

SPECIAL EDITION ON THE NEW UNESCO REPORT

# THE UNESCO Courier

November 2021

A NEW SOCIAL  
CONTRACT FOR  
EDUCATION



## EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEWS WITH:

**Audrey Azoulay**

Director-General  
of UNESCO

**Sahle-Work Zewde**

President of the Federal  
Democratic Republic of  
Ethiopia and Chair of the  
International Commission on  
the Futures of Education

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Advancement of Girls' and  
Women's Education

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▼ The back cover features the cover of UNESCO’s report, Reimagining Our Futures Together: A New Social Contract for Education, 2021.

## Editorial

It is the task of each generation to define what skills and knowledge must be passed on to future generations to meet the challenges of its time. Ours is no exception. Faced with global challenges such as growing inequalities, climate change, the rise of digital technologies, and the decline of democratic governance, we must reinvent education – “the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world,” in the words of Nelson Mandela.

UNESCO is contributing to this process of reinvention with the new global report, *Reimagining Our Futures Together: A New Social Contract for Education*. The result of two years of work by the International Commission on the Futures of Education, it outlines the contours of education for the twenty-first century.

*Reimagining Our Futures Together* upholds the tradition of the major UNESCO reports that have already structured education policies throughout the world in the past. The Faure report, *Learning to be*, in 1972, and the Delors report, *Learning: The Treasure Within*, in 1996, have become benchmarks in the debate on learning. This third document presents a lucid assessment of the challenges confronting education today.

Faced with the rapid changes in our environment, a change of direction is needed. We need to devote more importance to ecology; to provide students with the critical tools to detect misinformation, prejudices, and preconceived ideas; to strengthen teamwork, and to improve the professionalization of teachers. Beyond these imperatives, we must also rethink the multiple interdependencies, the links between generations and between cultures, and our relationship with living beings, to establish a new social contract for education.

The proposals presented in this new report are discussed in this special issue of the *Courier*. They are complemented by reflections on the future of education by Audrey Azoulay, Director-General of UNESCO; Peng Liyuan, First Lady of the People’s Republic of China and UNESCO Special Envoy for the Advancement of Girls’ and Women’s Education, and Sahle-Work Zewde, President of Ethiopia and Chair of the International Commission on the Futures of Education.

Their contributions reaffirm the absolute priority that UNESCO has given education since its creation, and its continually renewed commitment to this field. Each of these different approaches highlights, in its own way, the need to adapt the global common good that is education, to better preserve it.

Agnès Bardón

# Audrey Azoulay: “We must rebuild our relationships with each other, with the planet, and with technology”

The major challenges of climate change, digital transformation, the polarization of opinions, and misinformation make it imperative to rethink education to equip future generations with the necessary skills and knowledge and to lay the foundations for a new social contract for our societies, emphasizes Audrey Azoulay, Director-General of UNESCO, who has called for increased international co-operation in the field.

● ***The report *Reimagining Our Futures Together: A New Social Contract for Education* has just been published. What is its purpose?***

This is not the first time that such a report has been published by our Organization. As the intellectual agency of the United Nations, UNESCO endeavours to take stock of the situation whenever the historical and social context requires it, by outlining the present and future challenges of education on a global scale.

This is what the Faure and the Delors reports did in 1972 and 1996 – enabling such essential principles as “lifelong education”, “the knowledge society” and the need to “learn to know”. But this is also what Edgar Morin did in 1999, when he defined *Seven Complex Lessons in Education for the Future* for UNESCO in a work that has since become a reference.

More than two decades later, it is time to take stock again. The world has

changed considerably, and education should not lag behind, but look ahead. In the race for constant adaptation, however, education has sometimes lost its ability to give direction to the future. At a time when climate, health, and technological challenges are intersecting, and when the Covid-19 pandemic has highlighted the educational divide, rethinking education is more necessary than ever. It is to this fundamental need that the Futures of Education report must respond.

This initiative – launched before the pandemic, from which it will draw lessons – is a projection of education to the year 2050 and beyond. In a word, since education is our future, we felt it was vital to examine the futures of education. And to do this, UNESCO has been able to benefit from the work of specialists, but also from the expertise of nearly 200 UNESCO Chairs, and feedback from the field from over 400 of our Associated Schools around the world.

This work also benefited from the input of more than a million people – ranging from young people and teachers to civil society, governments and economic actors. It was essential for the project to have this democratic character, because tomorrow’s education needs to make more room for the participation, commitment, and contribution of both students and the entire educational community.

● ***In the face of challenges such as climate change, the polarization of opinions, and the proliferation of hate speech, how can education still forge a collective future?***

Education must indeed respond to these major challenges, and this is not yet the case. Young people are aware of this, and they are clearly stating their concern that climate change, which is critical for our future, is still far from being central

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**Environmental  
 education will be  
 a core component  
 of education in  
 the future**”

© UNESCO / Christelle ALIX



▼ Audrey Azoulay, Director-General of UNESCO.

to school curricula. And this observation by young people was confirmed in spring 2021 by a UNESCO report, *Learn for our planet* – a fifth of the world's school programmes, for example, do not mention biodiversity.

Environmental education will indeed be a core component of education in the future. This is essential for two reasons. Firstly, because the fight for the climate will take place in the long term, which implies a real upheaval in the way we think about our relationship with nature. And what more effective tool than education to act in the long term? Secondly, because we are better at protecting what we understand. Understanding is the prerequisite for protection.

But as the UNESCO report has shown, we have a long way to go. We must therefore mobilize the international community, stimulate initiatives, and also obtain concrete commitments. This is what UNESCO achieved at the World Conference in Berlin in May 2021 – eighty governments pledged to considerably strengthen the role of environmental education in their school curricula by 2025. And UNESCO will support them in this task.

At the same time, environmental education implies a strengthening of science education – a priority that is essential not only in light of climate change, but also in light of the upheavals

we have experienced due to the pandemic.

● ***Considering the digital transformation of our societies, accelerated by the pandemic, what other new knowledge should young people acquire?***

I see several other major areas of work. First of all, particularly because of social networks, our entire relationship to information, to the media and to data in general, has changed profoundly. We must continue to develop digital skills training, because what we have gained in terms of ease of access, we have lost in terms of fact-checking and →

professionalism of information. Clearly, the proliferation of misinformation, the emergence of fake news and deepfakes that are increasingly sophisticated – and that can directly influence an election, for example – have made it more necessary than ever to strengthen media and information literacy.

This discipline must support critical thinking and encourage rationality. It is of course important to learn to code, but even more important to learn to decode the flood of information to which we are constantly exposed. UNESCO is working on this. For example, we have updated our global Media and Information Literacy Curriculum for Teachers, and it will no doubt be updated again in the future.

In addition to media and information literacy, education against all forms of racism and anti-Semitism must also be further developed. This is another lesson of the pandemic – racist reflexes, the tendency to scapegoat, all these behaviours are still present and continue to pose a threat. We must therefore learn to create a shared world, to learn where we come from in order to know where we are going. For example, by exploring the origins of humanity, everyone can perceive our common roots and, through the odyssey of the species, rediscover the meaning of humanity.

Finally, we must move towards more cross-disciplinarity. I have already mentioned the necessary intersections between science education and environmental education. But we must also build bridges between education,

culture and heritage, notably through art education. Generally speaking, faced with complex subjects that no single discipline can fully cover, disciplines and teachers have a lot to gain from coming together, and school programmes should encourage these encounters even more.

● *As in the rest of society, digital technology is increasingly entering schools. Is this a real opportunity? How should we frame digital technology in schools in the future?*

Digital technology in schools should not be an end in itself, but a means to an end; we must remain clear about its limits and risks. It is true that the use of new technologies and artificial intelligence can offer real opportunities – particularly for personalizing learning, stimulating student creativity, or relieving teachers of the most tedious tasks. But they must not be seen as magic tools.

We must be aware of the limits of digital technology. I see two main ones – the risk of inequalities, and the learning risk.

First of all, and I think this is one of the major lessons of the Covid crisis, digital technology is widening all educational divides. There has been a lot of talk about distance learning in the last year and a half, but this concept was simply a mirage for many students around the world – in Africa, for example, where ninety per cent of students do not have access to a personal computer. So it is not surprising that more than 500 million students, according to our data, have not had any access to distance learning. In many areas, especially rural areas, distance education will continue to mean education via radio or television.

Moreover, in terms of learning, no screen can replace a teacher. Because not even the best algorithm can replace the social and emotional skills of educators, their humanity, empathy and attention – qualities that will be central to the teacher training of tomorrow. Therefore, digital technology can only complement the teacher's role, and be used on a case-by-case basis. On this point, the report is very clear – digital technology will transform schools and the work of teachers, but it cannot and should not replace them.



## The strengthening of media and information literacy must include critical thinking, and infuse the spirit of doubt and rationality

● *Beyond the question of goals, there is the question of means. What kind of international solidarity should be forged in the future so that education is considered a common good?*

It is true that the devastating consequences of the pandemic are creating a very harmful temptation – that of wanting to cut back on educational spending, which is already subject to competition from other sectors. This risk is real because, according to a report published jointly by the World Bank and UNESCO in February 2021, two-thirds of low-income countries, for example, have already reduced their government budgets for education since the beginning of the pandemic.

However, the educational emergency requires a budgetary commitment. Stimulus packages give us a historic opportunity to consider education budgets for what they are – not just recurrent expenditure, but the most profitable investment for the future of countries. The knowledge economy, as its name implies, involves considerable investment in education. Increasing education budgets is a question of rights and values, but also of economic interests and competitiveness.

Over and above financial considerations, we must also provide ourselves with the institutional means to achieve our objectives. In this area, international



**Digital technology will transform the work of teachers, but it cannot and should not replace them**

co-operation is more necessary than ever – education is a global common good, so we must act on this scale. The Commission’s report, therefore, calls for the co-operation of all regional and global actors in education. This is the whole point of the Global Education Coalition that we have launched, and that is active in more than 100 countries. We must also forge new partnerships, for example with the private sector and major digital players, around common objectives.

● **Finally, what follow-up will there be to the recommendations made in UNESCO’s Reimagining Our Futures Together report?**

The report, which has been produced following extensive consultations, is the culmination of a long process led by the Ethiopian President, Sahle-Work Zewde. But its publication is only a first step. The report is intended as a means to an end, not an end in itself. It aims to propose a range of actions to be taken in the coming years – not only in terms of education policy but also in terms of educational practices.

The report proposes the forging of a new social contract for our societies – to rebuild our relationships with each other, with the planet, and with technology. A new social contract that we need to repair past injustices and to transform the future.

