

Transforming Education

Towards SDG 4

Report of a global survey on country actions
to transform education



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SHORT SUMMARY

What transformative actions have countries implemented to accelerate progress towards SDG 4?

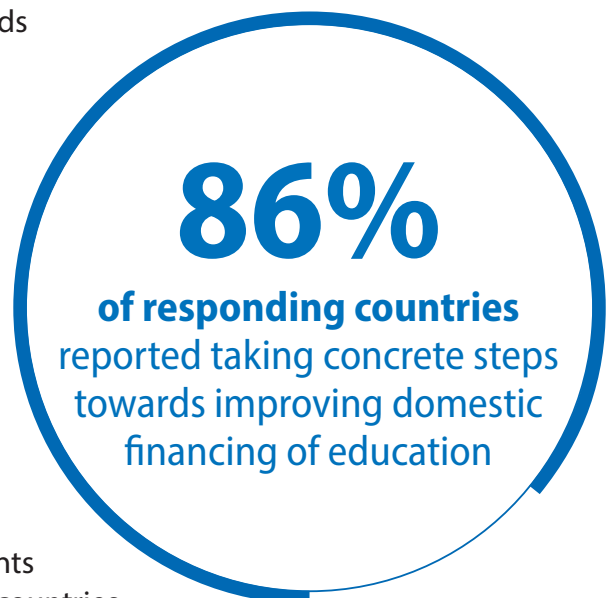
In September 2022, the United Nations Transforming Education Summit (TES) acted decisively to mobilize ambition and solidarity, prioritizing education on the political agenda.

A year later, UNESCO invited Member States to the Survey on Country Actions to Transform Education, reporting on their commitments and actions. This report showcases the survey's findings, highlighting transformative measures countries have adopted to advance towards Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4).

The report emphasizes that achieving SDG 4's vision of transforming lives through education requires a holistic, lifelong approach, focusing on individual and societal well-being. Key elements include embedding inclusion, equity, and gender equality in policies, enhancing education finance, and prioritizing investments in the teaching profession.

As an essential monitoring tool, this report tracks country progress in translating commitments into actions, fostering cross-country learning. It documents best practices and transformative actions, enabling countries to learn from each other's successes and challenges, accelerating progress toward SDG 4 by 2030.

Education leaders, policy-makers, teachers, parents, youth, and students are encouraged to reflect on, collaborate in, and learn from the transformative actions detailed in this report.



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"Since wars begin in the minds of men and women, it is in the minds of men and women that the defences of peace must be constructed"

Transforming Education Towards SDG 4

Report of a global survey on country actions
to transform education

Foreword

In September 2015, at the United Nations Sustainable Development Summit in New York, Member States formally adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, setting a new global education goal. Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4) aims to *ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all*.

Education is a fundamental human right that enables and advances other human rights. Quality education and lifelong learning is an end goal in itself, as it provides individuals with values, knowledge and skills to lead a meaningful and productive life. As such, SDG 4, particularly its Target 4.7 (education for sustainable development and global citizenship), holds transformative potential and drives progress across all SDGs by contributing to a peaceful, inclusive and sustainable future.

Yet, progress towards SDG 4 is severely off track as the global education crisis – of both equity and quality – persists and deepens. Despite efforts and progress made, multiple crises and global challenges, such as climate change, demographic shifts, increasing conflicts and natural disasters, have impeded further advancement. The COVID-19 pandemic, which precipitated the largest educational disruptions in human history, was a wake-up call that more investments are urgently needed to improve education system resilience and ensure the continuity, relevance and equity of learning for all. Moreover, the 2021 report of UNESCO's International Commission on the Futures of Education proposed reimagining and renewing of the purpose, content and delivery of education by building a new social contract for education that can repair past injustices while transforming the future.

In this context, the 2022 United Nations Transforming Education Summit (TES) marked a pivotal moment in global efforts to address these challenges and transform education. The TES encouraged a comprehensive, lifelong approach to education that fosters the development and well-being of both individual learners and society. It was inspirational to see a broad range of actors – from students, youth and teachers to the Heads of State and Government – mobilized to envision and commit to transforming education. The high response rates of national statements of commitment and the survey among countries demonstrate their willingness to be held accountable for progress towards SDG 4.

This report is a testament to such ongoing mobilization and actions to join efforts to accelerate progress towards SDG 4. Its purpose is to help monitor the extent to which countries have translated their commitments into action while sharing country examples and good practices to foster cross-country learning.

This report also underscores the necessity of a holistic, multifaceted and context-specific approach to transforming education. By prioritizing financing, focusing on inclusion, investing in teachers, embracing the digital transformation, and adopting holistic learning and teaching methods, countries can create a more inclusive, equitable and effective learning environment for all learners. The journey towards achieving SDG 4 is a collective effort, and with sustained commitment and action, we can ensure that education fulfils its promise as a catalyst for sustainable development and brighter futures for humanity and the planet.



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Assistant Director-General for Education

Acknowledgements

This report was prepared by a team of staff members and researchers of the UNESCO Education Sector, under the responsibility of the Section for SDG 4 Leadership, which serves as the Inter-Agency Secretariat (IAS) of the SDG 4 High-Level Steering Committee (HLSC). The HLSC spearheads the follow-up to the 2022 Transforming Education Summit and requested at its December 2022 meeting that the IAS develop a dashboard of country commitments and actions, which allowed for the conceptualization and preparation of this survey report in addition to the Dashboard of Country Commitments and Action to Transform Education.

The dashboard and survey project was conceptualized and overseen by Mami Umayahara, who led the IAS' Technical Support Team in the data collection, analysis and report writing. The team comprised Siwoo Lee, Yesle Hong, Kathleen Brennan and Olaf Kooijmans. Each team member's dedication, contributions and collaboration were essential to the successful production of this report. We also recognize Sandra Bisin of IAS who supported the publication of the report.

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Additionally, we appreciate the valuable feedback and contributions of experts from the UNESCO Education Sector at Headquarters, Institutes and Regional Offices who provided inputs and comments on the concept note, the survey instrument and the draft report of this project. Also acknowledged are the comments and insights received from the HLSC working group members on the Dashboard: the Council of Europe, Education International, Portugal and UNICEF.

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Executive summary

Education is a fundamental human right that enables other human rights. The vision of Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4) to “ensure inclusive, equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all” is to transform lives through education, recognizing the catalytic role of education as a driver of sustainable development and the achievement of all SDGs.

As the 2030 deadline approaches, the global education crisis deepens, with 250 million children and youth out of school¹ and 40% of primary-school-age children lacking basic reading skills, with significant and persistent disparities and inequalities between and within countries.² There is a shortage of 44 million teachers worldwide³ and a USD 97-billion annual funding gap for low- and lower-middle-income countries to achieve their national SDG 4 targets.⁴ Political commitment and targeted actions are essential to reverse these trends.

Inspired by the report of UNESCO’s International Commission on the Futures of Education, *Reimagining Our Futures Together: A New Social Contract for Education*⁵, the United Nations Secretary-General in his *Our Common Agenda* report announced the 2022 Transforming Education Summit (TES) to forge a shared vision for education and accelerate progress towards SDG 4.⁶ In the face of humanity’s choice between ‘a breakdown or a breakthrough,’⁷ both reports highlighted the need for an urgent and profound change of course in global development. Ultimately, quality education holds the key to fostering knowledge, skills and attitudes that contribute to peaceful, inclusive and sustainable futures of humanity and the planet. However, current education systems are plagued with crises of inequalities and quality. Despite the unprecedented levels of wealth, scientific knowledge and technological development available, educational models and systems are not only unable to respond to but conversely even contribute to the socially, economically and environmentally unsustainable development trends.⁸ Hence, the urgency to transform education.

The TES served as a platform to rethink the purpose, content and delivery of education as well as to galvanize ambition and political commitment, resulting in 143 National Statements of Commitment and a number of Calls to Action. The SDG 4 High-Level Steering Committee (HLSC), which was mandated to lead the TES follow-up, requested that its UNESCO-based Inter-Agency Secretariat develop a Dashboard of Country Commitments and Actions to Transform Education as a monitoring tool for country commitments. On the eve of the SDG Summit in September 2023, UNESCO launched the Dashboard of Country Commitments that displays the analysis of the commitments by 143 countries and Member States who were also invited to take the Survey on Country Actions to Transform Education. The survey was completed by 91 country governments (46.7%). Of these, 73 countries (51.1% of the 143 countries that made commitments) submitted both national statements of commitment and survey responses.

Key findings and messages

1. There is no singular way to transform education

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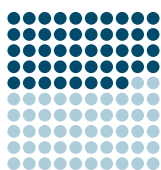


Seven out of ten countries reported having incorporated TES commitments into their national education policies and/or plans through participatory revisions. While many transformative actions are being reported, less focus was placed on integrating mechanisms to evaluate their effectiveness.

Approaches to transforming education should be contextualized and adapted to each country's unique reality, including political environment, institutional capacity, and economic and socio-cultural conditions. To optimize the chances of successful transformation, **four critical conditions** should be considered: (i) shared vision and ownership of the transformation agenda; (ii) aligned policies and strategies; (iii) engagement and empowerment of local actors; and (iv) effective governance structures for accountability and commitment.

2. Financing is vital to the education transformation agenda, yet adequate and sustained funding for education remains a persistent challenge

86%



Domestic resources account for the largest share of funding education (approximately 97%). **Overall, 86% of countries** reported taking concrete steps towards improving their domestic financing of education with actions focused on increasing the volume of public funding for education and on protecting education budgets in times of crisis and fiscal constraint. Countries need to mobilize additional funds to meet their national SDG 4 targets while improving the effective and efficient utilization of these resources. Transforming education financing requires universal, sustainable and systemic financing solutions. Effective education financing requires cutting inefficiencies, enhancing governance, linking investments to education outcomes and ensuring accountability to maximize the impact and value for money of investments in the sector.

Only a few donor countries meet the benchmark of allocating 0.7% of their Gross National Income (GNI) to Official Development Aid (ODA) and even fewer allocate the recommended 15% to education. **Nearly half (48%)** of the responding donor countries reported taking concrete actions towards improving international aid to education, including supporting global tax justice and country-level tax system reforms to widen fiscal space and allow more government spending on education. International aid remains vital as a complement to domestic resources to catalyse country-level sector transformation. Countries and the global community must increase investment in education from all sources – including through innovative financing solutions complementary to domestic public resources – and improve cross-sector resource mobilisation and collaboration.

3. All countries reported actions toward inclusion, equity and gender equality, but gaps remain



All 91 responding countries have undertaken actions towards inclusion, equity and gender equality – the sentiment at the heart of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development to leave no one behind – with special attention and support given to **girls and women** as well as learners faced with different challenges that render them more vulnerable, including disabilities, poverty and remote or rural residence. Despite progress, significant challenges to inclusion persist, which underscores the need for targeted strategies to address these ongoing challenges.



Refugee and other forcibly displaced children and young people are at acute risk of educational exclusion. Thus, countries are making efforts to include refugees and displaced children and youth in their national education plans and systems.

4. Digital transformation cuts across all thematic areas, highlighting its critical contributions to transforming education



Countries almost universally committed to and reported actions for **digital learning**, with many prioritizing the expansion of internet connectivity for educational purposes while promoting equity and inclusion. Countries are investing in strengthening teacher support and development by leveraging digital tools to be used in teaching practices. The quality of digital learning content is a relatively neglected concern, however, and only a handful of countries provided examples of government-sanctioned digital learning platforms. Ideally, digital learning platforms should be rendered freely accessible while ensuring the protection of data privacy and prioritizing the digital well-being of learners and educators.



