

**Executive summary
of the report**



What is promised becomes a debt

Five years to fulfill the commitments to
the right to learn

Five years to fulfill the right to learn

With just five years remaining until 2030, it is essential to intensify efforts and uphold the commitment to ensuring quality education for all people, throughout their lives.

Sustainable Development Goal 4, as outlined in the **2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development**, commits all educational stakeholders to ensuring inclusive, equitable, and quality education for all people throughout their lives. The global challenges hindering progress on educational commitments do not render the 2030 Agenda unnecessary or unattainable; on the contrary, it remains highly relevant and even more urgent in the face of the multiple crises threatening the right to learn.

This shared agenda, encompassing governments, international organizations, and the entire educational community, now demands renewed efforts and a strong sense of shared responsibility.

There is still time to reverse some of the most concerning trends, provided decisive action is taken during this final stretch. It is also time to begin thinking with a medium and long-term perspective about the post-2030 scenario. Simply extending current commitments will not be enough; it will be necessary to learn from shortcomings, assess unmet goals, and reformulate the agenda with greater ambition, justice, and coherence.

The Impact of COVID-19 and Education Financing

Education has lost prominence in national budgets and in official development assistance (ODA) due to a lack of commitment from states, structural factors such as **external debt**, and unforeseen crises like the **pandemic**.

- In 2020, COVID-19 led 40% of low-income countries to cut their education budgets by an average of 13.5%. The pandemic has been one of the primary contributors to the significant decline in learning outcomes in reading and mathematics.
- Between 2015 and 2023, ODA allocated to education remained stagnant, and it is projected to decline by 12% in 2024 and by 14% by 2027. These trends will have a severe impact on low-income countries.

- Austerity policies promoted by the IMF and the World Bank have restricted education investment, hindering the hiring of new teachers and placing limits on educators' salaries.

- Debt servicing has increased significantly, exceeding education investment by a factor of 2.8, particularly in low- and lower-middle-income countries.



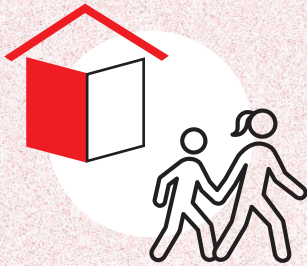
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In this report, **Entreculturas** examines the progress made and the ongoing challenges, including the factors contributing to setbacks, in the implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4). Over the past decade, global progress toward SDG 4 has been uneven. Significant challenges to its implementation persist, and while achievements have been limited, some are nonetheless meaningful. Entreculturas aims to highlight the most pressing issues and illustrate the reasons why none of the seven committed SDG 4 targets will be met by 2030.

If current trends continue, it is estimated that by that year, **84 million children will still have never set foot in a classroom.**



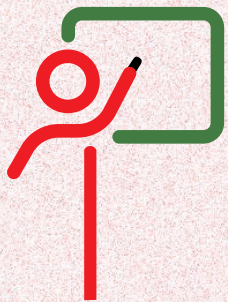
PROGRESS AND CHALLENGES IN EDUCATION 5 YEARS FROM THE END OF THE 2030 AGENDA



More than **50%**
of **refugee** children
and youth are **out of**
school



There are
754 million
illiterate people
worldwide
2/3 are **women**



Nearly
44 million
teachers
are needed worldwide to
meet the demand in primary
and secondary education



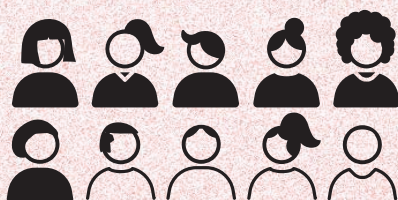
In sub-Saharan Africa
less than **50%** of
primary **school teachers**
are women
dropping to **32%**
in secondary
education



Despite **significant**
population growth, the
percentage of children
enrolled in **primary**
education has stayed
above

91% since 2008

But at this rate, only **6** out of **10**



young people
will finish secondary
school by 2030

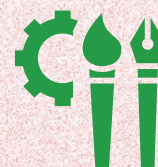


By 2030
37% of children
worldwide won't reach
basic **reading** proficiency
levels



Technical education
in sub-Saharan Africa
has made **significant**
progress

Youth
(ages 15–24)
enrollment



5%
in 2010

12%
in 2021



Based on the data, trends, and testimonies on SDG 4 gathered in this report, we have identified the following seven key conclusions.

1. With five years remaining until the SDG 4 deadline, the data reflect insufficient progress, and in some cases, unjustifiable setbacks, that not only deepen poverty and inequality, but also establish a trajectory that will be difficult to reverse unless states, international organizations, and financial institutions commit decisively and global governance structures are reformed.