The stakes are so high that we hope the discussion that has been initiated will continue. But I am very confident on this issue. The writing of this report has shown how much enthusiasm the subject has generated – among experts, among teachers, but also among young people, who have been very mobilized, because they know they are very concerned. The report makes assessments and outlines avenues of action – we must now seize upon them and extend them further. ■



▼ *During a visit to Djibouti in February 2021, the Director-General announced that UNESCO would strengthen its work in the field of education policies.*

In the context of today's environmental, social, and technological challenges, it is imperative that schools evolve – by creating inclusive educational ecosystems, and adopting participatory approaches that strengthen living together.

## “We must collectively commit to changing course”

An interview with Sahle-Work Zewde  
*President of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia and Chair of the International Commission on the Futures of Education.*

● ***The International Commission on the Futures of Education aims to rethink education in an increasingly complex, uncertain, and unequal world. What, according to you, are the values and principles that should underpin the education of tomorrow?***

The challenges the world faces now – as well as those we see on the horizon – are ones that we need to face collectively. Increasing inequality, climate change, the Covid-19 pandemic, overuse of the earth's resources, social fragmentation, the risk that technology will divide us further – all of these require international co-operation and global solidarity on a scale that we have not yet seen.

Education needs to develop the capabilities of people across the world to engage in dialogue and act together. To be empowered to take collective action, individuals need to learn empathy. Education has the potential to expose everyone everywhere to knowledge, opportunities, and people that they would not otherwise encounter. A strong

commitment to human rights, gender equality, and to repairing past injustices, will help us create inclusive educational ecosystems that support people in all areas of their lives.

Above all, thinking about the future of education means taking action today. The survival of humanity and the living planet is at risk. Collectively we must commit to changing course, so that the well-being of future generations is not compromised, and so that we live with each other and with the natural world in justice and peace.

● ***Today, 258 million children around the world are still out of school. The United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 4, to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education for all by 2030, seems out of reach. How can we rethink education in this context?***

This is a critical moment to rethink education because we are at a time of transition. Our relationship with the planet and with technology is

changing in profound ways, and this, in turn, is changing our relationships with each other. Also, the pandemic and its many disruptions have forced us to reconsider long-held assumptions and traditional ways of doing things. This has opened windows to new possibilities and highlighted our global interconnectedness. Our education systems need to better emphasize these interlinkages and show them as a source of strength.

Given our current context of transition, we have decided to take a long view of education. Our work looks to 2050 and beyond, and this distant time horizon has helped us see education anew and propose innovative avenues for learning.

First, it is important to acknowledge that there is much that we know how to do well in education. We know the tremendous importance of equal educational opportunities for girls and women, which is a gap that is closing. We know how to design schools that include those who are most marginalized – and that work needs to continue.





© Office of the President of Ethiopia

▼ Sahle-Work Zewde, President of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia and Chair of the International Commission on the Futures of Education.

However, we also know that there are persistent problems – some of which have their roots in the way that education has been organized over the last century. For a long time, the dominant global models presented education as a period of preparation. We now know that education is intertwined with our lives across our lifetimes, that there needs to be quality early childhood education as well as strengthened formal, non-formal, and informal adult education and learning opportunities.

Schools will remain central; they need to be safeguarded and transformed. Their curricula need to be reworked, so that we learn more about our interdependencies, and learn better ways of living with our world. We need to think about the skills we require in the digital worlds of today and tomorrow. Teachers need to make increasing use of participatory and collaborative approaches through problem- and project-based learning. The truth of the matter is that we cannot keep delivering the education we tried to deliver in the past for a vastly different twenty-first century.

## “ Education needs to develop capabilities to engage in dialogue and act together

● *The Commission's new report, Reimagining Our Futures Together: A New Social Contract for Education, was supported by an extensive global process of public and expert consultation. Why was it important to engage with such a wide range of diverse stakeholders?*

Education is one of most transformative experiences that human beings can share together. When laying out the work of the Commission, it was obvious to all of us that we can only build education as a global common good with collective knowledge and experiences from around the globe. This is why we asked people of all ages from over 120 countries to tell us about their hopes and fears for the future – and to think about ways that education could help us all to best shape the futures of humanity and the planet.

Through artworks, surveys, webinars, and focus group discussions, over a million people from all regions of the world shared their ideas. The Commission was truly inspired, and we attempted to take in as many of these ideas as possible. And one of the key messages that we heard was that as much as education is essential for individuals to live dignified and meaningful lives, it is also crucial for shaping our shared futures. So, thinking about education as a form of shared well-being that is chosen and achieved together became one of the key ideas of the Commission. And now, it is only through the work of those million individuals – and millions more – that the ideas of the report will be further debated, contextualized, and implemented. →



▼ President Sahle-Work Zewde and Filsan Abdulahi, then Minister of Women, Children and Youth, visiting a coding and robotics training programme for orphaned children in Addis Ababa, 2018.

● ***The pandemic has shown the startling digital divides among countries in distance learning. Eighty-two per cent of learners in sub-Saharan Africa lack internet access. What were the other main concerns raised by African countries during this global discussion?***

When we look to 2050 and beyond, the African continent will have an increasing percentage of the world's population, especially its youth. We also know that there is still much to do to remedy existing power asymmetries and unjust legacies of the past, some of which continue today. The unacceptably low share of learners on the continent who have access to the internet and computers is evidence of continued inequality.

Africa, like other areas of the Global South, has contributed the least to the climate crisis, but it risks bearing the

greatest burden. Across the process of preparing this report, the Commission repeatedly heard the message that truly appreciating our interdependencies means overcoming the dependencies that have been imposed in the world. Global solidarity and an appreciation of our common humanity must mean rejecting and correcting the levels of inequality that have emerged within, and especially across, nations.

The report strongly supports the aspiration of social and human development that benefits all and sustains cultural diversity. We must ensure that Africa has full access to the collective knowledge resources that humanity has accumulated over generations. And, as important, we must ensure that Africans are able to contribute to, and add, their indigenous wisdom and innovation to the global knowledge commons.

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**We strongly support the aspiration of social and human development that benefits all and sustains cultural diversity**

● **What lies behind the idea of “reframing humanism” that is emphasized in the report?**

‘Reframing humanism’ is about finding new directions for humanity by reconsidering who we are and how we think of ourselves in relation to each other, the living planet, and technology. Covid affected us all and reminded us how tightly humanity is linked together. But it affected us differently – with poorer communities suffering more, and girls and women more economically impacted than boys and men. Covid reminds us how important it is to fight power imbalances and eliminate exploitation wherever it exists.

Furthermore, human existence is inseparable from the larger natural world of which we are a part. We must adopt a new ecological consciousness that will ultimately make us more human. Recent technological advances are also blurring the lines between human and machine. The ethical decisions that we face about technologies like artificial intelligence and bio-enhancement should not just be made by elites, but need to involve us all. We all need to be involved in ensuring that technology is used in ways that support our shared futures. Education is one of the key sectors where we can make advances in rebalancing our relationships with each other, with the living planet, and with technology.

● **What are the basic skills that future generations will need to live in a world transformed by human activity, and digital, biotechnological and neuroscientific developments?**

There is work that can be done in all curricular areas to teach the art of living

respectfully and responsibly on a planet that has been considerably altered by human activity. Future generations will need education that promotes a consciousness of the planet, and fosters critical thinking and civic engagement. An awareness that the world will continue to change can be built into curricula by cultivating learners’ capacities for problem recognition and problem-solving.

Schools will need to focus on the basic literacies of reading, writing, and mathematics but also go beyond them. Everyone everywhere must learn *to be* and *to become*. *To be* means learning to participate, develop one’s personality, and act with independence, judgement, and personal responsibility. *To become* means learning to transform oneself and the world – committing to this as a lifelong responsibility, and ensuring that these same possibilities remain open to future generations.

● **How can global solidarity be enhanced in the field of education?**

International co-operation among governments, international organizations, civil society organizations and other partners is a critical way we can strengthen global solidarity in education. One crucial step forward is to elevate the importance of knowledge sharing. We need to strengthen the capacity of all areas of the world to generate and use knowledge to advance education. Regional organizations have a key role to play. We also need to strengthen multilateral channels, and bring different actors into dialogue and consensus building around shared norms, purposes, and standards.

At the same time, global solidarity needs to extend to all. The human

capacities for empathy and co-operation are among the better angels of our nature. We possess extraordinary creativity, imagination, and the ability to envision and build things – and to deviate from what is broken or not working. In our report, we try to help people envision future worlds – where curricula, teaching, schools, universities, and all educational platforms help us to better understand our common humanity, and build global solidarity.

● **In October 2018, you were appointed the first female President in Ethiopia’s modern history, after a 30-year career as a diplomat. What message does this appointment send to the young generation of girls in your country?**

There are many prominent women leaders in the history of Ethiopia, such as Empress Taitu [1851-1918] and Empress Zewditu [1875-1930]. However, we have not seen any high-level women leaders in modern Ethiopian history. I grew up and came of age at a time when there were very few women leaders to look up to as role models. I believe that the appointment of a woman in my position sends a resounding message to young Ethiopian – and indeed African – girls that they can achieve anything.

Young women and girls today can stand on the shoulders of current women leaders and reach heights that we could not imagine. We, as women leaders, must come together to not only keep open the doors of opportunity that we had, but also to expand them for those who follow us. We say to future generations: “Yes you can” and “We are here to help get you there”. ■



**We all need to be involved in ensuring that technology is used in ways that support our shared futures**

# Peng Liyuan: “Together, we will make tomorrow’s world a better place through education”

Notwithstanding the progress made in recent years, the Covid-19 pandemic has further widened gender inequalities. International efforts, investment, and innovation must be strengthened to better protect girls’ and women’s rights to equal access to education, advocates Peng Liyuan, the wife of the President of the People’s Republic of China and UNESCO Special Envoy for the Advancement of Girls’ and Women’s Education.

● ***The education of girls and women is an important component of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). In your view, what role does women’s education play in poverty reduction, economic growth and sustainable development? Could you give us some specific examples of this and share some good practices?***

The eradication of poverty and the realization of gender equality are ideals shared by all mankind, and an aspiration shared by women all over the world. The access to equitable and quality education ensures that women are able to draw the power of self-reliance from knowledge and skills. This will help them to lift themselves out of poverty and to embrace a happy life. In addition, they would be in a position to utilize this power to make contributions to society, and to pass it on to empower future generations – thus stopping the intergenerational transmission of poverty.

I have visited many countries and talked to people from all walks of life. I have observed many women lift themselves out of poverty and change their fate through education. I would like to share with you some of China’s experiences and practices in this regard. Through continuous endeavour, China has achieved the goal of eliminating absolute poverty. We have always stressed that for poverty alleviation, we must first provide knowledge and skills. The development of education is a very important measure to achieve this.