Guided by the principles of inclusion, equity, quality and accessibility, three ‘keys’ – **content, capacity and connectivity** – must be used to unlock the power of digital learning so it can serve as a more universal and reliable pillar to support holistic educational experiences.

5. Transforming education requires prioritizing investments in the teaching profession, ensuring that teachers are qualified, professionally trained, motivated and well-supported



To ensure that teachers can support the diverse needs of learners amidst evolving educational demands, **nine out of ten countries** are undertaking transformative actions in teacher training and professional development to incorporate new pedagogical skills, use of digital tools and renewed curricula.



Improved working conditions and professional autonomy are essential to making the teaching profession more attractive and keeping the supply of teachers sufficient and sustainable. Yet, a relatively smaller number of countries — six out of ten — reported actions in these critical areas.



Teachers are crucial agents of transformation. Addressing the global teacher shortage, estimated to be nearly 44 million by 2030, is an **urgent priority** for transforming education that requires systemic planning for teacher recruitment, training and retention.

6. Pivotal to educational transformation is the adoption of a holistic, lifelong and comprehensive approach that elevates the development and well-being of individual learners and society



Nearly all countries (95%) have reported on actions to renew and update curricular content and 88% of them have reported on updating pedagogical approaches. Eight out of ten countries are incorporating education for **sustainable development**, including greening education, and skills for work, including technical and vocational education and training (TVET), into their teaching and learning processes in response to the global climate crisis and evolving labour market demands driven by the green and digital transition. **Integrated early childhood care and education** emerged as one of the thematic areas with the highest level of country actions reported (92%) and the second largest difference from the commitment level (55 percentage points) after youth engagement (56 percentage points). Three-quarters of the responding countries reported on transformative actions to foster learners' 21st-century skills, social and emotional learning, and physical and mental health and well-being. The challenge remains to develop the capacities, conditions and processes for effective implementation inside and outside the classroom.



In light of the multi-dimensional transitions facing today's world, rethinking the purpose, content and delivery of education is at the core of transforming education – with a lifelong learning perspective. Having mainstreamed these transformative aspects into curricula, the challenge is to develop the capacities, conditions and processes for their effective implementation – both **inside and outside the classroom**.

7. Genuine and meaningful engagement of stakeholders, especially youth, students and teachers, and effective governance are needed to transform education



Youth engagement in education is rising, with three-quarters of countries reporting actions undertaken to engage their young constituents. Placing youth engagement within a country's legal framework, developing and financing a youth policy, and inviting young leaders to sit at the decision-making table are natural and strategic steps to be co-created with young people. In fulfilling their national commitments to transform education, many countries are pursuing SDG 4 and national targets with a transformative, whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach, building on existing systems and coordination mechanisms.

1. Introduction

1.1 Background

Education is a fundamental human right that enables and advances other human rights. The vision of Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4: *Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all*) is to transform lives through education, recognizing the catalytic role of education as a driver of development and the achievement of all SDGs.⁹ Yet, with only six years left to achieve the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the global education crisis persists and deepens. A staggering 250 million children and youth remain out of school.¹⁰ It is estimated that nearly 40% of primary-school-age children lack basic reading skills globally and there is a huge disparity among regions, ranging from only 3% of children in Europe and North America to 43% of children in Central and Southern Asia and 84% in sub-Saharan Africa.¹¹ There is an estimated 44-million teacher shortage.¹² About one out of seven young people and adults (765 million) lacks basic literacy skills. The UNESCO 2023 *Global Education Monitoring Report* estimates that low- and lower-middle-income countries face a shocking financing gap of USD 97 billion annually to reach their national SDG 4 targets by 2030.¹³ Political will and targeted actions are crucial to reverse these trends.

Education has recently garnered political support and attention as a driver of sustainable development, which led to the 2022 Transforming Education Summit (TES). In September 2022, the United Nations Secretary-General convened the TES to respond to the triple-crisis in education – of equity and inclusion, quality and relevance – compounded by a lack of adequate financing and heightened by the COVID-19 pandemic. Inspired by the report of UNESCO's International Commission on the Futures of Education,¹⁴ the Secretary-General, in his 2021 *Our Common Agenda* report,¹⁵ announced this historical summit to forge a shared vision for education and

accelerate progress towards SDG 4. In the face of humanity's choice between "a breakdown or a breakthrough,"¹⁶ both reports highlight the need for an urgent and profound change of course in global development, and that quality education holds the key to fostering knowledge, skills and attitudes that contribute to peaceful, inclusive and sustainable futures of humanity and the planet. Transforming education involves reimagining what and how we learn¹⁷ by ensuring it adapts to a rapidly changing global landscape to meet the needs of every individual from early childhood throughout life.^{18,19}

The TES mobilized ambition, solidarity and solutions to reignite actions towards SDG 4 by fundamentally rethinking the purpose, content and delivery of education. Leading up to the TES, countries held broad national consultations to "develop a shared vision of the futures of education and to strengthen political and public commitment, align priority innovative actions across constituencies, and mobilize collective capacity to deliver that vision between now and 2030."²⁰ In committing to transforming their education systems and increasing education financing to achieve this transformation, countries were invited to prepare National Statements of Commitment to Transform Education informed by national consultations, with 143 countries submitting such statements.

The UN Secretary-General mandated the SDG 4 High-Level Steering Committee (HLSC), co-chaired by the Director-General of UNESCO and the President of Chile, to lead the TES follow-up by (1) supporting and monitoring the translation of country commitments into actions; (2) ensuring that education transformation is a key component of the Summit of the Future; (3) upholding the global movement for transforming education; (4) transforming education financing; and (5) promoting the Global Initiatives that emerged

from the Transforming Education Summit. At its December 2022 meeting, the HLSC decided on a number of TES follow-up actions along these five pillars, including a request for its Inter-Agency Secretariat (IAS) at UNESCO to develop a Dashboard of Country Commitments and Actions to Transform Education as a monitoring and accountability tool for the implementation of the national commitments.

As the first step, the IAS research team carried out a content analysis of the 143 National Statements of Commitments, coding them into 9 broad themes and 37 more specific sub-themes, which emerged from the TES preparatory process and were agreed upon by the HLSC's dedicated working group (**Annex 1**). These statements varied in format, length and depth, and the level of precision of actions, which made it difficult to draw a clear line for what should be considered commitments. They certainly did not represent the totality of the country's commitments or intentions that may be included in national education policies, strategies or sector plans. Statements were recognized as commitments when they clearly expressed a political will to prioritize certain thematic areas or undertake actions, or if they reaffirmed commitments to implement existing

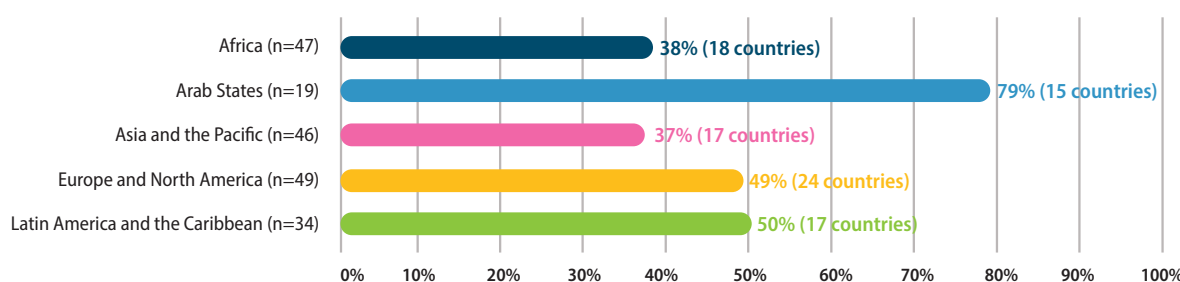
policies or programmes.²¹ Conversely, statements that solely described the country's challenges, past actions or achievements or those that recognized the importance or the need for action without explicit commitment or intention to act were not considered commitments.

In September 2023, on the margins of the SDG Summit, the Dashboard of Country Commitments was launched and, at the same time, UNESCO and the HLSC invited all Member States to respond to the Survey on Country Actions to Transform Education. The survey aimed to track transformative actions undertaken by countries against their own national commitments and the Calls to Action launched during the TES. The survey was thus open to all countries, including those that did not prepare a national statement of commitment.

A total of 91 countries (46.7% of 195 countries) responded to the survey. Of these, 73 countries, which represents 51% of the 143 countries that made commitments, submitted both national statements of commitment and survey responses (see country responses in **Annex 2**). **Figure 1.1** shows the response rates and number of country responses by region.

Figure 1.1 Survey on country actions to transform education

Response rate and number of country responses per region



Data Source: Survey on Country Actions to Transform Education, 2023.

1.2 The purpose of the survey

The purpose of the survey was two-fold. First, it aimed to monitor countries' actions undertaken against their own commitments made in the context of the TES as well as the Calls to Action launched at the TES. Second, the survey aimed to document transformative actions, with a view to facilitating cross-country learning and exchange of experiences and good practices. While the Dashboard of Country Commitments and Actions to Transform Education provides an overview of country commitments and actions, the survey report delves into a comprehensive and in-depth analysis of countries' survey responses. At the same time, the processes and products of these TES follow-up activities were

expected to generate policy dialogues and help maintain the momentum created through the TES.

This report presents an in-depth and comprehensive analysis of country responses to the survey. The survey allowed countries to provide written responses and official government documentation on how they are taking transformative actions. While the information collected through the survey is self-reported by governments, its value resides in the provision of documentation that enables monitoring of governments' policy intentions, keeps the momentum created through the TES and facilitates cross-country exchange and learning.

1.3 Methodology

UNESCO developed a survey questionnaire in consultation with the HLSC's working group on the Dashboard and the UNESCO Regional Offices that serve as secretariats for the regional SDG 4 coordination mechanisms. The survey questionnaire consisted of five sections:

1. **Respondent's information**, inviting a government official(s) with an overview of education sector planning and policies as well as familiarity with the SDG 4 Education 2030 agenda and the Transforming Education Summit to collect responses to complete this survey.
2. **Paths to transformation**, asking how the country may have taken forward the strategies and initiatives recommended as the 'Paths to Transformation' in the SDG 4 High-Level Steering Committee's *Guidance Note to Translate National Commitments into Action*.²²
3. **Country actions undertaken by thematic area**, asking for transformative actions undertaken (e.g. policies, funds allocation, programmes, social dialogues, advocacy) that were inspired by the TES in relation to the themes and sub-themes used for the Dashboard (see Annex 1).
4. **Education financing**, asking how the country has increased investments and done so more equitably and more efficiently in education in response to the TES Call to Action: Investing More, More Equitably and More Efficiently.
5. **TES Calls to Action**, asking specific questions about country actions in response to the Calls to Action:
 - Gender equality and girls' and women's empowerment in and through education
 - Quality public digital learning for all
 - Greening education
 - Addressing the learning crisis
 - Education in crisis situations

With the exception of Section 4 (education finance) of the survey, all survey sections contained multiple-choice questions and short answer responses. Section 3 of the survey (country actions undertaken by thematic areas) was the most substantial in length and content. The quantitative data of Section 3, generated through multiple-choice questions (e.g. sub-themes, type of action) are analysed and displayed on the Dashboard of Country Commitments and Actions. The qualitative data, provided as short

texts, were analysed and presented in this report to highlight trends as well as noteworthy practices in relation to the key messages derived from the nine thematic areas:

1. Inclusion, equity and gender equality
2. Teachers
3. Learning contents and methods
4. Governance and data management
5. Digital transformation and learning
6. Early childhood care and education
7. Higher education and research
8. COVID-19 recovery
9. Youth engagement

As noted earlier, these 9 themes and the 37 sub-themes emerged from the TES Thematic Action Tracks work streams and built upon an earlier UNESCO analysis of 133 statements as of October 2022.²³ While rigorously maintaining the lifelong learning perspective, these thematic areas were framed around the transformative aspects emphasized in the TES processes, including those highlighted in the Report of UNESCO's International Commission on the Futures of Education.

