the adoption of comprehensive policy frameworks to address these problems and their impacts. Among other critical aspects that directly influence the quality of education and students performance (Belot & James, 2011; Broton, Weaver & Mai, 2018), the policy frameworks should include school meals. In the countries of the MENA region, for example, the suspension of school meal programmes showed to be a significant barrier for children and youth's education. Egypt, Mauritania, Morocco and Somalia were founding members of the School Meals Coalition, an international initiative launched to scale up school meal programs, to bolster recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic (EFSD, 2022). Although school meal programs were identified as highly effective interventions to support children and youth in all these contexts, the programmes were suspended[11].

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11. The evidence for the MENA region in this paragraph was provided by Rand Wahsh and Refat Sabbah, Arab Campaign for Education for All (ACEA).

Additionally, education policies aiming to improve the quality of education in contexts of emergency should allocate financial resources to close the teachers gap, which was estimated at 69 million in 2016 (World Bank, 2018), and secure their adequate training for working with students who fled disaster, conflict and violence. Evidence suggests that teachers working in emergencies, notably in refugee settings, face more unequal work conditions and more than often lack teaching qualifications and opportunities for professional development. In Yemen, for example, two thirds of teachers had not received regular salary payments since 2018[12].

More broadly, teachers with refugee backgrounds consistently face additional inequalities. They are often not included in national planning and subsequently resources are not allocated to hire them and improve their working and living conditions. Besides, teachers' wages remain comparatively low in most countries and even lower in refugee settings where according to the UN Transforming Education Summit (2022), teachers are often paid late or not at all. This is not to mention that teachers, notably female teachers, are often victims of violence and sexual harassment in conflict zones (GCPEA, 2022).

New teaching methods to adapt schools and in general the whole education systems to the specific needs of all learners, including people with disabilities (see box 12), minority ethnic groups, and among others people on the move and those living in precarious material conditions and political instability should be also prioritised. More specifically, education systems should be adapted to the specific needs of all the different social groups whose right to education is disrupted by emergencies. Students affected by war, climate change and disaster-related emergencies, for example, not only need to go back to a safe school environment. They also need the school environment to take into consideration the many ways their lives have been altered by emergencies. As Sapkota and Neupane (2021) have shown in their analysis of the impacts of the 2015 earthquake in Nepal on its education system, students who are affected by emergencies and for example the loss of family members require special policies to help them to understand and navigate those impacts.

Box 12: Disability Inclusion Facilitators in South Sudan
Even though people often acquire a disability as a consequence of humanitarian crisis and armed conflict, children with disabilities are still underrepresented and neglected in education in emergency programming. Education Cannot Wait is making positive strides toward correcting the situation by engaging persons with disabilities and their organisations in ECW investments and have included a bold target of 10% of all children reached should have a disability in their results framework. They have encouraged grantees to gather and analyse disaggregated data on persons with disabilities. In 2021, ECW reached 34,191 children and adolescents with disabilities (0.92 per cent of all children reached against 1.3 per cent in 2021) (ECW, 2022), bringing the total since ECW inception to 62,274 children with disabilities (0.90 per cent since inception), against ECW's target of 3 per cent for the period 2018–2021. Considerably, more investment and technical expertise from organisations such as Light for the World and Humanity and Inclusion is needed. In South Sudan, for example, Disability Inclusion Facilitators (DIFs) are supporting teachers to include students who are deaf and hard of hearing. Facilitators are delivering sensitization activities and training students and teachers in Sign-language.
Author: Nafisa Baboo, Light for the World

12.   Ibid.

5.   Education Financing

The ongoing Covid-19 pandemic and the subsequent financial crisis have made much more visible the profound structural inequalities that characterise our societies and our education systems. While some countries can move to online learning in a matter of months, others do not have electricity, electronic devices, and Internet connection to deliver online learning. The pandemic and the financial crises however have not only made more evident education inequalities. They have also contributed to create more awareness among education stakeholders about the limitations of the current financing education architecture to protect and fulfil everyone's right to education. Following worldwide lockdowns in an attempt to stop the spreading of the coronavirus and the subsequent economic downturn, the provision of social services and the protection of social rights, notably the right to education, have been seriously compromised in many corners of the world, especially in low-and-middle income countries. This section focuses on two of the major challenges faced by countries and regions to secure sustainable financing for education and therefore to advance towards achieving SDG4. They are the insufficient allocation of national resources for education and the payment of debt service. As discussed below, and has been argued by the TaxEd Alliance (2022) and Tax Justice Network (2022), progressive taxation is likely the most effective option to secure sustainable financing for education.

