



International
Parliamentary
Network for
Education

International Day of Education 2024

A briefing for members of parliament

In 2018 the United Nations General Assembly proclaimed 24 January as International Day of Education, in celebration of the role of education for peace and development. This year the third International Day of Education will be marked on Wednesday, 24th January under the theme, 'Learning for Lasting Peace'

Sadly, the world is seeing a surge of violent conflicts paralleled by a concerning rise of intolerance and discrimination.

In this context, an active commitment to peace is more urgent than ever and education is key to this endeavour.

This briefing for members of parliament focuses on the critical tasks of

- protecting and growing financing for education
- prioritising foundational learning,
- improving children's access to a healthy meal at school.and
- ensuring all children in emergencies are learning.

Learning for peace

A transformed and well-resourced education system can be an effective long-term preventative tool that protects, builds and sustains peace before, during and after conflict.

Inclusive and equitable quality education is key to ensuring the economic development of all countries and breaking the cycle of poverty that drives injustice and conflict.

Today, 258 million children and youth are out of school, and 617 million children, two-thirds of whom are in school, cannot read and do basic math.

A transformed and well-resourced education system can be an effective long-term preventative tool that protects, builds and sustains peace before, during and after conflict.

Such an education can lay the preventative foundations by helping all learners realize their fundamental human right to accessible and equitable quality education.

In a period of crises, it is essential to ensure continuity of learning, especially for those marginalized, and mainstream education as part of global peacebuilding efforts.

Education can also contribute to reducing inequities, inequalities and injustices by ensuring that all learners are represented and recognized in all facets of their education.

1. Fund Education

To transform education for every child, governments must address all three aspects of education financing: adequacy, efficiency, and equity.

Education is severely underfunded

The annual financing gap for achieving Sustainable Development Goal 4 in low- and lower-middle-income countries now stands at [almost \\$100 billion](#).

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

In 2021, in low-income countries, government education spending as a share of GDP [increased](#) from 3.1% in 2012 to 3.6% in 2021, but it decreased in middle-income countries.

Families in low and middle income countries spend significant portions of their funds on education; [more than 1/3 of total education spending is from households](#).

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

Today [one in six of the world's poorest countries](#) pay more on debt than on education.

Aid to education in decline

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

Donor countries are encouraged to spend [0.7% of their Gross National Income \(GNI\)](#) on Official Development Assistance (ODA).

ODA for education continues to be important for the development of low-income countries, accounting for [13% of 90%](#) of their total education expenditure. However, today the proportion of ODA devoted to education continues to decline.

In recent years ODA for low and middle income countries [fell by 7%](#), from US\$19.3 billion in 2020 to US\$17.8 billion in 2021.

Only [30% of direct aid](#) to education among the ten largest donors to sub-Saharan Africa goes straight to recipient countries; the remainder is funneled through donors' aid agencies, international and domestic non-governmental organizations, and multilateral organizations.

One of the countries that reduced its ODA in recent years is the UK. In 2021, the UK [reduced the ODA from 0.7% of GNI to 0.5%](#), marking the first time ever when the country has not met the ODA 0.7% target.

Moreover, education remains one of the most underfunded areas of humanitarian aid, receiving [only around 3% of global humanitarian funding](#).

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

- Strengthening domestic revenue mobilization and increasing the share of expenditure for education in their country
- Protecting and increasing official development assistance (ODA) and the proportion of funding that is devoted to education
- Strengthening international coordination to address the debt crisis

2. Ensure all children learn how to read, write and do mathematics

Access to education has significantly increased over the past years, reaching an all time high of 97%. However, access does not equal learning, and even when children are in school, they are not learning.

[Two-thirds of the world's children today](#) cannot read and understand a simple sentence by age 10.

In Sub-Saharan Africa, [89% of children](#) will not learn how to read by age 10 - this includes out of school children and children in school but where the education is of such poor quality that basic learning outcomes aren't achieved

Parliamentarians can help increase the learning levels of children in their country by advocating to their government to establish policies and implement programmes which ensure that:

- Children access early childhood education and come to primary school ready to learn.
- Teachers have the skills and knowledge to teach reading effectively.
- Children have quality books and learning materials with which to learn to read.
- Learning outcomes and early grade reading are tracked in order to take remedial action when we identify that children aren't learning.