Section 4 (education financing) focuses on highlighting country efforts toward more

substantial, equitable and efficient allocation of resources in education, domestically and internationally. All questions were open-ended and asked for descriptions of the measures undertaken in response to the TES Call to Action on education financing. The analysis was complemented with official, internationally comparable data on education expenditure and the Official Development Aid (ODA) provision drawn from the UNESCO Institute for Statistics, the World Bank's World Development Indicators DataBank and the OECD.

The online survey was available in the six official languages of the United Nations (Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian and Spanish) and all Member States of UNESCO and the United Nations were invited to respond from mid-September to end of December 2023. The online survey remained open until end of March 2024 to capture as many country responses as possible. It was explicitly mentioned that only one submission per country was expected and that different ministries, departments and organizations should coordinate among themselves and submit their response via the national government while consulting the government-led local education mechanism.

1.4 Limitations

In the lead up to the TES, countries were asked to prepare National Statements of Commitment to capture key areas of action that emerged from their national consultation process. Initially, countries were requested to prepare these statements to encapsulate key action areas identified during their national consultations in preparation for the TES. Although not anticipated at the time, these statements were later utilized both as a baseline for monitoring and for analysing key thematic areas, despite being intended merely as brief declarations of intent rather than exhaustive delineations of priorities. Thus, the national statements do not fully cover all priority areas of countries' education strategies, which could limit the comprehensiveness of the present report's findings.

The survey methodology introduced additional constraints. Participation was voluntary, with countries electing to submit their national statements and respond to the survey.

The survey format, comprising both word-limited responses and multiple-choice questions, restricted the depth and breadth of information that could be reported. Some survey themes lacked detailed sub-themes, which constrained the respondents' ability to provide comprehensive insight into certain areas. Additionally, the survey was self-reported by countries, meaning each country made its own judgments on what constitutes an action against their national commitments. The actual implementation and effectiveness of such actions reported by countries have not been verified.

Consequently, the absence of specific mentions of actions towards a thematic area does not necessarily imply inactivity.

The response rate to the survey also presents limitations. Although 50% of the 143 countries that initially submitted a national statement of commitment responded, this resulted in a 46% overall response rate when considering the total number of invited countries (91 responses out of 194 countries invited). Also, the survey response is not fully representative of the global educational landscape. The geographical distribution of the responses varied significantly, with response rates of 38% from Africa, 79% from Arab States, 37% from Asia and the Pacific, 46% from Europe and North America, and 47% from Latin America and the Caribbean. Such discrepancies suggest potential over- or underrepresentation for certain thematic areas and response biases based on regional priorities. Additionally, caution should be taken

when extrapolating findings to all countries within each income category. Regarding income level, the survey was derived from responses collected across 28 high-income, 26 upper middle-income, 25 lower middle-income and 10 low-income countries. These respondents constitute 46%, 49%, 46% and 38% of the total number of countries in their respective income brackets.

Although attempts were made to achieve broad representation across both region and income categories, the size and makeup of the sample might not adequately reflect the full range of practices and experiences within each group. One should therefore be cautious when applying these findings to all countries in each category. While the surveys provide valuable insights into the strategies employed by countries, the survey's structure necessitates nuance and constraints when analysing the responses and making any generalization.

1.5 Structure of the report

This report roughly follows the structure of the survey questionnaire. Following this Introduction, Chapter 2 (Paths to transformation) illustrates *how* countries have brought about education transformation with reference to the four interconnected 'paths to transformation' and the indicative strategies suggested in the HLSC's Guidance Note, highlighting good practices at different stages of a policy cycle. Chapter 3 (Country actions to transform education) presents the analysis of transformative actions taking place in countries with respect to the nine thematic areas. The chapter first illustrates to what extent countries have translated their commitments by utilizing the analytical framework used for the Dashboard of Country Commitments and Actions. This chapter then delves into emerging transformations with country examples and good practices. Special focus is placed on

the transformative actions related to the five thematic Calls to Action informed by country responses to Section 5 of the survey.

Chapter 4 (Education financing) is divided into two parts: domestic financing of education and international support for education. In line with the actions called for in the TES Call-to-Action on Educational Investment, this chapter provides a broad analysis of countries' efforts to (i) invest more in education, (ii) invest more equitably, (iii) invest more efficiently, (iv) track and report on educational investment and (v) adopt innovative financing mechanisms.

Finally, Chapter 5, a short concluding chapter, summarizes the findings and provides policy recommendations for countries to continue their progress towards education transformation.

2. Paths to transformation

2.1 Introduction

This chapter provides an overview of how countries have undertaken the process of education transformation. It explores the intricate interconnections among the four key “paths to transformation” outlined by the High-Level Steering Committee (HLSC) and elucidates the indicative strategies and initiatives put forth in the HLSC’s Guidance Note.²⁴ Through detailed analysis of the survey submissions, this chapter showcases exemplary practices observed at various stages of the policy cycle.

The survey explored how countries have navigated the four interconnected paths to transformation: “Creating wider and deeper ownership of the commitment,” “From commitment to policy and plan,” “From policy and plan to action,” and “Accounting for commitments, actions, and results.” As emphasized in the guidance note, the sustained engagement following the Transforming Education Summit entails active involvement from a diverse array of stakeholders, each offering unique perspectives.

These four interconnected paths represent four respective prerequisites to optimize the success of transformation endeavours:



Creating a shared vision among stakeholders is foundational, emphasizing both the necessity and feasibility of the envisioned transformation. Equally vital is *fostering shared ownership*, ensuring that all involved parties feel a sense of responsibility and dedication to the transformative agenda.



Aligning policies and implementation strategies with the insights gleaned from the Summit is crucial. This alignment serves as a cornerstone for effective execution, ensuring that devised plans are not only coherent but also directly informed by the conclusions drawn during the Summit.



Empowering local actors is pivotal for successful policy implementation. These individuals, positioned at the forefront of transformation efforts, play a leading role in translating policies into actionable initiatives. Actively engaging and empowering local actors requires deliberate efforts as does acknowledging their indispensable contribution to the national transformation agenda.

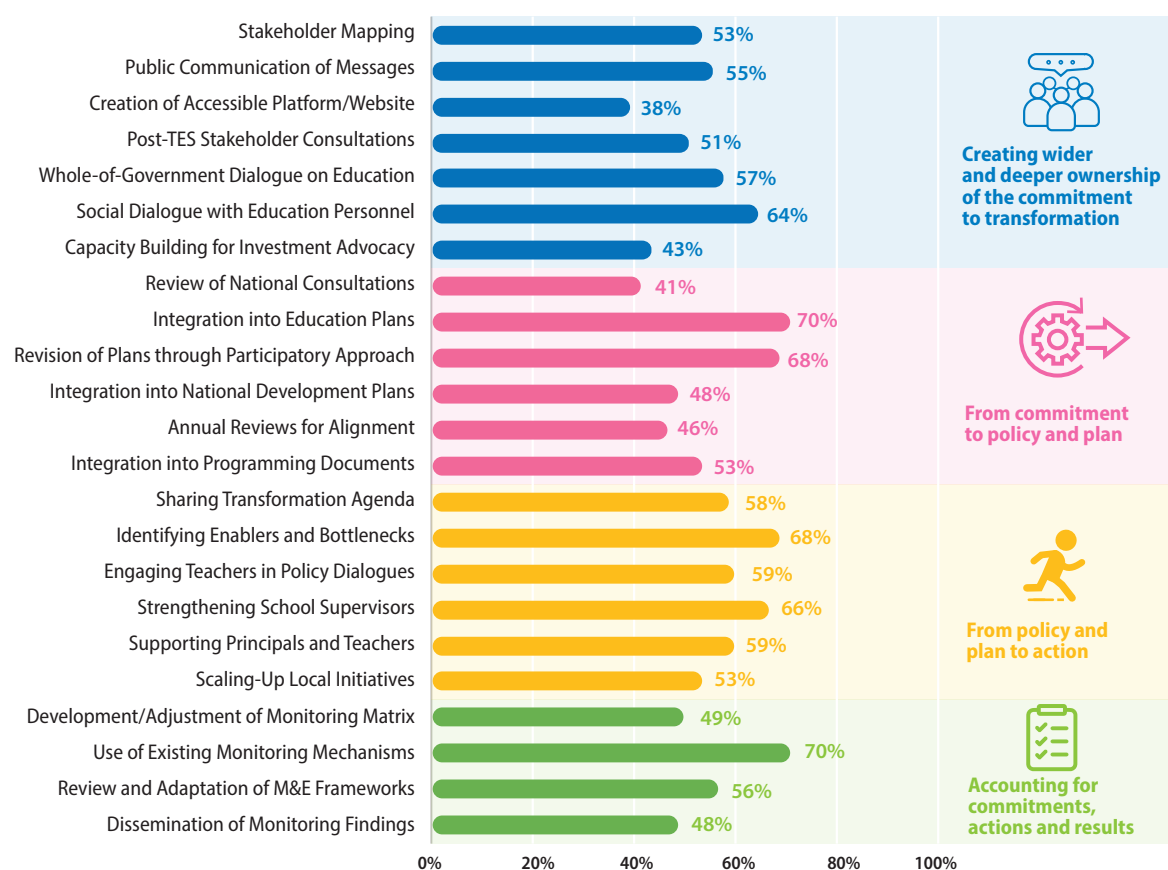


An effective governance structure acts as the backbone of the entire process, *ensuring accountability and commitment across diverse actors*. This structure must systematically hold each participant accountable for their role in the TES follow-up, fostering a culture of accountability and sustained commitment.

Figure 2.1 illustrates the percentage of countries implementing each strategy and initiative, with detailed descriptions provided in Annex 1. While delving into the observed global trends, it is essential to understand that a singular approach does not universally apply; what proves effective in one context may not be optimal elsewhere. The prevalence of various initiatives across surveyed countries is often influenced by resource availability, with simpler, communication-focused actions often taking precedence over more resource-intensive endeavours. At the same time, economic factors do not singularly dictate

the adoption of specific strategies. National policy priorities and contextual factors, including political will, institutional capacity, and socio-cultural conditions, significantly influence decision-making. Similarly, the extent of stakeholder engagement and cross-sectoral collaboration is shaped by existing partnerships and networks within countries, alongside international aid and cooperation frameworks. With these considerations in mind, additional analysis by income level is provided in **Box 1** to afford countries insights into the practices of their peers with similar economic contexts.

Figure 2.1 Percentage of countries implementing each strategy and initiative (n=91)



Data Source: Survey on Country Actions to Transform Education, 2023.

2.2 Creating wider and deeper ownership of the commitment

Most countries rely on conventional communication and consultation methods for stakeholder engagement, while efforts to develop relevant ministry staff's capacity to advocate and argue for increased investment in education were moderate (43%).²⁵ Fostering shared ownership of the transformation agenda entails two crucial dimensions: firstly, raising awareness among ministries and agencies outside of education about the global message and national commitments, emphasizing their indispensable role in educational transformation; and secondly, actively reaching out to national, local and school actors to garner their support for the transformative initiatives. The survey shows that stakeholder engagement initiatives, such as mapping wider stakeholder networks (53%) and organizing social dialogues with educators (64%), are extensive globally. This indicates a widespread recognition of the importance of involving diverse stakeholders in educational transformation efforts. Similarly, communication strategies, such as publicizing commitments (55%) and organizing whole-of-government dialogues on education (57%), reflect an understanding of the need for transparency and public awareness. However, initiatives to create accessible platforms to disseminate successful initiatives, narratives and other resources related to educational transformation remain moderate (38%).