Insufficient allocation of national resources for education

Following international human rights law and SDG4, rather than a commodity that can be bought from a market, education is a fundamental human right. The recognition of education as a fundamental right has substantial implications in terms of funding as states are not only the main responsible for the protection and fulfilment of the right to education but also, according to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (art. 2), they have the international obligation to invest the maximum of their resources available to effectively protect and fulfil everyone's right to education. Drawing mainly on the cases of Georgia, Honduras, Somalia and Tanzania, this section discusses whether and how governments are investing the maximum of resources available to protect everyone's right to education and the implications of the lack of sustainable financing to make progress towards SDG4.

To begin with, the analysis of these four countries reveals that they are neither investing the maximum of resources available to secure people's right to education nor on track to achieve the seven targets of SDG4 by 2030. For the period 2015-2021, any of these countries complied with the global investment benchmarks on education of at least 4 to 6% of the GDP and at least 15 to 20% of the total public investment. In the case of Honduras, the government budget allocation to the education sector has been consistently declining in the last seven years. It was 16% in 2016, 14% in 2019, and only reached 13% in 2020 (Acevedo, 2022). In the case of Georgia, the country has been investing less than 4% on education as a percentage of the GDP in four out of the seven years under analysis. In 2021 the figure was only 3.29% (see Janashia, 2022 and box 13).

Box 13: Lack of sustainable financing for education: The case of Georgia

Georgia's public investment in education and research and innovation is low compared to the European Union and global benchmarks. The total government expenditure as a share of GDP has been increasing from 2015 to 2019. The Government targeted to increase the spending on education to 6% of GDP, but due to the pandemic crisis, the above-mentioned target is not met (Janashia, 2022). Furthermore, available public funds (national or regional) vary from sector to sector as well as between different regions which implies that the quality as well as the equity differ significantly. Moreover, household spending on education is very high and increases social inequalities. To illustrate, students from high-income families are more likely to receive tutoring than students from low-income households (Kobakhidze, 2018).

As mentioned in the government's new strategy document, the current model of education needs to be reconsidered to give equal opportunities and to make quality education accessible and affordable for everyone. It is evident that early investments in education deliver the highest returns, however, in Georgia educational expenditure is the lowest for early childhood and preschool education and, as displayed in photos 5 and 6 below, schools in rural and remote areas are severely underfunded. Education is often provided in derelict infrastructure with precarious teaching, heating and toilet facilities.

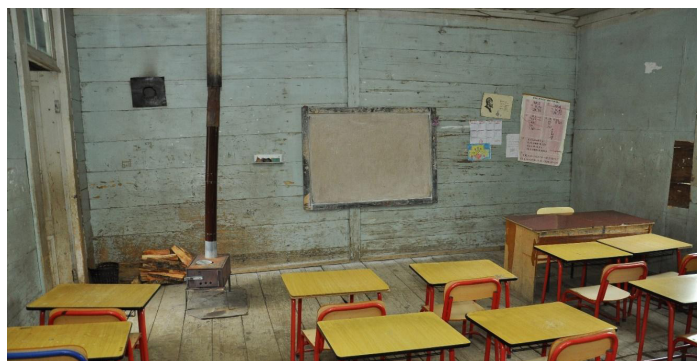*Photo 5: School in a rural area of Georgia. Photo courtesy of Education Coalition in Georgia*

Photo 6: Inside the school. Photo courtesy of Education Coalition in Georgia

Furthermore, the general education financing model (per-capita) does not guarantee that schools can accumulate enough funds to fulfil their educational and organisational objectives as more than 70% of the funds are dedicated for the teacher salaries. Due to the absence of school/national level measurement of learning outcomes, the funding formula does not include an equity component (World Bank, 2022).

Current funding scheme also affects the quality of tertiary education as it is basically student-number based and does not include any basic funding component and lacks performance incentives for modernization of the higher education sector (MOES, 2022, World Bank 2022). Additionally, while 70% of the tertiary education financing covers the tuition fees and grants for undergraduate and graduate students, only 2% of enrolled students receive need-based grants (MOES,2022). Therefore, tertiary education fees remain a significant financial burden for the students and their families and prevent students from low-income families from continuing studies. The new strategy emphasises that performance-based funding for higher education institutions will be established to stimulate better quality, greater alignment with the national priorities, and performance incentives for institutions and students as well as special social programs to support the students from vulnerable groups (MOES, 2022).