China considers the education of girls and women from poor families a top priority, and seeks to safeguard girls’ right to education with a host of measures. These include building schools, exempting girls from tuition and miscellaneous fees, and offering them grants and nutritious meals. In addition, we have introduced various skills training programmes for women – which take regional characteristics and the local

needs of women into account and help them increase their income.

Our Spring Bud Project is a public welfare programme aiming to improve the education of girls from poor families. Over the past three decades, more than 3 million girls have completed their schooling and fulfilled their dreams through this programme.

In China’s Guizhou Province, local governments introduced a programme called “The Beautiful” that offers handicraft training to women. More than 500,000 women have started to work from home as a result – making and selling embroidery, batik, and woven products. They are creating new lives for themselves, using their skilful hands.

Today, 435 million women in the world still live in poverty, and a marked gender inequality in education still remains. We should be even more determined to promote girls’ and women’s education, and work together to ensure that more of them are able to receive a good



▼ Peng Liyuan at the award ceremony of the first edition of the UNESCO Prize for Girls' and Women's Education in Beijing, 2016.

education. This would contribute to the attainment of the SDGs.

● *Covid-19 has led to increased inequalities in global education and an unprecedented disruption to education. More than ninety-one per cent of students around the world have been affected by the suspension of classes. According to UNESCO, 11 million girls might not be able to continue their studies. Before the pandemic, there were already 130 million girls out of school around the world. In your view, how should we respond to the serious challenges facing the education of girls?*

Girls and women are among the groups most vulnerable to crises. Since the Covid-19 outbreak, I have been following the challenges of health and education faced by girls and women around the world. I am deeply concerned

that so many girls cannot return to school. At this unusual time, we should give them more attention and offer them practical help.

From the beginning of the pandemic, UNESCO has taken positive action to safeguard the right to education of girls – such as integrating global online educational resources, compiling the *Building Back Equal: Girls Back to School Guide*, and publishing thematic reports. Governments all over the world have also worked hard to ensure that children – girls in particular – continue to take lessons taught online or broadcast via radio and television.

In China, while doing a good job on our pandemic response, we have made every effort to protect the physical and mental health of hundreds of millions of students. We introduced online education for nearly 300 million learners, including girls, during school closures and have

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**Education is essential to enable us to understand and respect nature**

worked to resume classes so that children can safely return to school.

While Covid-19 continues to spread across the world, it is our shared wish that no girl is left behind because of the pandemic. The first thing we need, therefore, is collaboration. As the Chinese saying goes, when people work with one mind, even Mountain Tai can be moved. As long as we stand in solidarity and work →



▼ Peng Liyuan and Audrey Azoulay at a special session on Girls' and Women's Education in Paris, 2019.

## “ Through education, we can teach future generations to appreciate the diversity of civilizations

together, every problem is surmountable. Second, we need to invest more in the education of girls during the pandemic, and make greater efforts to promote it. Third, we need to explore innovation, use new methods and adopt new technologies to address new problems – so that high-quality educational resources can be offered to more girls, and they can continue their education in flexible and diverse ways.

● *In 2019, UNESCO launched the Futures of Education initiative which looks at 2050 and beyond, and seeks to understand how knowledge and learning can shape the future of humanity and the planet. In your view, how should the education of the future help people improve their capacity to promote sustainable development and build a better world?*

The Futures of Education initiative, launched by UNESCO, pools global wisdom to think about the future of education, which is of great significance. The education of the future should accompany everyone throughout their life, be equally accessible to everyone, suit everyone, and be more open and flexible.

I believe the education of the future should focus on helping people to improve their abilities in three key areas. First, the ability to live in harmony with nature – humans and nature constitute the community of life. In the face of challenges like climate change and the deterioration of the environment,

education is essential to enable us to understand and respect nature, so that production models and lifestyles that are conducive to sustainable development can be fostered. People will then take the initiative to adapt themselves to protect nature and look after the Earth, the only home shared by all mankind.

Second, the education of the future must focus on the ability to live in harmony with people from different countries and cultures. Different histories, national conditions, ethnic groups, and customs have given birth to many different civilizations and created a world rich in diversity. Through education, we can teach future generations about the cultures of other countries and nations, so that they appreciate the diversity of civilizations, and respect other people's choices of development paths and lifestyles, while upholding their own cultural traditions and coexisting in harmony.

Third, the education of the future should impart the ability to learn, innovate, and apply new technologies.

Given the explosion of knowledge and technologies, future education should encourage people to think innovatively and pursue lifelong learning. Digital education should be boosted, and people trained to use the internet, big data, artificial intelligence, and other cutting-edge technologies to deal better with the changes in our world.

I'm convinced that together, we will make tomorrow's world a better place through education.

● ***The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action adopted at the World Conference on Women in 1995 laid a solid foundation for promoting gender equality and protecting women's rights and interests, giving a strong impetus to women's development around the world. Girls' and women's education is an important way to promote gender equality and protect women's rights and interests. Looking into the future, how do you think we can better promote the education of girls and women and contribute to building a community with a shared future for mankind?***

Living in one and the same global village, humanity is evolving into an interlinked community with a shared future. Women have the power to promote the development of human civilization and create a better future for mankind. Education for girls and women can awaken, enhance and fully unleash this wonderful power. The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action have driven home the idea of gender equality and women's empowerment; exerted a far-reaching influence on the development of women worldwide, and greatly stimulated the development of education for girls and women.

It is heartening to see that over the past twenty-plus years, countries have been working to promote gender equality in education and safeguarding the right of girls and women to education. Positive progress has been made in women's education across the world.

The development of girls' and women's education could not have happened without three conditions: the leading role played by UNESCO and other international organizations;

the firm, enduring commitment of the international community to achieving gender equality, and the enabling environment jointly created by society, families, and community schools.

I hope that governments, and more and more international organizations, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and public-minded people will take the initiative to work together; uphold the vision of a community with a shared future for mankind; enhance solidarity and co-operation; increase input; develop more targeted and effective policies and action plans, and create a better global network for the education of girls and women. When education is used to empower women and greater progress is made to promote it, we will be able to work at full throttle to build community with a shared future for mankind.

● ***The awarding of the 2021 UNESCO Prize for Girls' and Women's Education ushered in the second phase of co-operation between China and UNESCO on the prize. In your view, what are the most remarkable achievements and impact of the first phase of co-operation? What more can the international community do to continue supporting these laureates?***

In 2015, UNESCO and China jointly established the prize, which honours outstanding contributions made by individuals, institutions and organizations to advance girls' and women's education. Intended to demonstrate the importance of education in changing the destiny of



**Future education should encourage people to pursue lifelong learning**



**130 million**

girls were out of school before the pandemic

girls and women, and to inspire more people to be involved in the cause, the prize has been playing a positive role in recent years.

In the first phase, the prize was awarded to projects of ten organizations from ten countries, with one other country receiving a special nomination. The themes of these projects ranged from early childhood education to higher education, covering all dimensions of women's development. They safeguarded women's right to education, helped them acquire knowledge and skills, and worked to eliminate gender discrimination. The prizes have provided women with the confidence and ability to change their destinies and pursue their dreams, benefiting millions of girls and women. They have also inspired more people to engage in this noble cause.

Promoting this important cause today will deliver benefits to future generations. China will continue to work with UNESCO to make the second phase of the collaboration on the prize a success. This is a new starting point. I hope that more countries, institutions, and people will join in. I also expect to see that the laureates will strengthen exchanges and co-operation, and share their good practices and successful experiences in various ways. More importantly, I want to see the international community paying more attention to and supporting the education of girls and women, because they were influenced by the prize. Their stories deserve to be read and heard, and they deserve to be recognized and encouraged.

As UNESCO Special Envoy for the Advancement of Girls' and Women's Education, I am ready to further fulfil my responsibility and join hands with every one of you to make sure that more girls and women are loved, confident, and empowered. ■

# Rethinking our futures together

The growing concern about environmental issues, the rise of artificial intelligence and digital technologies, the decline of democratic governance – in a changing world, education has a key role to play. The result of a two-year global process of collective reflection, a new UNESCO report, *Reimagining Our Futures Together: A New Social Contract for Education*, takes stock of the current situation and lays the foundations for a new social contract for education by making a series of recommendations.

**O**ur world is at a turning point. We already know that knowledge and learning are the basis for renewal and transformation. But global disparities – and a pressing need to reimagine why, how, what, where, and when we learn – mean that education is not yet fulfilling its promise to help us shape peaceful, just, and sustainable futures.

Today, high living standards coexist with gaping inequalities. More and more people are engaged in public life, but the fabric of civil society and democracy is fraying in many places around the world. Rapid technological changes are transforming many aspects of our lives. Yet, these innovations are not adequately directed at equity, inclusion, and democratic participation.

Everyone alive today has a weighty obligation to both current and future generations – to ensure that our world is one of abundance, not scarcity, and that everyone enjoys the same human rights to the fullest.

“

**To shape peaceful, just, and sustainable futures, education itself must be transformed**

In spite of the urgency of action, and in conditions of great uncertainty, we have reason to be full of hope. As a species, we are at the point in our collective history where we have the greatest access ever to knowledge and to tools that enable us to collaborate. The potential for engaging humanity in creating better futures together has never been greater.

The problems of the world affect us all because we are connected to each other. Many people are already engaged in bringing about these changes themselves – they share the strong belief that it is imperative to be part of a common effort.

Starting from an acceptance of diversity and difference, we need to work together and take collective action to find solutions that benefit everyone.

Education – the way we organize teaching and learning throughout life – has long played a foundational role in the transformation of human societies. It connects us with the world and to each other, exposes us to new possibilities, and strengthens our capacities for dialogue and action. But to shape peaceful, just, and sustainable futures, education itself must be transformed.





Illustration: © Agnieszka Ziemińska for The UNESCO Courier

## Foundational principles

**Assuring the right to quality education throughout life.** The right to education, as established in Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, must continue to be the foundation of the new social contract for education and must be expanded to include the right to quality education throughout life. It must also encompass the right to information, culture and science – as well as the right to access and contribute to the knowledge commons, the collective knowledge resources of humanity that have been accumulated over generations and are continuously transforming.

**Strengthening education as a public endeavour and a common good.** As a shared societal endeavour, education builds common purposes and enables individuals and communities to flourish together. A new social contract for education must not only ensure public funding for education, but also include a society-wide commitment to include everyone in public discussions about education. This emphasis on participation is what strengthens education as a common good – a form of shared well-being that is chosen and achieved together.