3. Ensure children receive a healthy meal at school

School meals are vital to combat hunger and malnutrition, increase school enrolment and improve learning outcomes.

Today only [41% of children](#) enrolled in primary school benefit from school meal programmes globally. In low-income countries only [18% of children](#) receive a daily, nutritious meal at school.

The share of domestic funding in low-income countries for school meals has increased from [30% in 2020 to 45% in 2022](#), a total of US\$ 392 million. However, during the same period, there has been a 6% reduction in international support, [from US\\$ 267 million in 2020 to US\\$ 214 million in 2022](#).

In 2021, the [School Meals Coalition](#) was created to ensure that by 2030, every child receives a healthy, nutritious meal in school. 96 countries have joined as members and over 100 non-governmental organisations as partners.

Parliamentarians can support the expansion and improvement of school meals programmes domestically:

- Advocate for the multisectoral benefits of school meals.
- Engage with the key stakeholders in your constituency, nationally and internationally who have an interest in school meals and work with them to create coalitions to improve the reach and quality of school meals.
- Draft and amend legislation, to create a legal basis for the school meals programme or to improve existing laws provisions. This includes direct legislation for school meals programmes and related laws such as nutrition guidelines, food standards and procurement rules.
- Ensure financing for school meals programmes is adequate, cross-sectoral and supports long-term planning. Advocate for a specific budget line for school meals programmes.
- Hold your government to account for implementing school meals policies in accordance with the laws and budget passed by the parliament and in line with the government's commitments and targets.

Donor parliamentarians can support the development of school feeding programmes internationally by advocating that their government:

- Commit to financing school meals via their development and humanitarian funding.
- Ensure there are accurate reporting systems to capture aid flows to school feeding programmes.
- Support low and lower middle income countries make the transition towards domestic financing based on clear national commitments and multi-year financing aligned with a national strategy.

4. Protect the education of children in emergencies

Armed conflict, climate change, and the COVID pandemic have caused unprecedented disruption of education systems and unprecedented levels of forced displacement.

Children and adolescents bear the brunt. [224 million](#) school-aged children are today affected by crises globally and in need of educational support.

Out of those 224 million children, [78 million children](#) (of whom 54% are girls) are out of school, and close to 120 million are in school but not achieving minimum proficiency in mathematics or reading. That means that just **one in ten** crisis-impacted children is achieving the minimum learning standards.

[Education Cannot Wait](#), the fund for education in emergencies, has so far mobilized \$880 million of its 1.5 billion funding target which will allow it to reach 20 million children in crisis-affected countries with quality education between now and 2026.

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

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

Take action in parliament to protect education financing, learning, children's wellbeing and education in emergencies

Questions

Submit a parliamentary question on education:

- Ask what your government's policy is on protecting and growing education financing.
- Ask your government to restore ODA to 0.7% of GNI and increase education's share of the ODA budget to 15%.
- Ask what your government has done to ensure children are learning the basics.
- Ask your government the steps it is taking to ensure that every child at school has access to healthy food.
- Ask your government to join the School Meals Coalition and if they have, request that they make commitments to the coalition and ensure that they adhere to them.
- Ask what your government's plans are for overseas development assistance, including the proportion of aid they will be allocating to education and whether they will be supporting the world's two global funds for education, the Global Partnership for Education and Education Cannot Wait.

Debates

Ask for a debate in your parliament on the state of education and the importance of protecting education financing, prioritizing learning, tackling children's wellbeing and ensuring all children in emergencies and protracted crises are learning.

Motions

Table a motion in your parliament setting out your concerns and urging your government to act.

Statements

To call attention to the challenges which education faces both in your own country and internationally, you could work with other like-minded colleagues to issue a joint public statement. This can engage media interest and also bring issues to a wider audience both locally and internationally.

The International Day of Education

The International Day of Education provides an important opportunity to educate the public on issues of concern, to mobilize political will and resources to accelerate educational progress, and to celebrate and reinforce relevant achievements.

You can find out more about the International Day of Education at this link:

<https://www.un.org/en/observances/education-day>

Let us know how you mark the day

We would love to hear how you mark the International Day of Education in your parliament and share what you do with your parliamentary peers from around the world. Email us at info@ipned.org