Authors: George Chanturia and Meri Kadagidze, Education Coalition in Georgia

The situation in Somalia is even more critical. The country has been dealing with hunger, climate change and conflict-related crises and has been investing only 3.2% on average on education. Concerning the 15 to 20% benchmark, the government has committed to invest at least 12% by 2019 and in real terms has only invested 4.7%. In 2016, less than 1% of the total social investment was allocated to education. The lack of planning and adequate financing has resulted in only 9% of children with disabilities and only 22% of children and youth from nomadic families, which represent 60% of the total population of the country, are enrolled in education (see Suaad, 2022).

The lack of investment has been partly ameliorated by the international community and in the period under analysis Somalia has been receiving a significant proportion of its education budget from either international aid or development cooperation. Sixty one percent of the total budget to the education sector in the period 2016-2020 came from international assistance which means that Somalia's children and youth education largely depends on international cooperation and humanitarian relief.

In Tanzania, the government budget allocation to the education sector has been consistently declining in the last seven years. It was 16% in 2017, 14% in 2019, and only 13,53% in 2021. At the same time, the share of foreign funding in education has been increasing in the same period. It was 1.8% in 2017, 2% in 2019 and reached 7.58% in 2021. Largely associated with patriarchal structures that limit women and girls' education, lack of funding and a gender-sensitive budget planning, their education remains a critical issue in the country. Although the policy to ban pregnant girls from schools was lifted in 2021, partly because of pressure from internal donors, there is still a gender gap in the distribution of financial resources for men and women's education. To illustrate, in 2021, 55% of the resources for higher education were invested in males education and only 45% in females education (see Mahangila, 2022). The lack of investment in education and the subsequent negative implications for making progress towards SDG4 and for people to enjoy their right to education are by no means an exclusive feature of the four countries discussed above. Indeed, as it is shown in boxes 14, 15, and 16, respectively, this is a common trend in low-and-middle income countries in the Asia Pacific Region, Latin America and the Caribbean, and also in wealthy economies such as the United States of America.

Box 14: Critical challenges to secure sustainable financing for education: Examples from the Asia Pacific Region

Education financing is a critical requirement for the full achievement of SDG4 on quality education and lifelong learning opportunities for all. Yet, education in the Asia Pacific region remains grossly underfinanced. The region, specifically South Asia, East Asia and Southeast Asia, are the least spenders in education compared to the other global regions (GEMR, 2020; Nuruzzaman & Tateno, 2021).

Even before the pandemic, the region fell short of the global spending benchmarks on education of at least 4 to 6% of the GDP and at least 15 to 20% of the total public expenditure. Only 9 out of 48 Asia Pacific countries reached both benchmarks (Noguchi, 2021). Now, the consequent impacts of the pandemic are exerting pressure on education budgets, highlighting the urgent need to address the education financing gap given the narrowing fiscal space, decreasing government revenues and domestic resources, falling household budgets and remittance, and increasing debt servicing. The financial shortfall to achieve SDG4 by 2030 is forecast to be more than US$100 billion annually should there be a decrease in the share of education expenditure as a percentage of the GDP (UNESCO & UIS, 2021).

Many countries have cut down on their education budgets as part of the COVID-19 response and recovery measures (WB & UNESCO, 2021). According to E-Net Philippines' Spotlight Report (2021), "specific budget lines for education have been shifted to fund the emergency response to the pandemic". The realigned funds were supposed to be allocated towards supporting learning continuity plans and the marginalised learners and disadvantaged communities, including the budget for the special education and school feeding programmes. What is more, education financing fails to consider equity and inclusion. Once again, it is the marginalised learners who are being left behind.

In Vanuatu, parents are struggling to pay for their children's education, whether formal education or Post-Secondary Education and Training (PSET) level (KoBLE, 2022). It was also found that 80% of the Vanuatu Ministry of Education's budget is allocated towards staff payrolls, administration, and operation, and most of the budget is directed to financing formal education, neglecting non-formal and adult education. There are also challenges in terms of the utilisation of education budgets, such as in Nepal, where the government failed to allocate 20% of the national budget to the education sector and there are issues of leakages, misutilisation, and freezing of the allocated funds (NCEN, 2022).