Notably, Saudi Arabia convened the Fifth Arab Regional Meeting for the Education Plan 2030, which led to the formulation of the Riyadh Declaration, and hosted the ninth team meeting tasked with monitoring SDG 4 across Gulf countries. Namibia hosted a National Conference on Education in August 2022 as part of its initiatives under its commitment from the TES. The resulting recommendations from the conference were presented to and approved by the cabinet, which instructed the development of a costed implementation plan spanning eight years. Following consultations and workshops, this plan was finalized and presented to the cabinet for deliberation and mobilization of domestic resources to finance it effectively. Sierra Leone facilitated the Foundational Learning Exchange in 2023, gathering eight African ministers of education

in Freetown to exchange successful approaches to improve learning outcomes and reaffirm their TES commitments. In Nigeria, the Annual Education Conference (NAEC) convenes stakeholders annually to discuss progress, share best practices and address challenges in the education sector. Angola held conferences in May 2023 with partners and civil society to conduct discussions on curriculum transformation, and in collaboration with UNESCO IBE, efforts were made to advance curriculum transformation initiatives. Argentina also actively participates in meetings related to TES follow-ups convened by UNESCO and is preparing a document detailing the background and consultations leading to the national commitment that will be shared with all ministers of education across the 24 jurisdictions. In Belgium, collaboration between the Departments of Education and Environment Policies furthered the Education 2030 Framework for Action (FFA) as well as the implementation of the Berlin Declaration on Education for Sustainable Development (ESD). Costa Rica held a national consultation sponsored by UNESCO, UNICEF, and the Ministry of Public Education, engaging various sectors of society. This consultation included face-to-face workshops and virtual sessions targeting both young people and adults to inform national educational reforms. The Ministry of Education in Zambia opened a policy dialogue assembling teachers and educational personnel who were invited to explore their contributions to educational transformation, resulting in a call-to-action paper shared with the Knowledge Innovation Exchange (KIX). Japan's National Commission for UNESCO convened diverse stakeholders from government, academia, private sector and civil society to deliberate on transformative education practices. These discussions, anchored in the TES message and Japan's commitment statement, were documented and disseminated through public postings on the website of the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology. Lebanon's Ministry of Education and Higher Education launched a comprehensive reform roadmap in June 2022, engaging in roundtable discussions, awareness sessions and capacity-building programmes with support from UNESCO, UNICEF and the EU to transform the education sector by 2025.

2.3 From commitment to policy and plan

Seven out of ten countries reported having incorporated TES commitments into their national education policies or plans through participatory revisions, while five out of ten extended this integration into their international cooperation programmes. Clear and actionable policies, functioning as the blueprint for progress, are imperative in ensuring that aspirations materialize into tangible advancements. Likewise, the strategic plans serve as structured frameworks designed to drive transformation. Leveraging the political will and momentum generated by the Summit provides an opportune context to seamlessly integrate the transformation agenda into existing national policies and plans. This integration extends beyond the education sector, necessitating alignment across socio-economic development and refugee and humanitarian response plans. The objective is not to create a distinct ‘transformation plan’ or a separate programme but to breathe transformative intent into existing instruments.

The survey indicates a strong emphasis on policy integration with considerable shares for actions such as integrating commitments into education plans (70%) and revising plans through participatory approaches (68%). These trends indicate a robust commitment to aligning policy with transformation goals and fostering ownership among stakeholders. The prevalence of these actions suggests that countries recognize the importance of translating commitments into actionable policies. Notably, the National Education Conference (CONAE) 2024 edition in Brazil, held as an extraordinary event by the Presidency, played a crucial role in shaping the National Education Plan 2024-2034 in line with its commitment from the TES, providing an open platform for dialogue among stakeholders, including educators, administrators, students and parents to ensure that educational policies reflect community needs and the objectives of the TES. The Ministry of Civil Affairs of Bosnia and Herzegovina, in partnership with UNESCO, UNICEF, the European Commission, the Council of Europe and OSCE, initiated the development of a 10-year Education Sector Action Plan that translates commitments to transforming education

into concrete actions. Madagascar is revising its National Employment and Vocational Training Policy and reviewing its Education Sector Plan to align with the TES themes – the reviews involve key stakeholders and technical partners, including UNESCO, UNICEF, Agence Française de Développement (AFD) and the EU. Likewise, Côte d’Ivoire, Estonia, Gambia, Jordan, Kenya, Lao PDR, Malawi, Mauritania, Montenegro, Nepal, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Sierra Leone and Tunisia actively integrate TES commitments and strategies into their education sector plans.

Likewise, the integration of commitments into education cooperation programming documents, such as the GPE Partnership Compact, stands at a considerable share of 53%. This figure could be attributed to the survey’s sample composition, primarily consisting of 60% high- and upper middle-income countries, which typically do not develop such documents. It is worth noting that an increasing number of countries in Africa and the Asia-Pacific region are incorporating TES commitments and strategies into the GPE Partnership Compact, including Bangladesh, Benin, Côte d’Ivoire, Gambia, Kenya, Sierra Leone, Timor-Leste, Uzbekistan and Zambia. Notably, Gambia emphasizes the alignment between the TES agenda and the mid-term review of its education sector policy alongside the inception of the new GPE Partnership Compact, noting the TES model’s pivotal role in rural and community-level consultations during policy discussions. China and Oman also stand out as exemplars in integrating TES commitments into their international cooperation frameworks. China has embedded its commitment to transforming education into its cooperation framework with UNESCO, particularly focusing on advancing global education for girls and women and supporting education development in Africa through collaborative projects, including the China-Africa Trust Fund and the Great Wall Scholarship initiative. Similarly, Oman demonstrates proactive engagement with regional UN offices and UNESCO offices in Doha and Beirut to advance discussions on transforming education, with plans to incorporate the outcomes into its forthcoming voluntary report in 2024.

2.4 From policy and plan to action

Countries exhibit considerable endeavours to translate education transformation policies and plans into actionable initiatives, with a notable prevalence in identifying implementation enablers and bottlenecks (68%) although scaling up local initiatives is relatively less emphasized (53%). Commendable as well-defined policies and plans may be, their true impact is realized through effective translation into tangible actions, marking the critical step from intention to implementation. While challenges during implementation are complex and diverse, early research indicates a common obstacle: insufficient alignment among stakeholders regarding policy priorities and strategies coupled with inadequate support for local-level implementers, particularly schools and teachers.²⁶

The survey shows considerable initiatives aimed at stakeholder engagement in implementation, such as sharing transformation agendas (58%) and engaging with stakeholders to address implementation bottlenecks (68%), which highlight efforts to ensure buy-in and collaboration in the implementation stage. These actions facilitate the alignment of policies with on-the-ground realities and needs. Noteworthy initiatives include six countries – Angola, Benin, Côte d'Ivoire, El Salvador, Kenya and Mali – that are conducting enabling factor analysis as part of the GPE grant process reflecting the TES commitments.

Good practices are also demonstrated by Estonia whose commitment to transparency and accountability is demonstrated through its annual progress report, which tracks advancements toward predefined outcomes while pinpointing key bottlenecks and proposing strategies to surmount them. These reports are made publicly accessible via the ministry's website. Similarly, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) reported proactive measures to share the education transformation agenda with administration and school staff, ensuring alignment and understanding of objectives at all levels. By engaging stakeholders in extensive discussions, the UAE gains valuable insights into the major enablers and bottlenecks within its education system. Through this collaborative approach, tailored strategies are developed to address challenges and capitalize on

opportunities. The Bahamas convened conclaves with school leaders and teachers to share priorities, policies and draft strategic plans while gathering feedback. Virtual meetings with parents were also held to discuss education transformation strategies and solicit their input on required support to enhance their contributions to the education sector.

Additionally, capacity-building efforts at the local level, including guiding school supervisors (66%) and supporting principals and teachers in designing innovative strategies (59%), underscore the importance of empowering frontline actors for effective implementation. The prevalence of these actions suggests a recognition of the pivotal role of local stakeholders in driving sustainable change. In the Dominican Republic, informative assemblies held at schools with directors, teachers, students and parents facilitate the dissemination of the transformation agenda and the collection of needs. Multisectoral regional forums, featuring teaching unions, educational NGOs and public bodies, enabled the identification of good practices and the discussion of strategies. Additionally, model schools were selected to showcase innovations through a ministry website and partake in international exchanges. The initiative further incentivized teacher engagement through contests, recognizing initiatives in ICT use and attention to diversity. In Estonia, the emphasis lies on ensuring an adequate number of competent and motivated teachers and school leaders, alongside providing learners with access to a diverse learning environment rooted in a learner-centred approach to education. Meanwhile, in Timor-Leste, ongoing mentorship programmes and training sessions for school leaders are supplemented by various forums for teachers to exchange experiences, including online platforms and teacher working groups. Cyprus is actively engaged in implementing educational reforms, fostering dialogue with stakeholders, such as teacher trade unions, and providing support through in-service training for both teachers and school administrators. On a smaller scale, the Netherlands employs 'teacher-civil servants' working both in schools and within the ministry, enhancing collaboration and understanding between policymakers and educators.

2.5 Accounting for commitments, actions and results

A considerable share of countries use existing monitoring and evaluation (M&E) mechanisms to track progress and outcomes of the commitment implementation (70%), while adapting the M&E frameworks and Education Management Information Systems (EMIS) for the integration of education transformation indicators (56%). Nearly half of the countries are also developing or adjusting their monitoring matrices (49%) and sharing these findings (48%). As countries commit to the transformation agenda, the realization is dawning that accountability is a cornerstone on the path to transformative progress. Accountability takes a dual form – on the global stage through Member States reporting on their progress towards SDG 4 and the follow-up to the TES, and within individual countries where diverse actors are empowered to be accountable for their roles in SDG 4 and TES follow-up. Effective M&E

is essential for evidence-based decision-making and continuous improvement, accounting for educational commitments, actions and results.

Notably, Albania has initiated the creation of an EMIS for pre-university education, Education Management Information in Pre-university System (SMIP), with the Center for Education Services playing a pivotal role in ensuring comprehensive access and administration. Senegal is in the process of developing a monitoring matrix, integrating key indicators into the EMIS to facilitate thorough tracking of actions and progress towards SDG 4 targets. Ethiopia underscores the incorporation of SDG 4 into its EMIS, involving various levels of education offices and receiving support from local and international NGOs to enhance capacity within the system

Box 1 Paths to transformation: analysis by income group

The survey findings presented here are based on a sample of respondents from 28 high-income, 27 upper middle-income, 25 lower middle-income and 10 low-income countries, representing 46%, 51%, 46% and 38% of the respective income groups in terms of the number of countries.²⁷ While efforts were made to ensure representation across income categories, the sample size and composition may not fully capture the diversity of practices and experiences within each income group. Therefore, caution should be exercised when generalizing the results to the entire panel of countries within each income bracket. Additionally, the survey's income-based interpretations may overlook nuances and complexities that require further exploration beyond the scope of this survey. Further data and analysis are needed to verify the results.