## Disruptive transformations can be discerned in several key areas:

- The planet is in peril, but decarbonization and the greening of economies are underway. Here children and youth already lead the way, calling for meaningful action and delivering a harsh rebuke to those who refuse to face the urgency of the situation.
- Over the past decade, the world has seen a backsliding in democratic governance and a rise in identity-driven populist sentiment. At the same time, there has been a flourishing of increasingly active citizen participation and activism that is challenging discrimination and injustice worldwide.
- There is tremendous transformative potential in digital technologies, but we have not yet figured out how to deliver on these many promises.
- The challenge of creating decent human-centred work is about to get much harder as artificial intelligence (AI), automation, and structural transformations remake employment landscapes around the globe. At the same time, more people and communities are recognizing the value of care work and the multiple ways that economic security needs to be provisioned.



**The Futures of Education** is a global initiative to reimagine how knowledge and learning can shape the future of humanity and the planet. As part of this initiative, Audrey Azoulay, Director-General of UNESCO, has commissioned an independent International Commission to work on a global report on the future of education under the leadership of Sahle-Work Zewde, President of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia. The members of the Commission are thought leaders from the worlds of politics, academia, the arts, science, business, and education.

## A new social contract for education

Education can be seen in terms of a social contract – an implicit agreement among members of a society to co-operate for shared benefit. A social contract is more than a transaction as it reflects norms, commitments and principles and are formally legislated and culturally embedded. The starting point is a shared vision of the public purposes of education. This contract consists of the foundational and organizational principles that structure education systems and the distributed work done to build, maintain, and refine them.

During the twentieth century, public education was essentially aimed at supporting national citizenship and development efforts through the form of compulsory schooling for children and youth. Today, however, as we face grave risks to the future of humanity and the living planet itself, we must urgently reinvent education to help us address common challenges. This act of reimagining means working together to create futures that are shared and interdependent. The new social contract for education must unite us around collective endeavours and provide the knowledge and innovation needed to shape sustainable and peaceful futures for all anchored in social, economic, and environmental justice.

## Between past promises and uncertain futures

Widening social and economic inequality, climate change, biodiversity loss, resource use that exceeds planetary boundaries, democratic backsliding, and disruptive technological automation are the hallmarks of our current historical juncture. These multiple overlapping crises and challenges constrain our individual and collective human rights and have resulted in damage to much of life on Earth. While the expansion of education systems has created opportunities for many, vast numbers have been left with low-quality learning.

Looking to the future, it is all too easy to paint an even darker picture. It is possible to imagine an exhausted planet with fewer spaces for human habitation. Extreme future scenarios also include a world where quality education is a privilege of elites, and where vast groups of people live in misery because they lack access to essential goods and services. Will current educational inequalities only worsen with time until curricula become irrelevant? How will these possible changes impact on our basic humanity?

At present, the ways we organize education across the world do not do enough to ensure just and peaceful societies, a healthy planet, and shared progress that benefits all. In fact, some of our difficulties stem from how we educate. A new social contract for education needs to allow us to think differently about learning, and the relationships between students, teachers, knowledge, and the world.

## Proposals for renewing education

Learning should be organized around the principles of co-operation, collaboration, and solidarity. It should foster the intellectual, social, and moral capacities of students to work together and transform the world with empathy and compassion. There is unlearning – of bias, prejudice, and divisiveness – to be done too. Assessments should reflect these pedagogical goals in ways that promote meaningful growth and learning for all students.

Curricula should emphasize ecological, intercultural, and interdisciplinary learning that supports students to access and produce knowledge, while also developing their capacity to critique and apply it. Curricula must embrace an ecological understanding of humanity that rebalances the way we relate to Earth. The spread of misinformation should be countered through scientific, digital, and humanistic literacies that develop the ability to distinguish falsehoods from truth. We should promote active citizenship and democratic participation in educational content, methods, and policy.

Teaching should be further professionalized as a collaborative endeavour, where teachers are recognized for their work as knowledge producers and key figures in educational and social transformation. Collaboration and teamwork should characterize the work of teachers. Reflection, research, and the creation of knowledge and new pedagogical practices should become



## A new social contract for education needs to overcome discrimination, marginalization, and exclusion

integral to teaching. This means that their autonomy and freedom must be supported, and that they must participate fully in public debate and dialogue on the futures of education.

Schools should be protected educational sites because of the inclusion, equity and individual and collective well-being they support – and also reimagined to better promote the transformation of the world towards a more just, equitable and sustainable future. Schools need to be places that bring diverse groups of people together and expose them to challenges and possibilities not available elsewhere. School architectures, spaces, times, timetables, and student groupings should be redesigned to encourage and enable individuals to work together. Digital technologies should aim to support – and not replace – schools. Schools should model the futures we aspire to by ensuring human rights and becoming examples of sustainability and carbon neutrality.

We should enjoy and expand the educational opportunities that take place throughout life, and in different cultural and social spaces. At all times of life, people should have meaningful, quality educational opportunities. We should connect natural, built, and virtual sites of learning, carefully leveraging the best potentials of each.

Key responsibilities fall to governments whose capacity for the public financing and regulation of education should be strengthened. The right to education needs to be broadened to be lifelong and encompass the right to information, culture, science, and connectivity.

### Catalysing a new social contract for education

A new social contract for education needs to overcome discrimination, marginalization, and exclusion. We must dedicate ourselves to ensuring gender equality and the rights of all – regardless of race, ethnicity, religion, disability, sexual orientation, age, or citizenship status. A massive commitment to social dialogue, to thinking and acting together, is needed.

**A call for research and innovation.** A new social contract requires a worldwide, collaborative research programme that focuses on the right to education throughout life. This programme must centre on the right to education and be inclusive of different kinds of evidence and ways of knowing, including horizontal learning and the exchange of knowledge across borders. Contributions should be welcomed from everyone – from teachers to students, from academics and research centres to governments and civil society organizations.



### Schools should model the futures we aspire to by ensuring human rights and becoming examples of sustainability

**A call for global solidarity and international co-operation.** A new social contract for education requires renewed commitment to global collaboration in support of education as a common good, premised on more just and equitable co-operation among state and non-state actors. Beyond North-South flows of aid to education, the generation of knowledge and evidence through South-South and triangular co-operation must be strengthened.

The international community has a key role to play in helping states and non-state actors to align around the shared purposes, norms and standards needed to realize a new social contract for education. In this, the principle of subsidiarity should be respected, and local, national and regional efforts should be encouraged.

The educational needs of asylum seekers, refugees, stateless persons and migrants, in particular, need to be supported through international co-operation and the work of global institutions.

Universities and other higher education institutions must be active in every aspect of building a new social contract for education. From supporting research and the advancement of science to being a contributing partner to other educational institutions and programmes in their communities and across the globe, universities that are creative, innovative and committed to strengthening education as a common good have a key role to play in the futures of education.

It is essential that everyone be able to participate in building the futures of education – children, youth, parents, teachers, researchers, activists, employers, cultural and religious leaders. We have deep, rich, and diverse cultural traditions to build upon. Humans have great collective agency, intelligence, and creativity. And we now face a serious choice: continue on an unsustainable path or radically change course. ■

# Training the actors of the future

In 1993, UNESCO established an independent International Commission on Education for the 21st Century. Chaired by French statesman Jacques Delors, the Commission's eminent advisers were drawn from all regions of the world. Its task: to lead innovative thinking on how education could best prepare the citizens of tomorrow to address the challenges of the future. It completed its work in 1996, the year UNESCO celebrated its 50th anniversary.

## Jacques Delors

President of the European Commission from 1985 to 1995, he was France's minister of Economics and Finance from 1981 to 1984. His published works include *Le Nouveau Concert européen*, 1992, and *L'Unité d'un homme*, 1994.

**O**n the eve of the twenty-first century, intense thought and discussion are being devoted to the future of human society. Whereas advances in knowledge, especially in science and technology, bring hope of progress for humankind in the future, events each day remind us how the contemporary world is liable to drift off course, how exposed it is to dangers, in some cases extreme dangers, and how vulnerable it is to conflicts.

The increasing interdependence of peoples and nations, which is the hallmark of our time, is providing scope for unprecedented international co-operation. But the emergence of this global consciousness also reveals the extent of the disparities that beset our world, the complexity of its problems and the number of threats that are liable at any time to jeopardize the stock of human achievement.

Great demands are consequently being made on education, whose contribution to human progress is so vital. The idea is gaining ground that education is one of the most powerful tools with which to shape the future – or, to use more modest terms, to steer us into the future by taking advantage of constructive trends and trying to avoid pitfalls. What is education doing today to prepare the active citizens of tomorrow?

UNESCO has taken the initiative of bringing the light of its international experience to bear on this issue. Its Director-General, Mr. Federico Mayor, asked me to chair an International Commission on Education for the Twenty-first Century, mandated "to study and reflect on the challenges facing education in the coming years, and to formulate suggestions and recommendations in the form of a report that could serve as an agenda for action for policymakers and officials at the highest levels".

The following question from the Commission's terms of reference formed our point of departure: "How can education play a dynamic and constructive role in preparing individuals and societies for the twenty-first century?" We were asking it some twenty years after another Commission, chaired by Mr. Edgar Faure, had published a report – which is still topical – under the significant title *Learning to Be*.

## Four crucial issues

The Commission did its best to project its thinking on to a future dominated by globalization, to ask the right questions and to lay down some broad guidelines that can be applied both within national contexts and on a global scale. Here I shall examine four issues which I believe are crucial.

The first issue is the capacity of education systems to become the key

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factor in development by performing a threefold function – economic, scientific and cultural.

Everyone expects education to help build up a qualified and creative workforce that can adapt to new technologies and take part in the “intelligence revolution” that is the driving force of our economies. Everyone – in North and South alike – also expects education to advance knowledge in such a way that economic development goes hand in hand with responsible management of the physical and human environment. And, finally, education would be failing in its task if it did not produce citizens rooted in their own cultures and yet open to other cultures and committed to the progress of society.

The second crucial issue is the ability of education systems to adapt to new trends in society. This brings us to one of the fundamental responsibilities of education – having to prepare for change despite the growing insecurity that fills us with doubts and uncertainties. (...)

The third crucial issue is that of the relations between the education system and the state. The roles and responsibilities of the state, the devolution of some of its powers to federal or local authorities, the balance to be struck between public and private education – these are just some aspects of a problem which, moreover, differs from one country to another.

The fourth issue is the promulgation of the values of openness to others, and mutual understanding – in a word, the values of peace. Can education purport to be universal? (...)

The creation of a language accessible to everyone would mean that people would learn to engage more readily in dialogue, and the message that this language would convey would have to be addressed to human beings in all their aspects. A message that claims to be universal – one of education's lofty ambitions – must be conveyed with all the subtle qualifications that take full account of human beings' infinite variety. This is no doubt our major difficulty. (...)

## The pillars of education

The[re are] four main pillars that the Commission has presented and illustrated as the bases of education. (...)