In the Asia-Pacific region, revenue from taxes on goods and services decreased in 21 economies and decreased more as a percentage of GDP compared to OECD countries where this did not change on average (OECD, 2022). A report on tax incentives in the ASEAN found that countries in the region are reducing their corporate income tax rates and providing tax incentives to multinational corporations or a "race to the bottom in the taxation" (VEPR, Oxfam in Vietnam, The PRAKARSA, & TAFJA, 2020). India has slashed corporate tax rates by 7% for companies, while Nepal put in place tax exemptions for businesses impacted by the pandemic (The Economic Times, 2022; Orbitax, 2022). In the Philippines, a 2017 Review of tax incentives conducted by the Department of Finance estimated that P1.12 trillion (USD 21 billion) in tax incentives and exemptions were given away to a select group of more than 3,000 companies from 2015 to 2017, an amount that is more than twice the basic education budget for the year 2017 (DOF, 2019).

It is also worth highlighting that aid to education has been stagnating and it is projected to contract due to the pandemic (OECD, 2020; WB & UNESCO, 2021; Read, 2020). Japan's aid for basic education accounted only for 1.4% of its total Official Development Assistance (ODA) disbursement in 2018, way below the average percentage of OECD/DAC member states at 3.4% (JNNE & DEAR, 2021). Ultimately, significantly increasing domestic resources for education, mainly through implementing progressive tax reforms and curbing illicit funding flows, is urgent and critical, noting that the bulk of the education budget comes from domestic sources.

Authors: Raffiela Lae Santiago and Rene Raya, Asia South Pacific Association for Basic and Adult Education (ASPBAE), based on the Civil Society Spotlight Reports on SDG4 drafted by ASPBAE coalition members.

Box 15: Challenges and possible paths for education financing in Latin America and the Caribbean

Due to its key role in fulfilling the human right to education, education financing has been, since the creation of CLADE, a central issue in its political agenda.

In 2017, CLADE launched its Monitoring System of the Financing of the Human Right to Education in Latin America and the Caribbean, which analyses data from international databases in 20 countries in the region. Although the data shows important limitations, it is possible to say that very few countries in the region have been prioritising education in budgetary terms.

By 2022, of 14 countries with available data, only two had surpassed the regional agreement to allocate 6% of their GDP to education: Cuba (which reached 10.41%) and Costa Rica, with 6.75%. Six others allocated close to 4% and the rest were below this threshold. Another important indicator is the investment in education as a percentage of public spending, which shows a more promising trend: Chile, Costa Rica, Cuba, Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua exceed the target of 20% of the national budget allocated to education. Peru, the Dominican Republic and El Salvador did not reach the 20% target but made substantial progress.

Furthermore, CLADE analyses the amounts allocated per person of school age in each country. This indicator shows that although in the last 20 years the region doubled the resources allocated to education, from US$1,180 per person in the three-year period 1998-2000 to US$2,500 between 2019 and 2021, these amounts are still substantially low when compared to the average investment of lower-income OECD countries, which invest at least three times more than the region's average.

There is also a very large disparity in investments in education among the region's countries: while Costa Rica invested US$5,376.69 per person in 2019, Guatemala allocated US$666.42 - a little more than 10% of its neighbour, which is evidently reflected in poor school infrastructure, low teacher salaries and insufficient availability of textbooks and other supplies.

The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated the education financing crisis seen in most countries in the region prior to March 2020. It is estimated that in 2020, the GDP of Latin America and the Caribbean fell by 7.7%. According to ECLAC, this was the largest drop in 120 years, which led to a drop in the level of revenue collection by governments. The crisis led to a reorientation of funds according to the emergencies detected, such as the strengthening of health systems, access to basic services and social protection programmes, which is fundamental, but education was not prioritised.

In order to address the context of low education financing, it is essential to focus on two additional strategies. On the one hand, identifying what amount of resources is effectively necessary per person to guarantee the human right to education in different contexts. In this regard, the network has the inspiring experience of the Brazilian Campaign for the Right to Education, which developed the Cost of Quality Education per Student, proving that, for a country like Brazil, it is necessary to invest at least 10% of GDP in education to start talking about quality education for all. On the other hand, thinking of ways to expand the national tax base, in a progressive manner, with a view to finding the necessary resources for education. The study Education Financing and Tax Justice, published by CLADE in 2021, explores the potential for increasing education budgets in Argentina and Guatemala if states were to tax large fortunes, large properties and tax abuses and tax evasion by corporations. The result is that Guatemala could increase its national budget for education by 34% and Argentina by 41%. The national resources in our region are there, but there is a lack of political will to make education a real priority.