Despite these limitations, these findings could offer useful insights into the strategies employed by countries across different income groups, contributing to the understanding of the interplay between resource availability, institutional capacity and government priorities within these groups:

- **High-income countries** typically exhibit higher percentages of utilizing existing monitoring mechanisms and engaging extensively with principals and teachers, leveraging established institutional frameworks for effective resource deployment and communication. At the same time, fewer countries reported activities, such as public communication and capacity building, possibly stemming from the advanced stage of their educational systems, necessitating more targeted interventions rather than broad-scale ones.
- **Middle-income countries**, encompassing both upper- and lower-middle income countries, display a diverse range of activities. While both groups demonstrate a strong emphasis on policy and plan integration with participatory approaches, lower middle-income countries prioritize public communication and M&E enhancement compared to upper middle-income countries, signalling a growing commitment to evidence-based decision-making and seeking public support.
- **Low-income countries** prioritize engaging development partners in planning and programming efforts to establish a robust framework for educational development. They also demonstrate strengths in involving frontline teachers in policy dialogue and scaling up local initiatives, indicating proactive community engagement and reliance on grassroots solutions. Nevertheless, disparities persist in areas such as monitoring mechanism utilization and annual review conduct, suggesting resource limitations and the need for additional institutional backing.

Kyrgyzstan engages in diverse activities, including workshops and mid-term reviews to monitor SDG 4 achievements, with a specific focus on adapting and refining the EMIS. Nepal has successfully conducted its mid-term review of SDG 4 Education 2030 and engaged national experts and stakeholders in the process. The country strives to ensure alignment of commitments during periodic

reviews of education activities within the annual programme and budget. Norway's Ministry of Education and Research actively participates in the national benchmarking process for SDG 4 in close collaboration with the UNESCO Institute for Statistics. Furthermore, Statistics Norway is developing a statistics bank to showcase national indicators across SDG 4 and other goals, in line with the National Action Plan for the 2030 Agenda.

2.6 Closing considerations

Drawing from the observed trends, three fundamental considerations arise regarding the implementation of the TES follow-up strategies and initiatives:

- 1.** Resource availability, both financial and non-financial, may be one of the critical determinants shaping strategy choice. Notably, countries tend to prioritize simpler, communication-focused actions over more resource-intensive endeavours, such as capacity building. This pragmatic approach may reflect the necessity of operating within existing resource constraints.
- 2.** External assistance, whether in the form of financial aid or non-financial support, seems to significantly influence beneficiary countries'

strategy formulation and timeline, especially for low- and lower middle-income countries. Financial resources provided by development partners are often leveraged to execute initiatives outlined in national education plans and/or the TES commitments. Moreover, non-financial support – particularly technical assistance provided by international partners – plays a crucial role in capacity building and the adoption of best practices.

- 3.** High-income countries with substantial resources seem to exhibit lower levels of effort in many recommended strategies and initiatives. Despite possessing the capacity to enact comprehensive transformation actions, these countries may demonstrate less urgency in addressing educational challenges.

3. Country actions to transform education

3.1 Introduction

There is not a singular way to transform education. In this report, ‘transformative actions’ are discussed in a broad and inclusive manner, referring to measures, strategies or policies at various levels aimed at reimagining²⁸ educational systems to transform education. Transformative actions encompass both gradual or small-scale improvements and larger systematic changes that better align with the evolving needs of learners within a new social contract.²⁹ For example, transformative actions could be steps to address the need for quality teachers³⁰ by implementing measures that elevate the teaching profession and improve working conditions. Others could be modernizing the curriculum to be more relevant and responsive to the needs of diverse learners. Transformative actions at the school level could take the form of schools adopting waste reduction and energy conservation practices to improve their environmental³¹ footprint to help shape a more sustainable future. On a broader system level, such actions could be policies or legislations

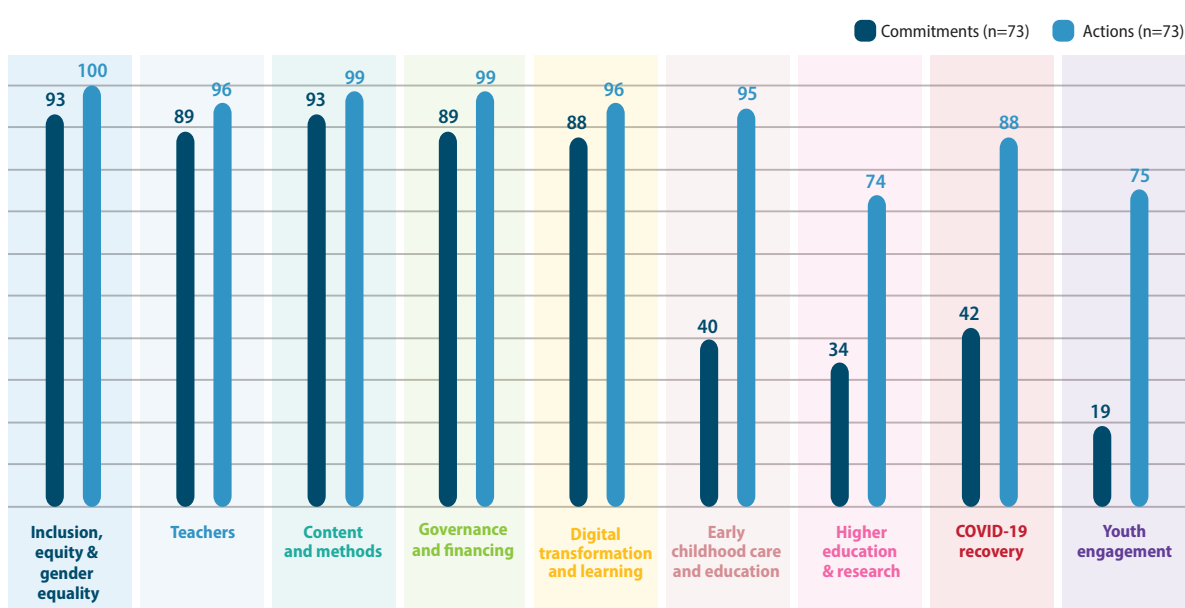
that would ensure the necessary budget allocations for consistent and stable education funding.³²

Countries were asked what transformative actions inspired by the Transforming Education Summit (TES) they have initiated or undertaken towards the commitments made in their national statements of commitment. They were also encouraged to share actions related to thematic areas that were not captured in those statements with reference to the 9 themes and 37 sub-themes (Annex 1).

Figure 3.1 provides a global picture of thematic areas to show which countries out of the 73 that had submitted both national statements of commitment and survey responses actually committed to and reported on transformative actions. Given that the national statements of commitment were meant to be succinct and focused on a small number of priority areas, there are more commitments and actions reported

Figure 3.1 Country commitments and actions

Percentage of countries that have committed to and undertaken action by thematic area



Data Source: Survey on Country Actions to Transform Education, 2023.

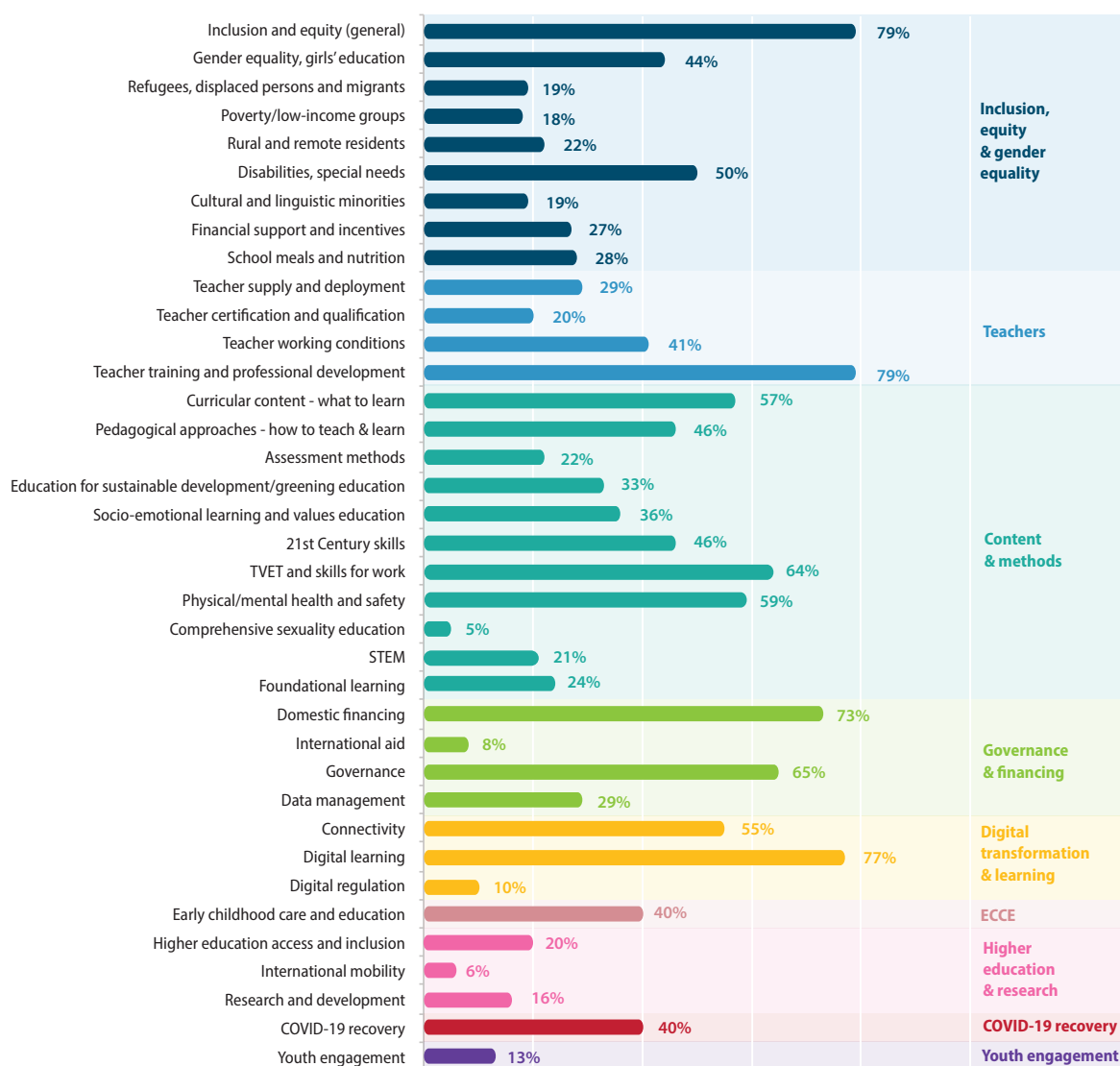
among the five themes listed on the left of the graph that are closely linked to the five Thematic Action Tracks of the TES (inclusive, equitable, safe and healthy schools; learning and skills; teachers; digital learning and transformation; financing of education). Actions under these themes are pursued universally. The other themes were not very visible in the national statements of commitment. However, countries have implemented transformative actions, particularly in early childhood care and education and COVID-recovery efforts. Only 19% of national statements of commitment expressed commitments to youth engagement, which is

surprising given the central place youth occupied in the TES. However, three-quarters of countries have reported taking actions under this theme.

Figure 3.2 and **Figure 3.3** expand this overview by showing the share of 143 countries that made commitments to each of the 37 sub-themes and that of the 91 countries that reported actions, respectively. Inclusion and equity (general) (79%), teacher training and professional development (79%), digital learning (77%), domestic financing of education (73%) and governance (65%) are the top five specific areas to which countries committed to act at the time of the TES.