The first of these is learning to know. Bearing in mind the rapid changes brought about by scientific progress and



▼ A plastic arts class at a school in Epinal, France.

new forms of economic and social activity, there is a need to combine a broad general education with the possibility of working in depth on a selected number of subjects. In a sense, such a general education is the passport to learning throughout life, insofar as it should teach people to enjoy learning and also lay the foundations that will enable them to carry on learning throughout their lives.

Learning to do is the second pillar. In addition to learning to practise a profession or trade, people need to develop the ability to face a variety of situations and to work in teams, a feature of educational methods that does not receive enough attention at present. These skills are more readily acquired if pupils and students have the opportunity to develop their abilities by becoming involved in work experience schemes or social work while they are still in education. Increased importance should thus be attached to all schemes in which education alternates with work.

Learning to be was the theme of the Edgar Faure Report published under UNESCO's auspices in 1972. The Report's recommendations are still extremely relevant, for in the twenty-first century everyone will need to exercise greater independence and judgement combined with a stronger sense of personal responsibility for the attainment of common goals.

Learning to live together, finally, by developing an understanding of others, of their history, their traditions and their spirituality. This would provide a basis for the creation of a new spirit which, guided by recognition of our growing interdependence and a common analysis of the risks and challenges of the future, would induce people to implement common projects or to manage the inevitable conflicts in an intelligent and peaceful way. Some might say that this is utopian; and yet it is a necessary utopia, indeed a vital one if we are to escape from the dangerous cycle sustained by cynicism and complacency.

## Learning throughout life

The concept of learning throughout life advocated in the Faure Report is one of the keys to the twenty-first century. It meets the challenge of a rapidly changing world, and it is necessary because of its advantages of flexibility, diversity and availability at different times and in different places. It also goes beyond the traditional distinction between initial schooling and continuing education.

The idea of lifelong education must be rethought and broadened. As well as adapting to changes in working life, it should also comprise a continuous shaping of the personality, of knowledge →



© Patrick Lagès

▼ A student on a street in Hanoi, Viet Nam, 1991.

and aptitudes, but also of the critical faculty and the ability to act. (...)

The basis for a learning society is a formal system where each individual is introduced to the many different forms of knowledge. There is no substitute for the teacher-pupil relationship based on authority and dialogue. This has been said time and again by the great classical thinkers who have studied the question of education. It is the teacher's responsibility to impart to the pupil the knowledge that humankind has acquired about itself and about nature, and the essence of human creativity and inventiveness.

Education should therefore constantly be adapting to changes in society, and also pass on the attainments, foundations and benefits of human experience.

### The stages and bridges of learning: A fresh approach

By focusing on the concept of learning throughout life, the Commission did not intend to convey the idea that one could

avoid reflecting on the different levels of education. The fact is that learning throughout life makes it possible to reorder the sequences and itineraries of education, ease the transition from one stage to another and recognize the value of each.

The "three Rs" – reading, writing and arithmetic – get their full due. The combination of conventional teaching and out-of-school approaches should enable children to experience the three dimensions of education – the moral and cultural, the scientific and technological, and the economic and social.

Basic education should be provided worldwide for 900 million illiterate adults, 130 million children not enrolled in school, and more than 100 million who drop out prematurely. This vast undertaking is a priority for technical assistance and partnership carried out through international co-operation.

One major problem area in any reform concerns the policies to be adopted for young people after primary education.

One might go so far as to say that secondary schools tend to be neglected in educational thinking. They are the target of considerable criticism and provoke a considerable amount of frustration.

One source of frustration is a demand for expansion and diversification of secondary education, leading to rapid growth in enrolments and congestion in teaching programmes. This gives rise to some classic problems of mass education which developing countries cannot easily solve either financially or in terms of organization. Furthermore, there is the discouraging problem of school leavers who face a shortage of opportunities, their distress increased by a widespread all-or-nothing obsession with access to higher education. Mass unemployment in many countries has exacerbated this malaise.

The only way out of this difficult situation seems to be a very broad diversification of types of study available. The latter should include both conventional education, which



## Lifelong education must be rethought and broadened

focuses more on abstraction and conceptualization, and approaches that combine school and job experience in a way that brings out other abilities and inclinations. In any event, there should be bridges between these approaches so that errors in choice of direction, which are far too widespread, can be corrected.

Furthermore, the prospect of being able to go back to education or training would alter the general climate by assuring each young person that his or her fate is not sealed between the ages of 14 and 20.

Higher education should be seen from the same angle.

In many countries, other types of higher education institutions exist side by side with universities. Some are highly selective, while others were set up to provide specifically targeted, quality professional and vocational training. This diversification obviously meets the needs of society and the economy, both at the national and regional levels.

Increasingly stringent selection in order to ease the pressures brought about by mass higher education in the wealthiest countries is neither politically nor socially acceptable. One of the main flaws in such an approach is that many young people are expelled from the educational process before they have been able to obtain a recognized diploma and find themselves in the desperate predicament of having neither a degree nor training appropriate for the job market.

There is a need to manage increasing university enrolment in tandem with reform of secondary education. Universities would contribute to this process by diversifying what they offer: as scientific establishments and centres of learning leading to theoretical or applied research or teaching; as establishments

offering professional qualifications, with courses and content tailored to the needs of the economy; as one of the main crossroads for learning throughout life; as leading partners in a form of international co-operation favouring exchanges of teachers and students and promoting the wider availability of first-class teaching through international professorships.

These proposals have a special significance in poor countries, where universities have a decisive role to play.

### Long-term strategies for reform

(...) Three main protagonists contribute to the success of educational reforms: the local community (parents, school heads and teachers), the public authorities and the international community.

Local community participation in assessing needs by means of a dialogue between the public authorities and social groups concerned is a first essential stage in broadening access to education and improving its quality. Continuing the dialogue by way of the media, community discussions, parent education and training, and on-the-job teacher training usually arouses greater awareness, develops judgement and helps build local capacities.

In any event, no reform can succeed without the co-operative and active participation of teachers. The Commission recommended that the social, cultural and material status of educators should be considered as a matter of priority, along with the tools required to deliver education of a high standard: books, modern communication media, and suitable cultural and economic support for the school.

This being so, one requirement for the improvement of education systems is responsible public policy. Policymakers cannot assume that the market can compensate for the failures in the system or that *laissez-faire* is sufficient. The public authorities must propose clear options and, after broad consultation with all concerned, choose policies that set guidelines for the system and lay its foundations, and regulate it by making the necessary adjustments.

All the choices to be made should be predicated upon the principle of equal opportunity. (...)

As far as the international community is concerned, as agent of the success of educational reforms, the Commission framed a number of suggestions concerning: a policy of strong encouragement for the education of girls and women; the allocation of a minimum percentage of development aid (a quarter of the total) to fund education; the development of debt-for-education swaps to offset the adverse effects on state education expenditure of adjustment policies and policies for reducing internal and external deficits; the widespread introduction of the new technologies of the "information society" in all countries, to prevent the growth of yet another gap between rich countries and poor countries; enlisting the outstanding potential of non-governmental organizations.

These few suggestions should be seen in the context of partnership rather than aid. After so many failures and so much waste, experience militates in favour of partnership. Globalization makes it inescapable.

### Conclusion

The interdependence of nations provides scope for – and requires – international co-operation on a new scale and in all fields. The International Commission on Education for the Twenty-first Century is one of the ways of asserting the will to achieve this as the turn of the century draws near.

Without conducting a purely descriptive exercise or outlining a philosophy of education systems, its goal was not to construct "scenarios for the future" resulting in a set of precepts for educational policymakers, but to provide decision makers with facts to help them draw up educational policies and to spark off a debate that would go beyond the world of education and teachers, and involve parents, children, business leaders, trade unionists and associations engaged in giving education a more effective role. ■

# Learning to live in the time of AI

To the three basic pillars of any education system – reading, writing, arithmetic – we must now add three others: empathy, creativity, and critical thinking. These skills, usually acquired outside school, must be included in school curricula, as artificial intelligence (AI) becomes part of our societies.

## Leslie Loble

Co-Chair of the Council on Early Childhood Development and Fellow at the Centre for Policy Development, she was Deputy Secretary in the New South Wales Department of Education for twenty years. Loble was awarded the Australian Financial Review/Westpac Top 100 Women of Influence in 2013 for her positive impact on Australian public affairs, and named one of Australia's top 50 school education innovators in 2019.

In Australia, 300,000 children begin their school journey in 2018. Graduating from school in 2030, they will spend most of their working lives in the second half of the twenty-first century – some may even live to see the dawn of the twenty-second century. The pace of change wrought by advancing technologies makes it increasingly likely that these children will live and work in a world that is radically different from ours. Education systems must move swiftly to anticipate and adjust to this change if these future generations are to thrive.

New South Wales is the largest school education sector in Australia, with over a million children and young people attending some 3,000 schools. In every classroom, every day, a teacher instructs and guides these students towards their future. But at a system level, especially one of this scale, change can be slow to evolve, even with the mounting and clear urgency that new technology brings.

This is why the New South Wales (NSW) Department of Education initiated Education for a Changing World in 2016. Examining the strategic implications of technological advances, this comprehensive project aims to stimulate and inform necessary reforms in curricula, teaching and assessment, and to orient the entire system towards a more innovative approach.

Since the project began, the Department has engaged with global leaders from the economic, technology and academic spheres, deliberations which led to the publication of *Future Frontiers: Education for an AI World* in November 2017. The book explores the future of education in a world with AI, and the skills needed to thrive in the twenty-first century. Some of these thought leaders got together with educationalists, non-

government organizations (NGOs) and policymakers at an international symposium in late 2017 to discuss how to use new technologies and tools to support teachers and improve student outcomes. The infusion of new ideas led to a unified commitment to reform.

## The new Rs

The three Rs – reading, writing and arithmetic – are the foundation of all learning, but today's students need additional core skills and important non-cognitive skills such as self-efficacy. The pace and breadth of technological change demands a deeper understanding of concepts, and a great deal of resilience, adaptability and flexibility for students, teachers and education systems as well.

Human skills will be more important than ever in the new world taking shape before our very eyes – critical thinking will be one of the most powerful skills that education systems will impart to students.

For the time being, these essential skills can be acquired through extra-curricular activities, where we learn about co-operation, goal-setting and planning, for example. Discipline and team spirit could be developed through sports, creativity through drama, critical thinking through debate, and empathy through fundraising for the Red Cross or volunteering at a youth group.

The challenge is how to create this wide range of opportunities for all students, how to value them as legitimate experiences and integrate them into our curricula, and how to assess students in



these domains – which were previously not considered part of school education.