2. Human rights are a prerequisite for attaining development. Education is a fundamental human right, and the Sustainable Development Agenda must reflect this reality. This means clearly outlining governments' obligations under international human rights law, encouraging states to renew their public policies, and ensuring full compliance.

3. Global education financing is insufficient, stagnant, or in decline, making it impossible to expand access. This is especially the case in fragile economies where rising external debt has displaced education spending. ODA for education has shown marginal or negative growth, severely hindering the development of robust and equitable education systems.

4. Gaps in access, retention, and learning within education systems remain deeply influenced by structural factors such as poverty, gender, ethnicity, disability, geographic location, and migration status.

5. Diversity, curriculum content, and education governance are key factors in ensuring learning outcomes. Achieving the SDG 4 targets requires a holistic approach that respects and promotes diverse forms of learning and cultural contexts. Learning outcomes improve significantly when basic education is delivered in the mother tongue and adapted to the personal and cultural characteristics of students.

6. No target can be met without teachers.

The global shortage of 44 million teachers clearly cannot be resolved by 2030, but there is still time to reduce it, especially in sub-Saharan Africa. More than just means of implementation, teachers are central actors in the educational process.

7. Once the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda deadline has passed, states will need to redouble their efforts to fulfill outstanding targets and sustain the commitments made in 2015. Only through public, free, inclusive, and quality education systems will it be possible to universalize the right to education. SDG 4 must inspire a renewed global framework for action beyond 2030.



“The complex historical moment we are living in, marked by polarization, fragmentation, democratic backsliding, violence, and a lack of goodwill, does not make the educational path easy; we are swimming against the current. Yet, although it is difficult today, we cannot throw in the towel.”

AMPARO MUÑOZ

Teacher at IES Vicent Andrés Estellés, Valencia.



Recommendations for decision-makers requiring urgent action: the right to learn cannot wait.

To States and the International Community

1. Enhance public education budgets:

- Increase public investment in education to between 4-6% of GDP or 15-20% of total public expenditure.
- Support national and international tax justice initiatives, including a UN Fiscal Convention, to establish a more equitable international tax system.

2. Transform international financing policies:

- International financial institutions must relieve the debt burdens of low- and middle-income countries to free up resources for education, increase education aid and refrain from implementing austerity measures that cut budgets or restrict teacher salaries.

3. Strengthen institutional and community processes and expand support for families:

- Eliminate gender disparities in education by removing all gaps, stigmatization, and prejudice present in textbooks and curricula.
- Update curricula in line with UNESCO's recommended standards.
- Expand mother tongue instruction.
- Ensure access to technological resources and internet connectivity in all educational institutions.

4. Expand and strengthen the teaching profession:

- Support initial and ongoing professional development for teachers at all levels.
- Establish competitive salaries and improve working conditions for educators.
- Promote meaningful teacher participation in educational policy decision-making.

5. Develop the institutional capacities of Ministries of Education and related government bodies involved in education:

- Develop systems for monitoring, evaluation, and oversight of education systems.
- Establish agile consultation mechanisms to update curricula and study programs.
- Set plans and allocate resources to eliminate educational inequities.
- Expand and strengthen educational programs for adults, including literacy initiatives.

6. States must initiate internal and multilateral consultations to establish a global monitoring mechanism for the Sustainable Development Agenda post-2030. This mechanism should be grounded in international human rights law and include a clear framework of obligations and enforceability measures. Furthermore, it should actively recognize and support civil society organizations as key actors in educational development.

To Spain as a Signatory State of the 2030 Agenda

1. Develop **educational equity** policies to address challenges related to school segregation, early school leaving, repetition rates, and academic failure.
2. Increase **public investment** in education by designing a budget that addresses structural issues.
3. **Comply with the Law on Cooperation** for Sustainable Development and Global Solidarity by investing up to 0.7% of GDP in Official Development Assistance (ODA) and allocating 8% of bilateral ODA to education.
4. Commit to key multilateral initiatives such as the Global Partnership for Education (GPE) and Education Cannot Wait (ECW).
5. Increase humanitarian aid for education and allocate at least 3% of total ODA to Education for Sustainable Development and Global Citizenship.
6. Strengthen universal, equitable, and inclusive coverage of education, especially in early **childhood education**.
7. Facilitate **funding for all costs associated** with educational stages. In particular, ensuring universality and free access to school meal programs.



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8. Implement additional measures to combat **school dropout** rates, which remain higher than those of our European counterparts.

9. **Provide teacher training** in key areas that present current challenges, including:

- a. Prevention, identification, and management of various forms of violence occurring in classrooms.
- b. The realities of rural schools (multi-grade classrooms, diversity, methodologies and educational tools).
- c. Education for Sustainable Development and Global Citizenship.



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Entreculturas is committed to the right to learn for all people and leaving no one behind.



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