Figure 3.2 Country commitments

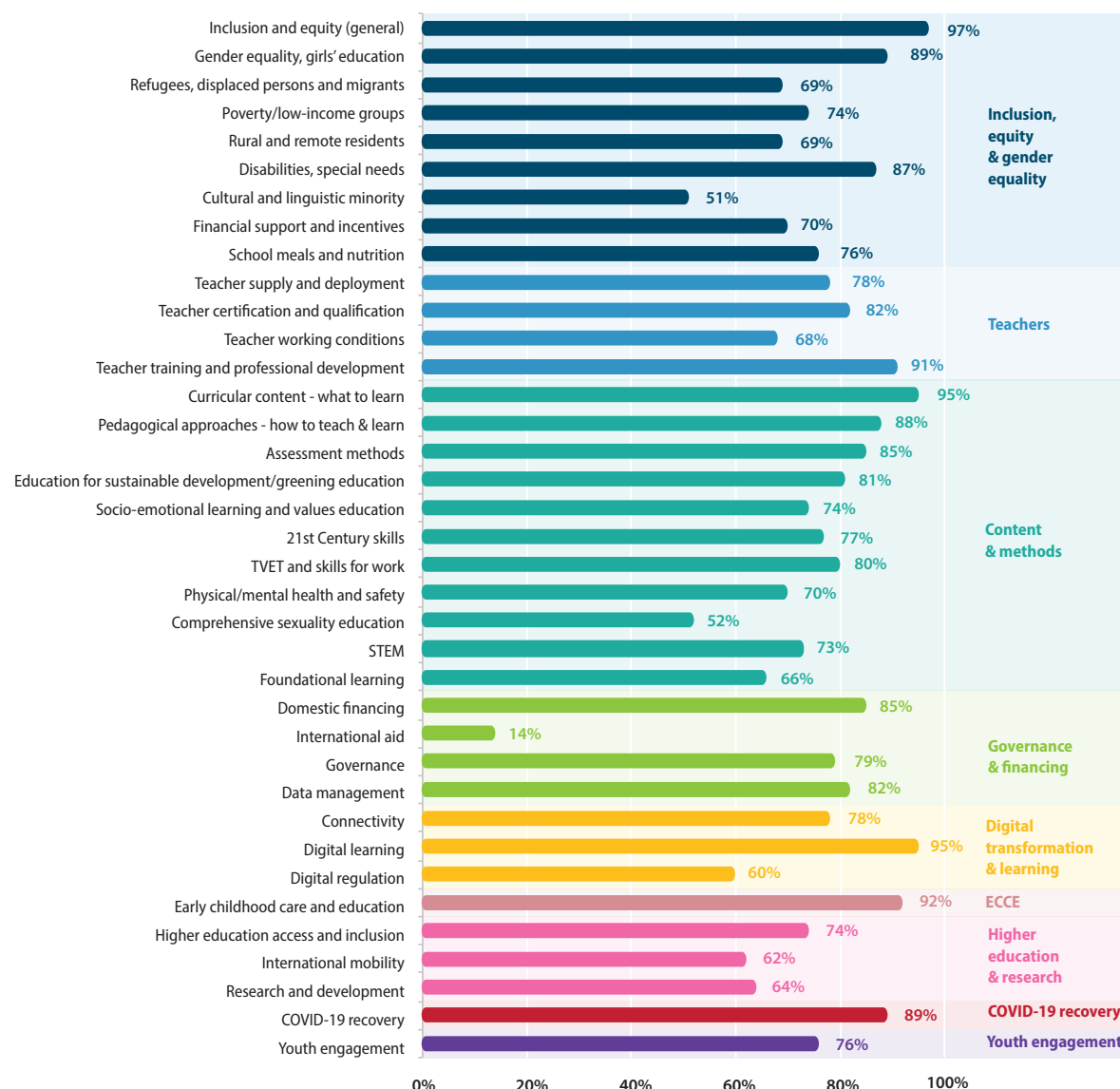
Percentage of countries that have made commitments by sub-theme (n=143)



Data Source: Survey on Country Actions to Transform Education, 2023.

Figure 3.3 Country actions

Percentage of countries that have undertaken actions by sub-theme (n=91)



Data Source: Survey on Country Actions to Transform Education, 2023.

A large majority of countries indeed reported transformative actions undertaken in these areas, ranging from 79% on governance to 97% on inclusion and equity (general) although other areas, such as curricular content (95%), early childhood care and education (92%) and gender equality and girls' education (89%) were almost universally ranked in the top as well (Figure 3.3). The remaining sections of the chapter take a detailed look at the survey responses in relation to the nine thematic areas. Each section starts with (1) an overview of transformative actions reported by all responding countries in relation to the respective sub-themes; and (2) a comparison

between the commitments made and actions undertaken on the sub-themes by the 73 countries that submitted both national statements of commitment and survey responses. Three themes (early childhood care and education, COVID-19 recovery and youth engagement) do not have sub-themes while a separate set of multiple-choice questions were posed under the youth engagement theme in the survey. Each section then illustrates transformative actions emerging from the survey with remarkable country examples and good practices highlighted. Transformative actions related to the five thematic Calls to Action are also spotlighted.

3.2 Inclusion, equity and gender equality

Inclusion, equity and gender equality in and through education are vital to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals. They create an enabling education environment from which all individuals can benefit and in which they can thrive and contribute to sustainable development.³³

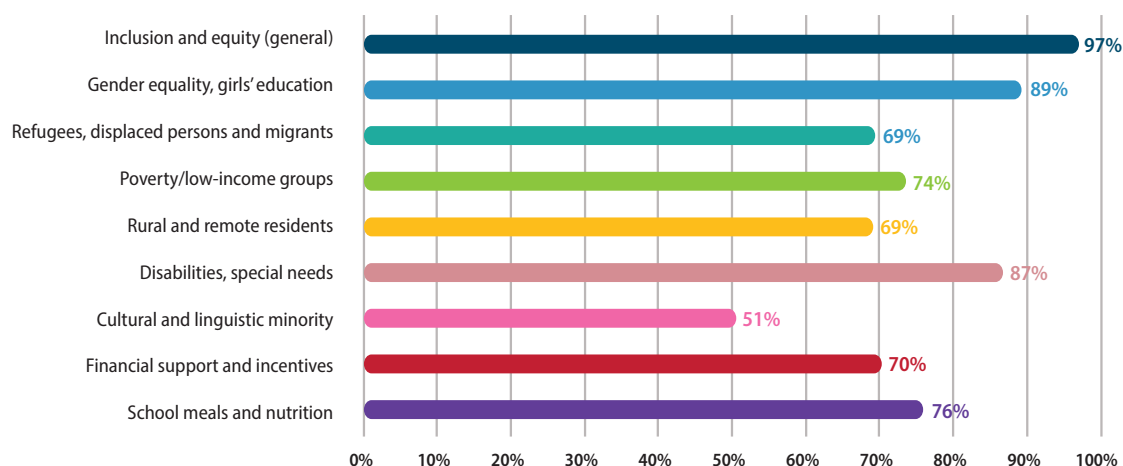
The Education 2030 Incheon Declaration and Framework for Action commits to these principles by promoting 12 years of free, publicly funded, equitable, quality primary and secondary education, with a minimum mandatory duration of nine years. It also advocates for at least one year of free and compulsory quality pre-primary education. The Incheon Declaration recognizes inclusion and equity in and through education as the ‘cornerstone of a transformative education agenda’ and as such, commits to addressing “all forms of exclusion and marginalization, disparities and inequalities in access, participation and learning outcomes.”³⁴ This declaration is a testament to the international consensus on the need for education systems to be inclusive and equitable to ensure no one is left behind.

Inclusion represents a transformative journey for both the educational system and society as a whole.³⁵ It ensures that all learners, regardless of their circumstances and individual characteristics

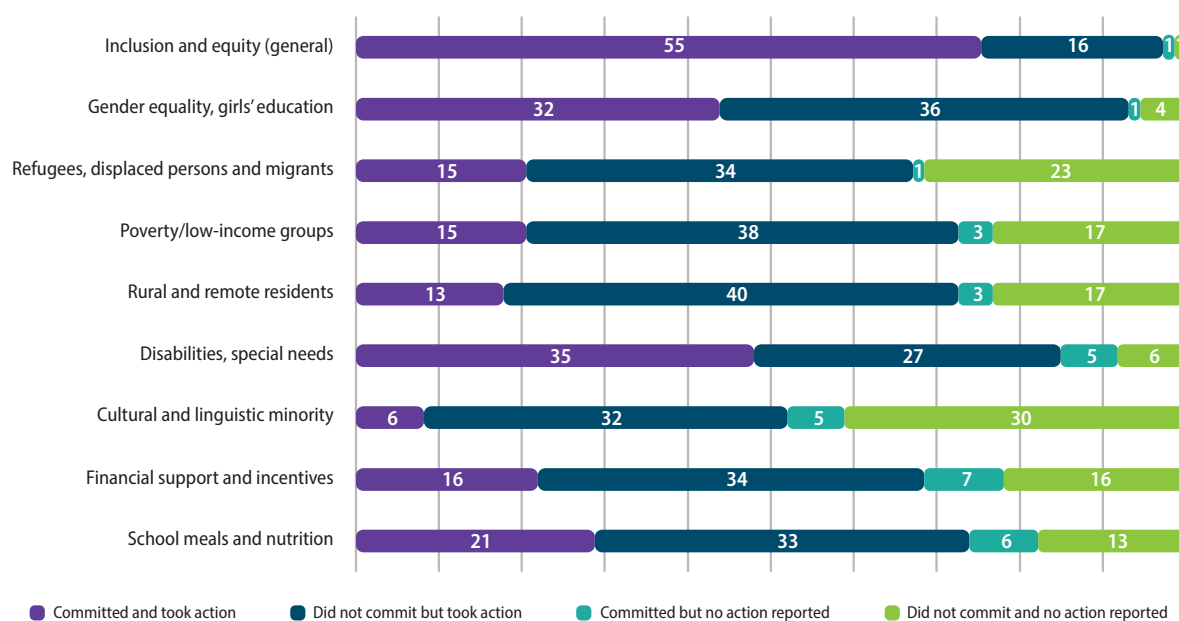
and abilities, have unrestricted access to and participation in quality education. To achieve this, the education system itself must undergo transformation to value and respond to diversity and to eliminate all forms of discrimination.

Despite the significant progress countries have made globally in the past decade, challenges persist. Learners with disabilities, for example, are often segregated within the education system.³⁶ Furthermore, there are still 250 million children out of school.³⁷ Educational disparities are influenced by various intersectional factors, such as poverty and geographic location. This is especially evident in sub-Saharan Africa and regions affected by the crises, where completion rates for poor rural girls remain low.³⁸ In other settings, boys are more likely to repeat grades, fail to learn while in school and disengage from education.³⁹ The COVID-19 pandemic has worsened the problem of exclusion and made it more apparent, especially for marginalized and disadvantaged groups. Moreover, refugee children and young people were found to face acute educational exclusion. In 2020, only half of them (52%) were enrolled in school, with just 31% reaching secondary education and a mere 5% advancing to tertiary education.⁴⁰

Figure 3.4 Percentage of countries that have undertaken transformative actions related to sub-themes under inclusion, equity and gender equality (n=91 countries)



Data Source: Survey on Country Actions to Transform Education, 2023.

Figure 3.5 Comparison of country commitments and actions per sub-theme under inclusion, equity and gender equality (n=73 countries)

Data Source: Survey on Country Actions to Transform Education, 2023.

