

# An introduction to education

## SUSTAINABLE

### DEVELOPMENT GOAL 4

'Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all'. -SDG4



## HUMAN RIGHT TO EDUCATION

'Everyone has the right to education' - Universal Declaration on Human Rights. Also recognised and developed in a number of other treaties, laws and constitutions.



"I'M VERY HAPPY TO FINALLY BE LEARNING. I KNOW I'M YOUNG, BUT IF GIVEN THE CHANCE, I'D LIKE TO TAKE UP TEACHING OR NURSING AS A CAREER TO HELP MY COMMUNITY."

Rekia, 10-year-old student  
Gash-Barka region, Eritrea  
[Read more here.](#)

## Why does education matter?

Education is a fundamental human right that can enable someone to reach their full potential. For example, education can help tackle gender inequality, poverty and the impacts of climate change. [Educated girls](#) are less likely to marry young or contract HIV, and more likely to have healthy, educated children. Education is also said to be the most cost-effective [investment against climate change](#) as it can equip young people with essential skills, knowledge and behaviours. It is estimated that if all people in low-income countries left school able to read, [170 million people would be lifted out of poverty](#) - a 12% reduction in global poverty levels. There are also economic benefits: it is projected that each additional year of education raises a [person's earnings by 8-10%](#). All in all, education is a powerful investment in individuals, communities and countries.

## Progress and challenges to achieving SDG4

There are now [more children in school than at any point in human history](#), and the number of girls in school has risen by [180 million since 1995](#). This is a huge achievement and shows that it is possible to improve access to education worldwide. However, access remains a huge issue especially among girls, children with disabilities and children affected by crises such as conflict and displacement. It is estimated that [78.2 million children are out of school because they are affected by crises](#). The COVID-19 pandemic and response [disrupted the education of 1.6 billion children](#), with many months of lost learning and millions of children, particularly girls, who have dropped out of school as a result.

As well as a need to continue to improve access to schooling, there is an urgent need to address what is known as the [learning crisis](#) - the fact that the majority of children in low- and middle- income countries do not gain foundational learning skills such as literacy and numeracy during their primary education. [Foundational learning skills](#) can also provide children with a springboard to enable them to engage with other aspects of learning in school such as social and emotional learning, more advanced curriculum content and be better equipped to deal with issues in their personal lives and communities.

## LEARNING CRISIS IN NUMBERS

The World Bank defines learning poverty as being unable to read and understand a simple text by age 10.

**90% children**  
in low-income countries experience learning poverty.

**119.6 million**  
children and young people affected by crises are [not achieving minimum proficiency](#) in reading or maths by early grades.

**17% rise**  
estimated in the number of children in low- and middle- income countries experiencing learning poverty, [since before the COVID-19 pandemic](#).



## CASE STUDY

Neda and her family live in a house in a refugee camp in Northern Greece, where Neda attends school and non-formal education classes after school. It is the first time Neda, aged 10, has been to school. She and her family were forced to leave their home in Afghanistan due to uncertainty and violence. After an arduous journey, they arrived in Greece where Neda was initially anxious and afraid. She has since found comfort in her safe surroundings and the non-formal education classes, funded through Education Cannot Wait, have offered her and other refugee children a space to express themselves creatively and process some of the stress of their displacement. Read more about Neda and her schooling [here](#).

"MY FAMILY AND FRIENDS LIKE MY DRAWINGS, AND THEY ENCOURAGE ME TO DRAW MORE AND MORE. THROUGH DRAWING, I CAN EXPRESS MY FEELINGS AND THOUGHTS EASILY," - NEDA

PHOTO © UNICEF Greece/Kotak/2022  
NON-FORMAL EDUCATION CLASSES ARE RUN BY UNICEF AND OTHER IMPLEMENTING PARTNERS.

## SOME CHALLENGES



### Funding gap

In 2020, it was estimated that there was a **US \$148 billion** annual financing gap for low- and middle-income countries to achieve SDG4 by 2030. It's likely this gap has grown.



### COVID disruption to learning

Research suggests that without effective catch-up support for children, just a three month period of school closure can result in up to **a year's worth of lost learning**.



### Data gap

Many UK-funded education programmes do not collect data on learning outcomes. Measuring and tracking this data is vital to adapt programmes accordingly. To better understand impact on learning outcomes, **data needs to be collected and tracked**.

## What can be done to improve education globally?

### ● Funding

The UK Government should invest in global education. The UK should increase the share of the Official Development Assistance (ODA) budget allocated to education and increase investments in basic education, with an emphasis on literacy and numeracy, and reaching places where literacy rates are lowest. Investments should also be made in multilateral forums such as:

- ***The Global Partnership for Education***: the largest partnership working solely to transform education systems in low-income countries. It is dedicated to ensuring access to free, inclusive and quality education. Since 2002, GPE has helped 160 million more children access school.
- ***Education Cannot Wait***: the United Nations global fund dedicated to education in emergencies and longer-term crises. It focuses on reaching those left furthest behind, such as refugees and internally displaced people. Since 2016, ECW has reached almost 7 million children and youth with inclusive, safe, quality education across 40 countries.

### ● Policy changes

The UK should focus on and promote **greater emphasis on foundational learning outcomes**, both in its ODA funded programmes and when working with other organisations and countries. A focus on supporting teachers and education systems to deliver quality education is also needed.

### ● Advocate for global education!

**Join our campaigns** to call on the UK Government to fund and support global education. Together, we can show public support for the Government to take action on achieving SDG4. For campaigning by young people and in UK schools, check out our hosted organisation '**Send My Friend to School!**