One thing is certain – the future will demand that children develop connections with one another and foster a sense of community, citizenship and collaboration based on empathy, which some believe is a key competency for the twenty-first century.

Interpersonal competencies are increasingly recognized as a crucial component for education systems around the globe. Organizations including UNESCO and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) are developing frameworks, standards and assessments for intrapersonal competencies, and concepts such as global skills to support greater cross-cultural collaboration. In Australia, a set of general capabilities including critical and creative thinking and intercultural understanding were included in the national curriculum in 2009 – since then, many jurisdictions have added them to their own curricula.

The Education for a Changing World project has highlighted the imperative to foster innovative education practices that will lead to widespread gains across the system. Already, these novel practices are springing up across the education community, seeking to motivate, engage and challenge students, and to harness the potential of advanced technology to lift their performance. Some of these practices have a stronger evidence base than others, which makes it difficult to distinguish which ones are the most effective.

## AI in the classroom

Drawing on lessons from national and international innovation best practices within the private and public sectors, the NSW Department of Education is examining how to better support educationalists to develop and accelerate innovative ideas. The aim is to establish new ways to create sustainable and scalable methods to extend the learning, capabilities and achievements of our students.

AI offers significant potential within education, if used wisely and if it serves the needs of educators. Already, there are AI-based systems that can support personalized learning, freeing up teachers to focus on individual student needs and educational leadership. These systems are able to monitor student engagement and progress, and potentially suggest adjustments to content.

It is crucial that educators are in the driver's seat when it comes to designing and developing AI-based systems. Teachers and school leaders must play a critical role in defining a clear purpose for AI in the classroom, and be trained to understand and utilize it effectively. Students must also be involved in decisions about the use of these technologies and educated about the ethical frameworks that accompany their use. Their future will depend on the policies and approaches that are adopted now. ■



© Vincent Fournier

▼ Photo by French fine art photographer Vincent Fournier, taken in Barcelona, Spain, in 2010, as part of *The Man Machine* series, showing “speculative fictions”, where artificial creatures interact with humans.

# Illiteracy: “Another form of slavery”

Katerina Markelova

UNESCO

“The nineteenth century can boast of having legally abolished slavery by law, and the twentieth century should devote its efforts to the abolition of another form of slavery – illiteracy,” declared Jaime Torres Bodet, Director-General of UNESCO (1948 to 1952), at an education conference in 1949.

The fight against this other “form of slavery” has been at the very heart of UNESCO’s mandate since the beginning. In the years following the Second World War, illiteracy affected more than forty-four per cent of adults worldwide, with significant disparities between regions and countries. In Malawi, for example, it exceeded ninety per cent.

Europe was not spared. In Calabria, southern Italy, almost half the population could neither read nor write. It was in this region that UNESCO, together with the Italian government and non-governmental organizations, took part in one of the first campaigns to combat illiteracy. This was followed by other initiatives, like those in Iran in 1965, and Nicaragua in 1980. More recently, in 2008, the Organization launched a literacy campaign that benefited 1.2 million Afghans, including 800,000 women.

In almost seven decades, considerable progress has been made. The global adult literacy rate rose to eighty-six per cent in 2016, and to ninety-one per cent for 15- to 24-year-olds, according to UNESCO’s Institute for Statistics. In South Asia, girls can now expect to complete twelve years of schooling, compared to just six in 1990.

But in spite of these advances, the global education map continues to be marked by glaring inequalities. A majority of the world’s 773 million illiterate adults are women. It is to reduce this proportion of the population excluded from schooling – but also to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning – that Goal 4 on education was adopted as part of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, with UNESCO as the lead agency. ■



© UNESCO

Students attend class at their new primary school in the village of San Isidro del General, Costa Rica, 1954.

1950



© UNESCO / Tamagawa Gakuen, Tokyo

Girls testing the airplane models they crafted at the Tamagawa Gakuen primary school in Tokyo, 1962.

1960

1970





© UNESCO / A. Jonquères

La Perona, a school for adults in Barcelona, Spain, 1973.

1970



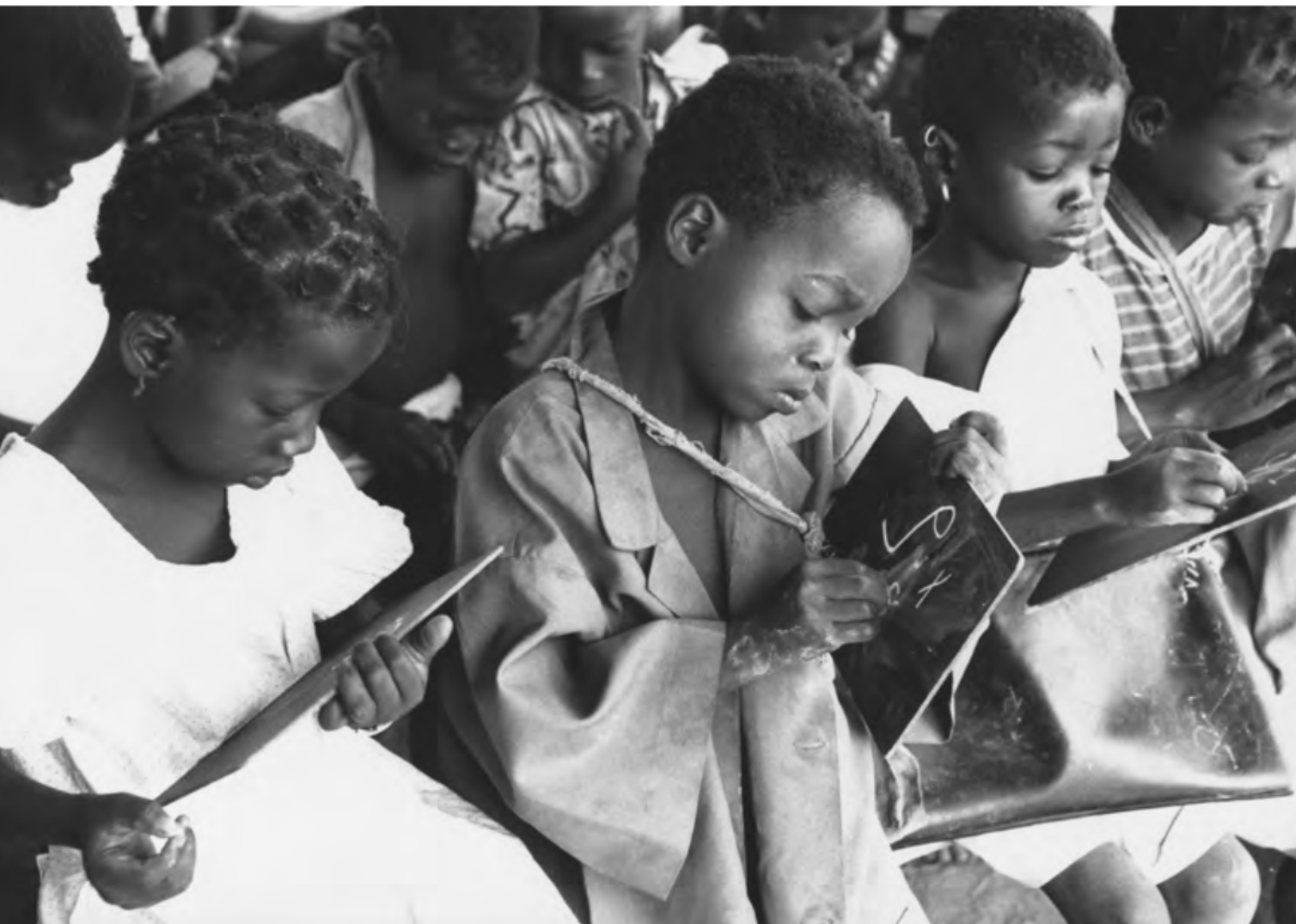
© UNESCO / Nicaragua Ministry of Education

A literacy campaign in Nicaragua, launched in 1980, has reduced the country's illiteracy rate from fifty per cent to thirteen per cent.

1980

1990





© UNESCO / Inez Forbes

Learning to read and write at a village school in Koloni Boundio, Mali, 1994.

1990



© Bernard van Leer Foundation

Children of the nomadic Samburu pastoralists play and learn at enclosed Loipi community learning centres in northern Kenya, 2006.

2000

2010





© Lucas Veuve / HI ([www.hi.org](http://www.hi.org))

Fitted with a prosthesis, Sophea, 10, is able to attend a regular school in Kampong Cham, Cambodia, 2017.

2010





© UNESCO / Fouad Choufany

The *École des Trois Docteurs*, a school in Beirut's Gemmayzeh district, damaged by the blasts on 4 August 2020. As part of its Li Beirut initiative, UNESCO is co-ordinating the rehabilitation of schools in Lebanon.

2020

# Universal access to education: We can do better

Education is a fundamental human right. Yet millions of children and adults remain deprived of educational opportunities.

Linda Klaassen


UNESCO

Everywhere, the Covid-19 pandemic has hit the most vulnerable and marginalized the hardest – affecting 1.6 billion learners at its peak, when the majority of the world’s schools were temporarily closed. It has widened inequalities and could erode decades of hard-won progress. About 24 million children and youth – from pre-primary to tertiary education – are at risk of dropping out because of the pandemic’s economic impact alone, according to UNESCO’s estimates.

Girls and women constitute a particularly vulnerable group regarding the right to education. They account for 131.7 million out-of-school children and for two-thirds of the 773 million

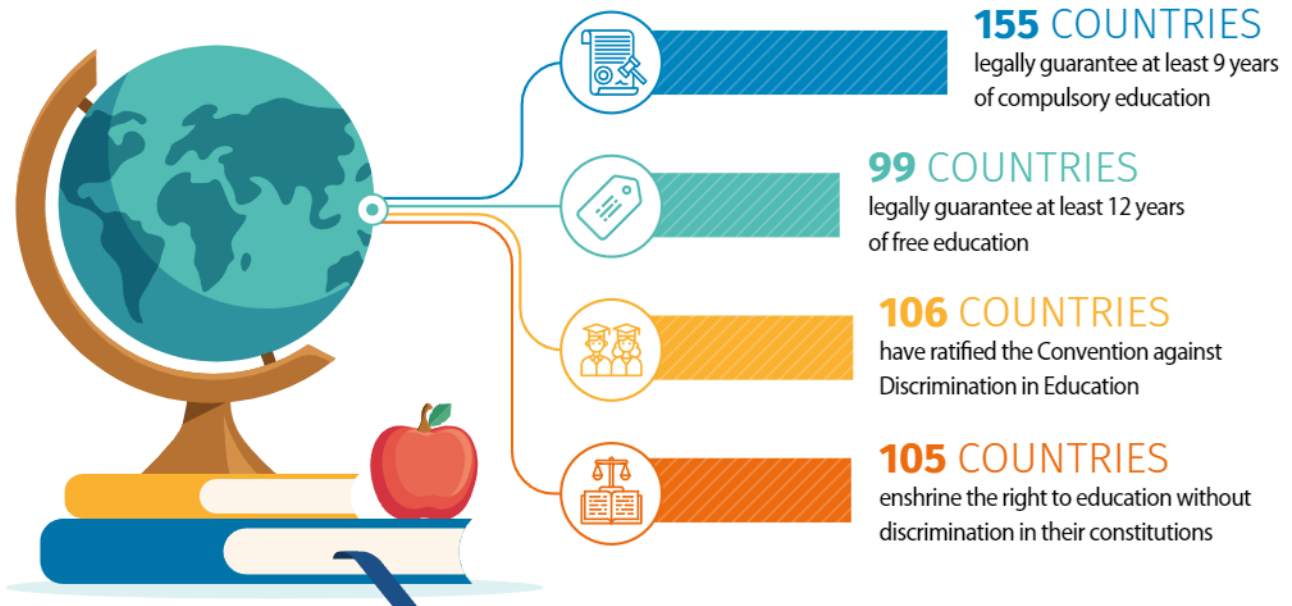
illiterate adults. The Covid-19 pandemic has aggravated already existing inequalities – it is estimated that 11 million girls may not return to school. Girls aged 12 to 17 are especially at risk of dropping out in low and lower-income countries.