Additionally, during the pandemic, some 40% of the poorest countries were unable to assist at-risk learners, highlighting the fragile situation of access to education during periods of crisis.⁴¹

Addressing these challenges requires the transformation of education systems to promote equity and inclusivity, prioritizing the needs of every learner.⁴² It entails implementing progressive legislation and transforming the role of educational systems to create an environment that not only values diversity but also actively challenges prejudices and ensures equal opportunities for all. The 2022 TES's Thematic Action Tracks emphasized the importance of these principles. They are core components of most international commitments that are needed to combat persistent inequalities in resource distribution and access to opportunity.⁴³

Figure 3.4 shows that 97% of countries have reported actions toward inclusion and equity in general terms, which highlights countries' commitments to provide special attention to the most vulnerable groups. As **Figure 3.5** shows, of the 73 countries that submitted both a national statement of commitment and a survey, 49% (36 countries) did not specifically commit to act on gender equality and/or girls' and women's

education, while they still took concrete actions. This highlights that even if countries do not make a specific commitment in their national statements to a sub-theme, actions are still being undertaken.

3.2.1 Eliminate gender-based stereotypes and discrimination to promote gender equality and inclusivity in education systems

To build a more inclusive and just world, it is crucial to prioritize an education system that is inclusive and promotes equality for individuals of all genders. The Education 2030 Framework for Action highlights the importance of governments implementing policies, plans and learning environments that are gender sensitive.⁴⁴ Furthermore, the TES emphasized that education systems must make more explicit and active commitments to breaking down gender-based barriers, stigma and discrimination that hold learners back from fully accessing their right to education and future life, work and leadership opportunities. Several countries (e.g. Albania, Belgium, Brazil, Germany, Estonia, Latvia) have introduced initiatives to raise awareness among educators about the negative effects of gender stereotypes on child development and to eliminate these stereotypes in education at all levels.

Box 2 Call to action: advancing gender equality and girls' and women's empowerment in and through education

Building on extensive consultations carried out through the Transforming Education Summit process as well as relevant pre-existing frameworks and commitments, the Call to Action: Advancing Gender Equality and Girls' and Women's Empowerment in and through Education⁴⁵ lays out the ambition for governments, development partners, United Nations and multilateral organizations, civil society and youth organizations, and academia to put gender equality at the heart of education systems. Targeting persistent gender-based barriers and bottlenecks that prevent learners from fulfilling their potential, the Call to Action sets out key areas for action, including 1) gender-transformative education plans, budget, policies and data systems; 2) gender parity and non-discrimination at all education levels and in all subjects; 3) gender-transformative curricula, teaching and learning materials, and pedagogies; 4) gender-transformative and inclusive learning spaces; 5) cross-sectoral collaboration and meaningful integration of young people in decision-making; and 6) investments that target the most marginalized learners.

Global TES Initiative: Global Platform for Gender Equality and Girls' and Women's Empowerment in and through Education

Along with the Call to Action, UNESCO and UNICEF launched the Global Platform for Gender Equality and Girls' and Women's Empowerment in and through Education⁴⁶ – a multistakeholder initiative that aims to drive transformative leadership, accountability, innovation, data and financing to advance gender equality in and through education. The Global Platform leverages the cross-sectoral and intergenerational spirit of the Transforming Education Summit, bringing together government representatives, education leaders and champions, and a broad array of stakeholders and activists. The first major output of the Global Platform is the Global Accountability Dashboard⁴⁷, which monitors the progress of 193 countries using key indicators drawn from the Call to Action, deepening and complementing the Dashboard of Country Commitments. Launched in November 2023, it builds on collaborative advocacy and crowdsourcing efforts undertaken at key global education and gender-equality moments since September 2022 (LDC5 conference, Women Deliver 2023, Triennial International Conference of the Forum for African Women Educationalists, International Day of the Girl, International Women's Day, Commission on the Status of Women 2024, etc.). The Global Accountability Dashboard also has the capacity to generate mappings and analyses of national commitments.⁴⁸

Key messages and good practices

Governments across the world are working hand-in-hand with education champions and activists to put gender equality at the heart of education systems.

1. Countries are establishing gender-transformative education sector plans, budgets, policies and data systems. Cyprus and the Republic of Korea are implementing new gender equality plans, starting in 2023,

that adopt a cross-sectoral and comprehensive approach to overcoming systemic gender biases and discrimination in educational settings at all levels, with strengthened efforts directed towards creating more robust budgets, policies and data.

2. Countries are embedding the promotion of gender equality in curricula, teaching and learning materials, and pedagogies. Bangladesh, the Dominican Republic and Malawi have taken decisive steps to update curricula, textbooks and teacher guides to reflect equality combined with training on gender-responsive pedagogies. Ecuador, Hungary and Latvia have introduced specific actions to bolster girls' and women's participation in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) education. Argentina, France and Nicaragua have strengthened the provision of comprehensive sexuality education that promotes healthy relationships and lives.

3. Countries are adopting a range of measures to foster gender-transformative, safe and inclusive learning spaces. Preventing school-related gender-based violence is a priority for many countries. Sierra Leone has adopted a ground-breaking policy on comprehensive school safety. Colombia has launched an intersectoral National School Co-existence Plan. Bahrain and Malaysia have taken measures to ensure the provision of safe educational facilities. Belgium has introduced dedicated programmes to combat bullying while Kenya is promoting positive discipline in an effort to eradicate corporal punishment.

4. Countries are investing in the most marginalized learners. Investments are targetting the most marginalized learners. Uzbekistan's gender-responsive budgeting has led to targeted spending in underserved regions as well as increased resources for pre-school children and learners with disabilities. Timor-Leste is revising its funding mechanism to protect small schools in geographically-isolated areas.

The way forward

With the Global Accountability Dashboard now operational, efforts over the coming years will be three-pronged. First, governments will be supported in articulating the Call to Action into transformative legislation, policies, plans and programmes – in particular by equipping leaders and decision-makers to take proactive measures and strengthening gender focal points networks within education ministries. Second, Global Platform members will seek to improve and expand the evidence available on the Global Accountability Dashboard, including by leveraging partnerships to fill data gaps on indicators linked to cross-sectoral coordination, curriculum and learning resources, and gender-responsive teacher training. Third, learning will be spotlighted and shared through strategic and targeted advocacy, providing stakeholders with information and resources to hold education actors to account.

For example, as part of its Women's Rights Plan 2020-2024, the Government of the Wallonia-Brussels Federation in Belgium has emphasized the importance of ongoing training for educators. This includes the *Filles-Garçons: une même école* (Girls - Boys: the same school) training module designed to develop critical thinking among teachers and students regarding gender relations and stereotypes. Such modules target educators at all levels, aiming to foster a more egalitarian teaching environment. This demonstrates the comprehensive approach needed to overcome these obstacles.

Proactive measures are essential to combat gender-biased attitudes and behaviours in educational settings, ensuring instead that they promote gender equity and inclusivity.⁴⁹ Argentina has been updating its education policies in compliance with national law (laws 26,150 and 26,206). These laws entail implementing comprehensive and universal educational actions towards human rights and gender equality. They also guarantee students to receive Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE) in all educational institutions whether public or private, across all levels and modalities. CSE covers bodily autonomy, emotional intelligence, gender perspectives, diversity, respect and sexual rights, and is tailored to be age appropriate.

Several countries (e.g. Brazil, Côte d'Ivoire, El Salvador, Germany, Senegal, Zambia) are going beyond awareness raising. They have implemented strategic initiatives aimed at addressing gender inequalities and promoting an inclusive educational environment where all learners have equitable access to quality education and the opportunity to build their skills and confidence. For instance, the *Mil Mujeres* (Thousand Women) programme in Brazil is designed to promote gender equality in education and employment by directly targeting women in socio-economically vulnerable situations. It represents a significant commitment from the Brazilian Government to not only raise awareness of the existing gender inequalities but to actively engage in rectifying them through education and professional qualification. El Salvador's educational reform 'My New School' also highlights significant efforts towards promoting gender equality. The reform includes a budget

allocation for the Institutional Women's Unit, aimed at promoting, advising, monitoring and coordinating the implementation of the principles of equality, equity and non-discrimination. This Unit ensures compliance with human rights regulations for women throughout their life cycle across policies, plans, programmes, projects and actions within the Ministry of Education (MINEDUCYT). Additionally, several countries (e.g. Colombia, Côte d'Ivoire, Nicaragua) have implemented targeted initiatives to create inclusive learning environments and tackle challenges, such as teenage parents dropping out of school, school pregnancies and gender-based violence.

3.2.2 Implement systemic changes to include individuals with disabilities and special needs in education

Education should be specifically designed to uplift individuals who, for various reasons, need additional support and adaptive teaching methods to fully engage and achieve the learning goals within an educational programme.⁵⁰ The Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities highlights the importance of inclusion as a comprehensive and transformative process. Inclusion goes beyond merely enrolling students with disabilities in mainstream classrooms. It requires the implementation of essential modifications across various facets of education, including how learning environments are structured, curriculum, teaching methods and educational strategies that benefit all learners. Moreover, inclusion goes beyond simply integrating students with disabilities into regular classrooms. It involves comprehensively adapting educational environments and processes so that learners, regardless of their diverse characteristics, needs and abilities, can achieve their full potentials.⁵¹

Several countries (e.g. Albania, Andorra, Bangladesh, Colombia, Cuba, Estonia, France, Germany, Indonesia, Jordan, Malawi, Oman, Saudi Arabia) have implemented policies and laws to improve the conditions and quality of education for students with disabilities. Albania, following its revised Education Law of 2022, has prioritized inclusion and equity, particularly for children with disabilities, by transforming special schools into resource centres and enhancing support for assistant teachers.

The provision of free textbooks for vulnerable groups, such as children with disabilities, strengthens this transformation, which is a part of the National Education Strategy. In parallel, a working group was established to develop resource centre models and amend relevant laws.

Special schools and units play a crucial role in supporting regular schools to enhance inclusion. Once mainstream schools embrace full inclusivity, the demand for separate special services will decrease. Several countries (e.g. Bahrain, China, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Germany, Kyrgyzstan, Republic of Korea, Saudi Arabia) have reported on the availability of resource centres or specialized school programmes to support children with disabilities. For instance, in Saudi Arabia, the Comprehensive Learning Initiative for Public Education for Children with Disabilities redesigns general education curricula to better accommodate the special needs of children with disabilities, integrating them more fully into the educational system. This initiative includes the creation of specialized resources, such as the Al-Fawzan Center for Autism as well as the installation of early intervention kindergartens to provide individualized educational and support services from a young age. Bahrain has implemented special education programmes in 175 mainstream schools. Part of this initiative involves conducting awareness programmes for teachers, administrative staff and the entire student body, ensuring that schools are equipped to meet the diverse needs of students with disabilities to learn in regular schools. To ensure the right of learners with disabilities to education, the Republic of Korea enforces compulsory education from kindergarten through high school and provides extensive support services free of charge for infants under 3 years of age with disabilities and those pursuing vocational courses. The 6th Five-Year Plan for Special Education Development (2023-2027) of the Republic of Korea exemplifies a tailored approach to special education, adapting educational strategies based on the types and severity of disabilities. This plan aims to improve inclusive education, vocational training and lifelong learning opportunities, thus providing better educational support for these students. These initiatives lend support to regular schools to enhance inclusion, with the expectation that

the need for separate special services will decrease as mainstream schools become well-resourced and more inclusive.