Authors: Laura Giannecchini and Ana Raquel Fuentes (CLADE).

Box 16: challenges to secure sustainable financing for education in the United States of America

Funding remains a major problem in the United States of America, as funding for schools predominantly comes from state and local governments often resulting in education system funding variations and inequities across economic, racial, gender, geographic, cultural, and other social markers. In fact, the federal government accounts for only around 8% of total school funding while states account for around 47% of funding and local communities 45% (Irwin et al., 2021). Martin, Boser, & Benner (2018) suggest a set of principles to guide a new framework for school finance reform and secure a high-quality finance system. The principles include: (i) ensuring equal access to core educational services; (ii) providing significant additional resources for low-income students; (iii) using outcomes-based accountability rather than dollars to evaluate if schools are providing students with quality education; and (iv) maintaining and increasing funding for education and child welfare programs. These principles create a narrative centred on improving the overall quality of education, emphasising the need to provide more funding for schools that are performing poorly – as opposed to the current model that strips funding from schools.

Author: Stephanie Peña, Global Campaign for Education-US.

Debt compromises the effective protection and fulfilment of everyone's right to education

As stressed above, the ongoing global health and economic crisis have meant that financial resources for education are under significant pressure. According to the World Bank (2022), global growth is expected to slump from 5.7 percent in 2021 to 2.9 percent in 2022. The global economic prospects for the remainder of 2022 can even be more modest as Russia's invasion of Ukraine is increasing the risk of high global inflation which can eventually result in more restricted monetary policy in advanced economies and further financial stress in low-and-middle income countries (World Bank, 2022). The tepid economic prospects, along with the foreseen austerity measures and IMF's policies which tend to prioritise debt payments to creditors over financing the provision of social services for the population (see Munevar, 2020), compromise the provision of social services and social rights. Empirical evidence suggests a negative correlation between debt servicing and public expenditure on social services: higher spending on debt negatively impacts spending on basic social services (Shiroya & Brown, 2019; ActionAid, 2020; Jubilee Debt Campaign, 2020; Khundadze, 2020; Khundadze and Alvarez, 2022).

Against this backdrop, the critical issue here is that the payment of debt servicing is compromising the fulfilment of the right to education for all and notably for the most disadvantaged members of society in low-and-middle income countries. Shiroya & Brown's (2019) analysis of debt burden for Sub-Saharan Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean, and East Asia and the Pacific for the period 2009-2017 suggest that regions with less capacity to pay debt tend to invest less in education[13]. In Mongolia, for example, its external debt increased from less than 50 percent of GDP in 1997 to 253 percent in 2019 and the payment of the debt service, which reached 15.8 as percentage of the gross national income, subsequently reduced investment in education and further compromising the achievement of SDG4 (see Banzragch, 2021)[14]. In Zambia, debt servicing has been drastically affecting the provision of education in the last two decades (see Milapo, 2021) and as it is illustrated with photos 7 and 8, has left school infrastructure in very precarious material conditions and community schools with no financial support for teachers and infrastructure. In the country, community schools provide education to 20% of children and youth and those schools are initiated, operated and financed mainly by low-income families and communities in places where there are no public schools nearby. Similarly, in countries such as Ghana and Kenya, debt servicing is seriously compromising spending for all social services, including education (ActionAid, 2020). Their debt servicing ratio to revenue accounts for 59% and 36%, respectively. ActionAid and Jubilee Debt Campaign (2020) estimate that if their proportion of revenues being spent on debt servicing are reduced at 12%, for example through cancellation, rescheduling, or other debt alleviation mechanisms, Ghana is likely to have an extra $5 billion and Kenya an extra $4.4 billion available for spending on public services[15].

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13. When analysing the impact of debt on education financing, Shiroya and Browne (2019) suggest considering both the total volume of debt of a country and its economic capacity to meet its payment. The latter aspect can be measured, for example, by comparing the total amount of debt against the value of exports.
14. See also World Bank (2022). International Debt Statistics. https://data.worldbank.org/ Retrieved on September 10 2022.
15. ActionAid (2020) estimates in 12% the threshold marking the maximum acceptable proportion of revenues being spent on debt servicing.

Photo 7: Students sitting on the floor. Community school in Zambia. Photo courtesy of Zambia National Education Coalition.