This is particularly alarming as education is one of the most powerful tools by which marginalized children and adults can lift themselves out of poverty and fully integrate into society. ■

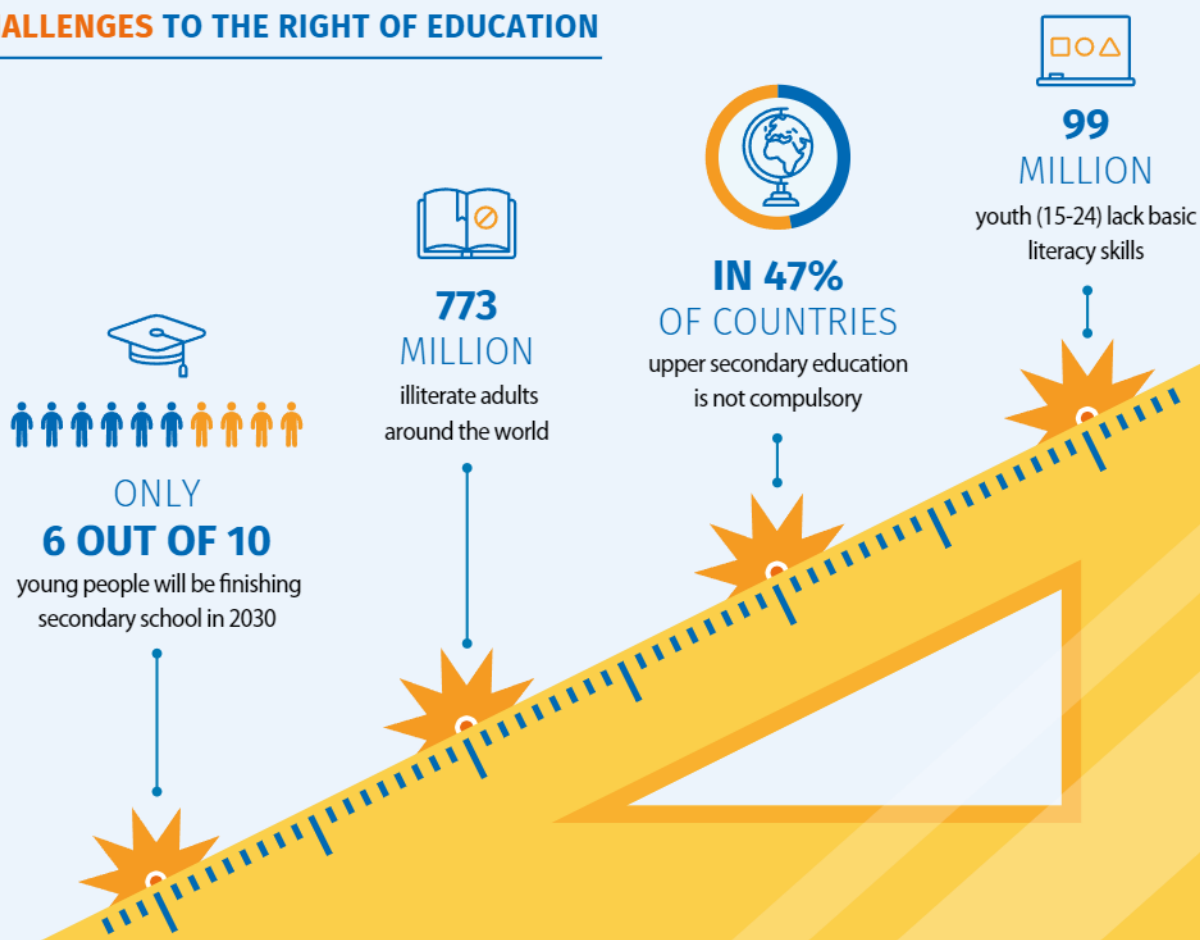
 Source : *Guidelines to strengthen the right to education in national frameworks*, UNESCO, 2021. #HerEducationOurFuture: Keeping girls in the picture during and after the Covid-19 crisis, 2021.

## WHAT THE RIGHT TO EDUCATION REALLY IMPLIES

### STATE OF THE RIGHT TO EDUCATION



## CHALLENGES TO THE RIGHT OF EDUCATION



**257 MILLION** children and youth were out of school in 2019



**8%** of primary school age children were out of school in 2019

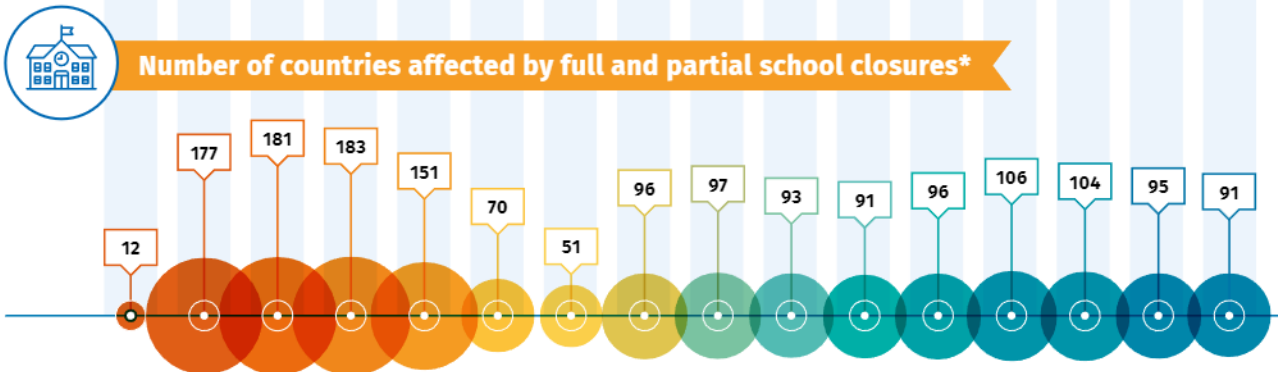
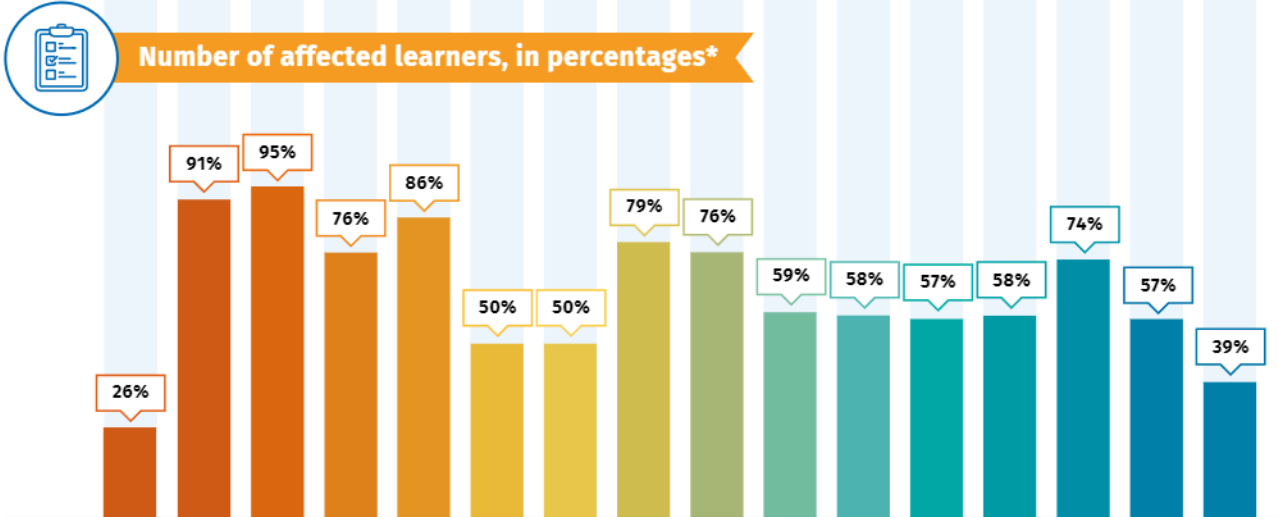
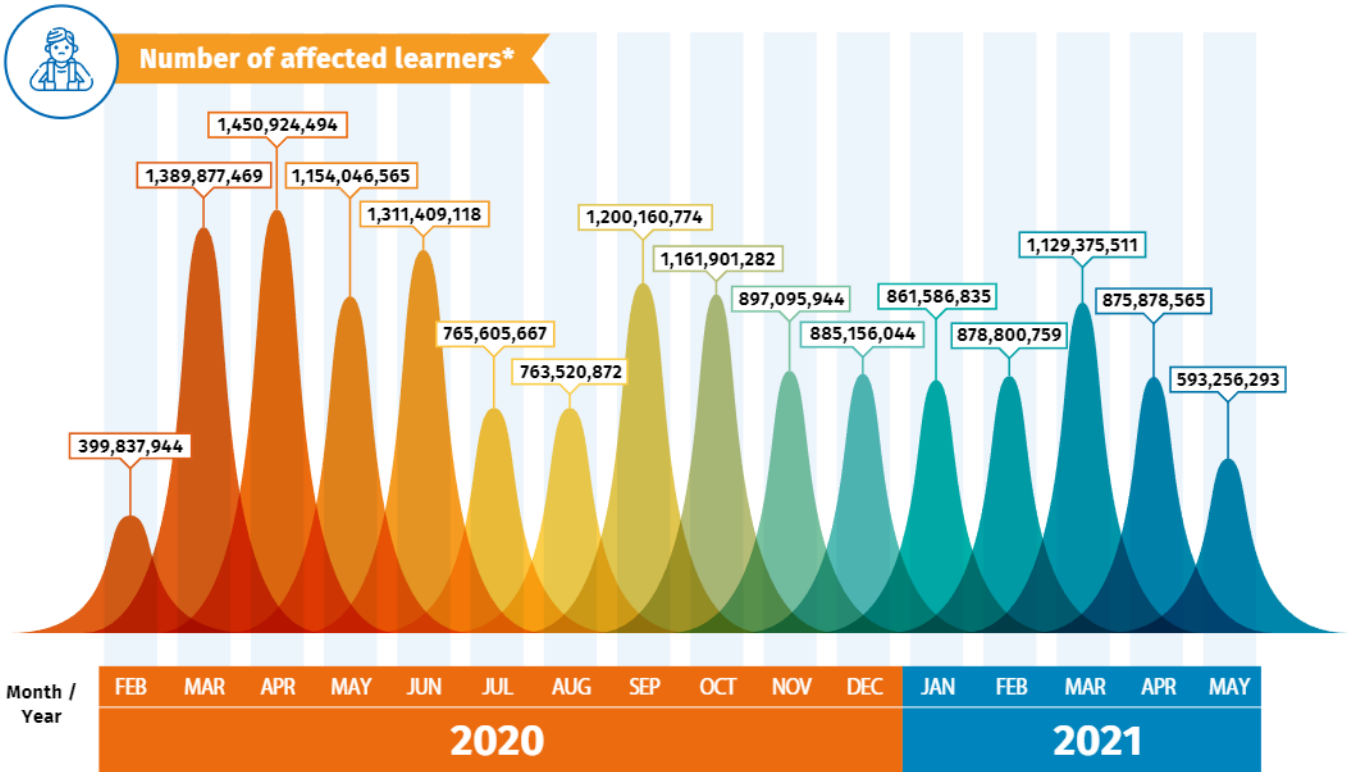
**199 MILLION** Children of secondary (lower and upper) school age were out of school in 2019

**58 MILLION** children of primary school age were out of school in 2019



# EDUCATION: FROM DISRUPTION TO RECOVERY

## IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON EDUCATION: MONITORING OF SCHOOL CLOSURES



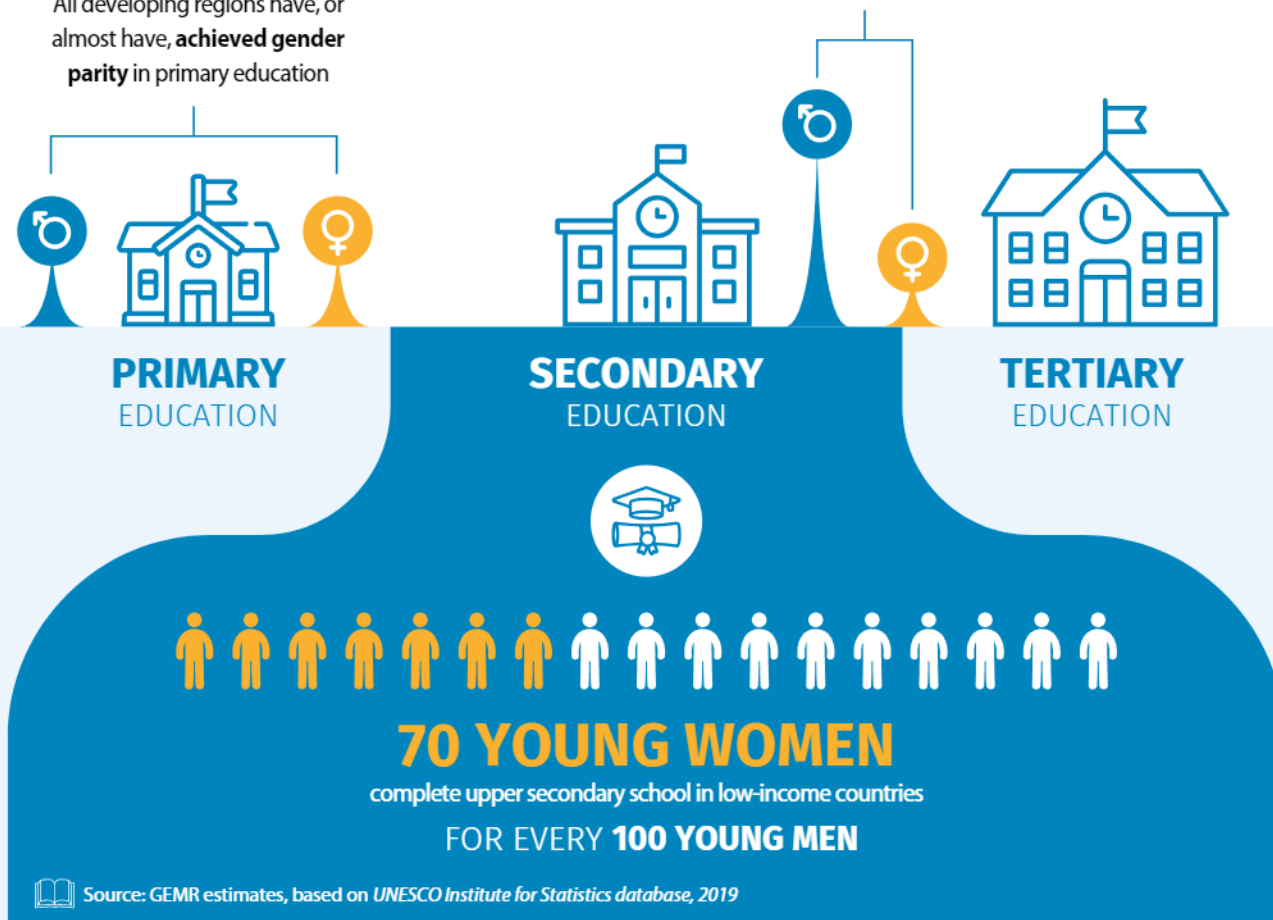
\*Highest figure for each month, for pre-primary to secondary levels.

# GENDER EQUALITY: WHERE ARE WE TODAY?

## EDUCATION:

All developing regions have, or almost have, **achieved gender parity** in primary education

But **gender disparity in enrolment widens** in secondary and tertiary education in many countries



**\$** ↑  
**20% EARNINGS**  
Just one more year of school can increase a girl's earnings when she is an adult, by up to 20%

**ADOLESCENT PREGNANCIES**  
10% fewer girls under 17 would become pregnant in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia if they all had a primary education

**\$**  
Some countries lose more than **\$1 BILLION A YEAR** by failing to educate girls to the same level as boys

## GIRLS BACK TO SCHOOL

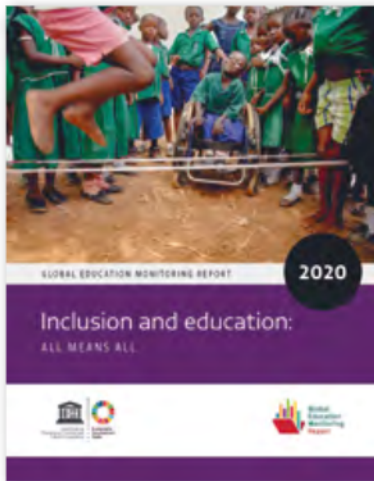
Source: UNESCO

More than **11 MILLION GIRLS** are at risk of not going back to school

Up to **130 MILLION GIRLS** were already out of school before the Covid-19 crisis

**DON'T LET COVID-19 THREATEN THE FUTURE OF GIRLS**

# New publications



## Global Education Monitoring Report 2020

**Inclusion and education:  
All means all**

ISBN 978-92-3-100388-2  
424 pp, 215 x 280 mm, paperback, €55  
UNESCO Publishing

The 2020 Report looks at social, economic and cultural mechanisms that discriminate against disadvantaged children, youth and adults – keeping them out of education, or marginalized in it.

Spurred by their commitment to fulfil the right to inclusive education, countries are expanding their vision of inclusion in education, putting diversity at the core of their systems. Yet, the implementation of well-meaning laws and policies often falters.

Released during the Covid-19 crisis – which has exacerbated underlying inequalities – the Report argues that resistance to addressing every learner's needs is a real threat to achieving global education targets.



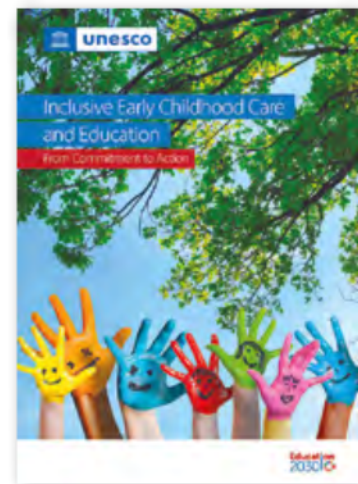
## Education in prison

**A literature review**

ISBN 978-92-820-1241-3  
110 pp, 148 x 210 mm, PDF  
UNESCO Publishing  
Publication available on  
<https://unesdoc.unesco.org>

This publication focuses on some of the unique characteristics and challenges concerning the provision of education in prison. These include the emergence of an informal curriculum; language tuition in prison; access to higher education; the availability of library facilities; digital literacy; civic engagement and social (re) integration; and prison programmes for education.

It also analyses commitments made through international and regional declarations and agreements. Furthermore, it examines penal policies, strategies and pedagogical approaches established in jurisdictions around the world. Finally, this review provides sets of recommendations for local administrations and national governments on education in prison.



## Inclusive Early Childhood Care and Education

**From Commitment to Action**

ISBN 978-92-3-100461-2  
58 pp, 170 x 240 mm, PDF  
UNESCO Publishing  
Publication available on  
<https://unesdoc.unesco.org>

Today, too many young children are still deprived of an inclusive education from early childhood.

Early childhood services aim to provide for all children equally, but when the most vulnerable children are excluded or ignored, universal participation is unattainable. Many children are denied access because of gender, disability, ethnicity, socio-economic status, geographic location, language, refugee or displaced status, or due to a humanitarian crisis or natural disaster. The Covid-19 pandemic has exacerbated this exclusion.

This publication presents and discusses both qualitative and quantitative data for a renewed, action-oriented global commitment to universal and inclusive early childhood services. The recommendations emerged from a literature review and consultations with experts, practitioners, and academics from multiple countries.

# Many voices, one world

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**REIMAGINING**  
A new social  
**OUR FUTURES**  
contract for  
**TOGETHER**  
education

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