Photo 8: Community school in Zambia. Photo courtesy of Zambia National Education Coalition.

Similar trends can be observed in countries of Latin America and the Caribbean, the Middle East (see box 17), and Africa (see the example of Zambia in box 18). In Latin America and the Caribbean, for example, a region that is already heavily indebted, several countries have signed new loan agreements, which has put public investment in education at risk and further compromised the making of progress towards SDG4. According to the study Impacts of indebtedness on the realisation of the human right to education, published by CLADE in 2022, Argentina, Ecuador and Honduras are the three countries of the region with the greatest deterioration in the debt-education ratio in the last five years. In 2020, the region paid an estimated US$95 billion in debt service payments. In Argentina, Brazil, Jamaica and St. Lucia, public spending on debt exceeded the amount allocated to education, highlighting the need to negotiate debt cancellation[16]. Recent research for Honduras further illustrates the important role that debt alleviation mechanisms can play for increasing the resources available for financing education. About 358 million dollars were added to the national budget for education in the period 2016-2021 as the country's debt and debt service were alleviated by the Paris Club (see Acevedo, 2022).

Box 17: Debt crises in the Middle East

The Arab region faces many challenges to secure sustainable financing for education, being external debt burdens one of the most critical in recent years. Certainly, the region has faced rising public and external debt burdens over the last decade, due mainly to low growth and persistent fiscal and trade deficits. In middle-income countries (MICs) of the region, external public debt service consumes nearly 11% of export rations, which is much higher than the global average for MICs at 6.4% (UN 2022).

COVID-19 has pushed gross public debt in the Arab region to a historic high of $1.4 trillion, putting some of the MICs and Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries at high risk of debt distress. Public debt reached 60% of GDP in 2020, and in conflict-affected countries (CACs) such as Iraq, Libya and Yemen, it has increased to about $190 billion by 2020, 88% of their aggregate GDP (UNESCWA, 2021).

Overall, the historical high level of debt and the impacts of the ongoing pandemic have put most of low-and-middle income countries in the region at risk of debt unsustainability, especially since regional GDP growth has remained considerably low and fell below zero in 2020. Overcoming the increasing debt sustainability requires advancing immediate to near-term and long-term policies to foster a resilient recovery from COVID-19 and build forward better in enhancing sustainable financing for the SDGs. While the set of policy measures are applicable to all countries across the region, the priority is for the low-and-middle-income countries, which account for the largest share of debt in the region and face increasing risks of debt unsustainability (UNESCWA, 2021a).

Authors: Rand Wahsh and Refat Sabbah, Arab Campaign for Education for All (ACEA)

Box 18: The payment of the debt service is compromising sustainable financing for education: The case of Zambia

Zambia's debt crisis represents the most critical challenge to secure sustainable financing for education. In 2011 when the Patriotic Front Government ascended to power, external debt stood at US$ 3.5 billion or 15% of GDP. By end of June 2020, the debt had reached US$11.97 billion (Ministry of Finance, 2021)[17]. The 2019 World Bank and IMF (2019) Debt Sustainability Analysis concluded that Zambia's risk of overall and external debt distress remains very high and that public debt under the current policies is on an unsustainable path[18]. In 2019, total external debt service payments amounted to $ 944.4 million compared to $760 million recorded in 2018, representing an increase of 24.3 % (Ministry of Finance, 2015)[19]. As a result, Zambia has in the last five years (2016 -2021) only spent an average of 14 % on education, dropping 5 percentage points from the levels of funding between 2006-2010. The 10.4 % allocated in the 2022 budget is the lowest that the country has spent on education in the past 15 years. Furthermore, the advent of COVID 19 has also slowed down economic growth, thereby undermining the country's ability to generate domestic revenue to invest in education.

To address this situation, Zambia needs to implement specific debt alleviation and progressive tax measures. Debt alleviation options include debt-for-education swaps, cash repurchases using externally donated funds, senior bonds, bailouts, self- financed buybacks and debt cancellation. While progressive tax measures may include suspending tax breaks and incentives given especially to copper mining multinational corporations, broadening the tax base, strengthening enforcement of tax laws to improve compliance and increasing the severity of penalties for non-compliance. These tax measures have the potential to provide a sustainable and wide tax base as they can help capture all potential taxpayers who are currently either avoiding or evading to pay tax.

Author: George Hamusunga, Zambia National Education Coalition

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16. The evidence for Latin America and the Caribbean in this paragraph was provided by Laura Giannecchini and Ana Raquel Fuentes (CLADE).
17. Ministry of Finance. (2021). Ministerial Statement on Zambia's Public Debt Management Strategy.
18. World Bank and IMF (2019) Zambia Joint World Bank-IMF Debt Sustainability Analysis. Downloaded on 20th January 2022 at: https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/548351570791173632/pdf/Zambia-Joint-World-Bank-IMF-Debt-Sustainability-Analysis-August-2019.pdf
19. Zambia's Ministry of Finance (2015). National Budget Speeches, 2018 – 20.

More broadly, a recent report comparing the influence of external public debt stock on government spending on education in El Salvador, Gambia, Georgia, Lebanon, Mongolia, Nepal and Zambia shows that high external debt to GDP ratio is associated with higher limitations to increasing public education expenditure (Khundadze and Alvarez, 2022). Although public external indebtedness is not a problem in itself since it allows developing countries to acquire resources that could be used for financing development programs, debt servicing consistently constrains the public expenditure on education. More specifically, Khundadze and Alvarez (2022) show that a 1 percent increase in the external debt-to-export ratio is associated with a 0.33 percent decrease in public spending on education. Thus, it is difficult to expect that developing countries increase their budget for education in the foreseen future and make progress towards achieving SDG4 by 2030 if multilateral organisations, mainly IMF and World Bank, do not adopt aggressive policies to reduce the debt service pressure on these countries.

6.   Summary and concluding remarks

This report has provided a general overview of both the critical challenges the world is facing to make progress towards SDG4 and the multiple barriers that people encounter to effectively enjoy the right to education. Drawing on the analysis of contemporary debates in education policy and examples from Latin America and the Caribbean, the United States of America and Europe, the Asia Pacific Region, East and North Africa and the Middle East, the report shows how the Covid-19 pandemic has exacerbated deep-rooted inequalities in the world education systems and further limited the most marginalised members of society's opportunities to enjoy the right to education.

 Before summarising and analysing the policy implications of the multiple barriers children, youth and adults face to enjoy the right to education worldwide, a methodological note is in place. The report aimed to identify common patterns to develop its main arguments in four interrelated thematic areas, named transformative education; digital learning and transformation; education in emergencies; and education financing. The selection of these thematic areas was informed by both the seven targets of SDG4 and the five Thematic Action Tracks established by the Transformative Education Summit. The remaining paragraphs of this section identifies the key barriers for people to enjoy their right to education and discusses its policy implications for all thematic areas:

Transformative Education

The need to positively transform education systems to effectively protect everyone's right to education has become a new mantra in education policy in most regions of the world. However, the integration of this concept in the everyday practices of education is largely rhetoric. Education systems which embrace ideas of transformation are still reproducing patriarchal practices and theories in which the education of boys and males are given preference and subsequently receive more funding. Furthermore, in some of these systems, colonial practices, which in some contexts give predominance to some social and ethnic groups over others, can still be found in the curricula. In the most critical cases, notably in contexts where the rights of minority ethnic and religious groups are under threat, curricula and pedagogical practices can promote racial and religious intolerance. No to mention the hostility and even violence and punishments, since in various countries diverse sexual orientation is considered a crime, that students with diverse sexual orientation and gender identity often face in countries where individual freedoms are considerably restricted and even promoted by the institutions in power. All in all, the evidence provided by GCE national and regional coalitions not only shows the multiple dimensions of exclusion and injustice that characterise education systems in many countries of the world. It also shows how the lack of political will to develop education policies that respect and embrace diversity compromises both progress towards achieving SDG4 and the effective protection of everyone's right to education.

Digital learning and transformation

Multiple forms of inequality characterise access and use of technology in education within and across countries. Those inequalities comprise among other aspects access to technological devices and the internet, digital skills, teacher skills, parental support to use technology, and adaptation and management of learning environments. Recent research along these lines as well as the evidence provided by GCE members show that the multiple dimensions of the digital divide are interrelated and affect progress towards SDG4 and all the four components of the right to education. In terms of availability, the closure of schools worsen deep-rooted inequalities in the distribution of digital infrastructure, including Internet and electronic devices required for inclusive online learning. Not to mention that many countries in East Africa and South Asia Pacific have limited access to electricity. Concerning accessibility, underprivileged and marginalised social groups, including ethnic and religious minorities, people with disabilities, people living in remote areas and those on the move, are consistently left behind. In all these groups, girls and women are often over represented and in many countries have very limited access to technology. Not to say that they are particularly targeted by online abusers. Regarding acceptability, evidence for many countries suggests that online learning repeatedly crashes to fulfil minimum standards of quality, associated for example to lack of qualified teachers and training for teachers to develop online content. Parents and students are also often out of reach of training programmes and thus struggle to continue with their education even when technology is available. Finally, in terms of adaptability, online teaching has been rarely adapted to the specific needs of children with disabilities and consequently children who are deaf or hard of hearing can struggle to access the same educational content either by computer online lessons or radio. Children and youth from minority ethnic groups who do not communicate in the country's official language are also often excluded from the benefits of online teaching or TV/radio educational programmes.

Education in emergencies and crises

Conflict, disaster and climate change-related emergencies have dramatically disrupted the education opportunities of millions of students. Although all these emergencies affect the right to education of all learners, evidence suggests that women, girls, students with disabilities, and those with refugee background, are often among the most affected. Along with these emergencies, the ongoing global pandemic and the subsequent closure of schools and universities all across the world, have deeply affected progress towards SDG4 and people's right to education. As in the case of climate and conflict-related emergencies, girls and women, students with disabilities, people living in remote areas, families with low income, as well as students with migratory or refugee backgrounds, are among the most severely affected by the pandemic. Overall, what the exclusion of these social groups indicates is that the negative impacts of the pandemic on education are far from equally distributed. Indeed, those who have been largely excluded from the benefits of development and economic growth, and those who have been historically marginalised and discriminated against, have been the most negatively affected by these multiple crises.

Furthermore, the evidence shows that education planning tends to overlook the significant and long-term impacts of emergencies in both education infrastructure and the lives of students, teachers and their families. The reconstruction of schools often takes years if ever completed and despite some progress in recent years, education policies still lack comprehensive programmes to support students, teachers, families and communities to deal with the physical and mental impacts of emergencies. Policies that effectively address the issue of mental health are not only essential for those students who fled conflict and human rights abuses. They are also vital for those affected by disaster and climate change emergencies and those who were affected by the Covid-19-related closure of schools.

Data provided by coalitions also strongly reveal the multiple forms of discrimination against migrants, internally displaced people and refugees are subject to in the places they settle. Education policies have largely failed to integrate people on the move into the education systems and exclusion, discrimination and even segregation still prevail in education systems in many regions of the world. Overall, to address the multiple challenges that emergencies pose to secure quality education for all demands not only an in-depth understanding of the multiple dimensions of refugees exclusion. It also demands policies to close the teachers gap in refugee settings, the provision of training, especially their skills to work with students who may have experienced traumatic events, and more generally the adoption of comprehensive policy frameworks to provide quality education for those on the move.

Education Financing

The ongoing Covid-19 pandemic and the subsequent financial crisis have significantly affected domestic financing for education and international aid and cooperation for education. Evidence reveals that low-and-middle income countries have consistently struggled to provide adequate and sustainable funding for education partly because the limited resources were oriented towards strengthening their already poorly financed health systems. Along with the competition for resources among social sectors, the pandemic worsened the debt crises in many countries of the world and the payment of debt service had been compromising the provision of education and other social rights and progress towards SDG4.

Evidence for Africa and Latin America and the Caribbean reveal that many countries have failed to comply with the global investment benchmarks on education of at least 4 to 6% of the GDP and at least 15 to 20% of the total public investment. In some critical cases, especially in East Africa, the provision of education largely depends on international aid and cooperation. Although globally 97% on average of resources for education comes from domestic sources, in countries which had been dealing with protracted crises, i.e., Somalia, this figure only accounts for 40%. Although progressive taxation is likely the most effective option to secure sustainable financing for education, it is worth calling into attention the need to adapt the global financing architecture to address the needs of countries which have been dealing with multiple emergencies for several years if not decades.

Furthermore, the analysis shows that austerity measures which tend to prioritise debt payments to creditors over financing the provision of social services for the population compromise the achievement of SDG4 and others SDGs. Examples for many countries in the MENA region, as well as for the Asia Pacific, Africa and Latin America and the Caribbean show that debt cancellation or debt swaps for education can effectively increase resources for education. Overall, the analysis strongly suggests that low-and-middle income countries are unlikely to increase funding for education unless progressive taxation systems are put in place and unless multilateral organisations adopt aggressive policies to reduce the debt service pressure on these countries.

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