3.2.3 Combat poverty by investing in education and promoting inclusive learning programmes

Poverty continues to be a major barrier to ensuring educational opportunities for all. This factor of exclusion and marginalization compounds inequalities based on genders, disabilities, ethnicity, languages, places of residence, or countries' stability and conflicts.⁵² Moreover, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on learners and learning among the poor has been disproportionately significant, with learning loss exacerbating the existing learning crisis. Nevertheless, education is the key to the fight against poverty as it equips each individual with the skills and knowledge needed to secure decent employment and incomes, upskill and reskill to meet the evolving labour market thus preventing the intergenerational transmission of poverty.

Many countries reported on equity measures that help families overcome financial barriers to education. For example, Lebanon's 2025 education strategy aims to provide equal opportunities for vulnerable children – both Lebanese and refugees – through government-funded tuition for grades K-9 and a Cash for Education programme that assists with non-tuition expenses, benefiting about 90,000 of the most vulnerable students in public schools. This financial support that amounts to 15 to 20 USD per child per month over two consecutive years helps mitigate the economic pressures that often drive families towards short-term solutions, such as child labour or early marriage for girls, which ultimately contributes to a reduction in child labour. The country's Ministry of Education and Higher Education advocates for increased public subsidies to bolster these initiatives. Similarly, the Nigerian Federal Government has implemented a National Policy on Social Investment that includes a conditional cash transfer programme aimed at supporting vulnerable households as well as the Trader Moni initiative, which seeks to empower petty traders to enhance their livelihoods and secure their children's education.

Another important initiative is the Anchor Borrower Program, which targets vulnerable people and communities, including parents, students, farmers, youths, orphans and other vulnerable children, and seeks to provide financial assistance to those in economically vulnerable positions within society. It alleviates the financial burdens that might otherwise compel families to prioritize immediate economic contributions from children, such as work, over their educational opportunities. This targeted financial assistance contributes to the broader goal of educational equity by enabling students to continue

their studies without economic hardship. For its part, the Government of Spain has substantially raised the budget for scholarships and study grants for both non-university students and university students.

3.2.4 Enhance access to education for children and youth affected by crises through inclusive educational systems

The TES spotlighted the provision of quality education and lifelong learning for those affected by emergencies and protracted crises and urged

Box 3 Call to action: education in situations of crisis

Following open and inclusive consultations with UNESCO Member States and the global education in emergencies (EiE) community, the Call to Action: Education in Situations of Crisis was launched at the Transforming Education Summit (TES) as an initiative spearheaded by the five co-conveners (ECW, GPE, UNESCO, UNHCR and UNICEF) to serve as a multi-stakeholder collective response to address the dire education crisis confronting learners in different emergency contexts around the world. Endorsed by close to 40 Member States⁵⁷ and over 170 partners, the *Global Initiative: Partnership for Transformative Actions in Crisis Situations*⁵⁸ has since served as a guiding framework to galvanize concrete actions at national, regional and global levels.

With the main objective of advocating for and implementing the Humanitarian-Development-Peacebuilding (HDP) Triple Nexus, the Global Initiative (GI) consists of four interlinked pillars: 1) improve equitable inclusive education access and learning outcomes for children and youth affected by crises; 2) protect and improve external financing; 3) work in spirit of international cooperation to build crisis-resilient education systems; and 4) scale and mainstream high-impact and evidence-based interventions into policy and programming efforts, with a focus on eight interlinked priorities.⁵⁹

Many countries face challenges specific to their own context. Through operationalizing the GI, the Member States, co-conveners and the global EiE community aim to position education at the heart of lifesaving humanitarian response, while building resilient education systems to ensure progress towards SDG 4.

Global Initiative – Education in Crisis Situations: Partnership for Transformative Actions

Building on the momentum gained at TES, a roadmap to operationalize the GI was elaborated, including key global actions that align with the GI. Four global milestones highlight this partnership in action by advocating for the centrality of education when responding to humanitarian situations and bridging the nexus and the need for longer-term, flexible financing to sustain country efforts: 1) the High-level Financing Conference for Education Cannot Wait in February 2023; 2) the Global Refugee Forum in December 2023; 3) COP28 in December 2023; and 4) Revision of the INEE Minimum Standards during the course of 2023. These milestones provided strategic platforms for both crisis-affected and donor governments to present their plans and concrete actions towards the realization of their commitments, learn lessons from other crisis contexts and further mobilize governments and partners towards taking actions in the GI's key elements, particularly the:

- whole-of-child approaches to achieve gender transformative, inclusive, holistic learning in emergencies and crises;
- cross-sectoral coordination to improve education and humanitarian response planning; and
- sustainable, multi-year financing to education in emergencies and protracted crises.

In parallel, the first group of the 14 target countries⁶⁰ was selected for GI mobilization by the co-conveners and a broader EiE community, based on geographical representation, types of emergencies, demonstrated education leadership, limited financing and dependency on external partners for education response.

Success stories at country level

Colombia has long been a country that integrates migrants primarily from the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, including in the education sector. By amending their legislations and policies, the Government of Colombia provided the necessary resources to fully include migrant learners and support them as well as host community teachers and learners. The Government of Colombia, led by the Ministry of National Education, played a critical role in the launch of the Call to Action and conducted a comprehensive survey of two groups (young people/students and teachers/academics) on the five TES Thematic Action Tracks. The survey resulted in a report of the country's process to implement the commitments made during TES, a work

investment in impactful interventions for these most vulnerable groups. Access to education during and after emergencies and crises continues to challenge the right to education and outcomes of learning for millions. In 2022, a record high of forcibly displaced people, including nearly 32.4 million refugees – half under age 18 years – faced educational disruptions.⁵³ Between 2015 and 2019, over 11,000 attacks were reported on schools, universities, students and personnel, resulting in harm to more than 22,000 individuals in at least 93 countries.⁵⁴ Failure to meet the educational needs

of those affected by emergencies only serves to compound a crisis.

Displaced learners, often traumatized by violence and conflict, have high rates of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), with incidences of PTSD affecting 75% of displaced learners in low- and middle-income countries.⁵⁵ These students experience numerous challenges in new educational settings, including stereotyping, bullying and discrimination, which can further affect their mental health and disrupt learning

plan with key initiatives, and the focal points for priorities and initiatives. The country co-convened the ECW High Level Financing Conference in February 2023 and received an ECW grant for the second phase of the Multi-Year Resilience Programme – not only for the government to provide education for migrant children and adolescents but also to support internally displaced children due to armed conflict.

In **Jordan**, the government fully upheld its TES national statement of commitment, including in the following areas as key pillars of Jordan's education agenda: 1) inclusion and diversity; 2) refugees, and crisis and risk management; and 3) financing. In 2023, partners under UNESCO's lead have been mobilized to move the needle specifically in three areas towards the commitment: 1) system strengthening; 2) inclusion and diversity; and 3) TVET. During the Global Refugee Forum in December 2023, the Minister of Education and Higher Education presented a comprehensive progress report on the TVET reform and the new national policy and action plans on inclusion and diversity. GPE recently approved the country as eligible for the Multiplier Grant funding scheme to enable the country-led partnership to further support Jordan's actions.

Confronted by compounding crises, including recent climate-induced disasters, the Ministry of General Education and Instruction in **South Sudan** played a key role in shaping the Call to Action as a lead champion and continued to prioritize their commitments through mobilizing the Local Education Group to ensure harmonized, coherent approaches to the education sector response. The four commitments of the TES GI are all prioritized under the ECW and the GPE response plans for South Sudan with clear implementation plans by EiE partners. Amidst significant pressure on the education sector, given the outbreak of conflict in Sudan in April 2023, the Ministry and partners joined forces to provide learning opportunities for returnee learners.

Ukraine served as one of the champion states to draft and launch the Call to Action, highlighting its firm commitment to the continuity of learning and teaching in situations of war. Responding to the immediate impact on the education system from displacing millions of children and youth internally and externally, the Ministry of Education and Science immediately deployed an online learning platform and brought together both the Education Cluster and the Education and Science Working Group. The Ministry's lead role resulted in leveraging the first phase of the GPE Multiplier Grant (UNESCO and UNICEF as co-Grant Agents) and ECW Multi-Year Resilience Programme after provision of First Emergency Response funding. Within the framework of a newly launched Education and Science Strategy for 2024-2027, Ukraine continues to focus on the continuity of learning at all levels on the one hand and the transformation of national education system with the power of digital transformation on the other. In the meantime, considering the forced displacement, UNHCR, together with partners, continues to support the inclusion of displaced learners in public schools. An important partnership initiative to highlight includes one of monitoring pathways of learning for Ukrainian refugee learners in neighbouring countries by UNESCO, UNHCR, UNICEF, OECD and the European Commission.

The way forward

In view of multiple and compounding crises affecting so many countries around the world, the global EiE community will continue its joint efforts to advocate for building resilient national education systems, ensuring the centrality of education in humanitarian situations and further leveraging the transformative power of education to protect crisis-affected learners and the education community from harm, addressing their learning, mental health and psychosocial needs. The TES GI partnership will remain instrumental to this journey and will together produce a first monitoring report in 2025 to showcase promising transformative practices and propose a way forward to reach the 2030 target.

School-based mental health support, such as creative arts therapies and cognitive behavioural therapy, have shown potential in addressing these issues, though effective implementation requires specialized training that most teachers lack.⁶¹

The *Guidelines on Mental Health and Psychosocial Support in Emergency Settings* recommend that teachers can support these students by creating a safe environment and connecting with specialized mental health professionals while ongoing professional development is essential for them to manage trauma effectively without overstepping their professional boundaries.⁶²

Efforts to include refugees and vulnerable migrant children in national education systems are increasing through initiatives, such as the Global Compact on Refugees and Migration. This framework aims to enhance international response and support for large movements of refugees and help resolve challenges in refugee situations. Several countries (e.g. Andorra, Brazil,

Costa Rica, Estonia, Ethiopia, Germany, Japan, Jordan, Latvia, Lebanon, Libya, Netherlands, Montenegro, Oman, Republic of Korea, Spain) reported on their approaches to integrating these groups into their education systems, demonstrating a global commitment to ensuring educational access for all, despite emergencies and crises. Costa Rica allows refugees and migrants to access different national public educational services while Estonia has integrated nearly 80,000 Ukraine refugees into its education system by providing substantial financial, material and mental health support. Jordan has made significant efforts to accommodate Syrian refugees in its educational system, ensuring their unconditional enrolment in public and private schools, allowing identification flexibility and providing access to schools near their residences. Libya ensures equal educational rights for refugees, aligning with the Sustainable Development Goals. Andorra has enacted laws for refugee reception and created special classes for immigrant students.

3.3 Teachers

Teachers play a crucial role in upholding the right to education and significantly impact students' learning and well-being. As such, the achievement of SDG 4 and the transformation of education rely on the dedicated efforts of teachers who need to be well-trained, professionalized, empowered, highly motivated and well supported.⁶³ These aspects should be prioritized in all educational settings, including those impacted by crises and refugee situations, and at all levels of education, from early childhood to TVET, adult learning and higher education.⁶⁴ Nevertheless, despite a global increase in the number of teachers over the past decades, there is still a significant shortage. The projected global teacher shortage is expected to reach 44 million by 2030, a reduction from 69 million in 2016, with one-third of this demand concentrated in sub-Saharan Africa. This shortage highlights the critical need for strategic interventions in teacher recruitment, equitable deployment and professionalization.⁶⁵ Moreover, the COVID-19 pandemic, along with the hectic transition to digital learning and compounding of existing inequalities,

has escalated the need to transform teaching methods and provide enhanced support to education professionals.

The TES reiterated the crucial role of teachers as drivers of educational reform.⁶⁶ However, the input of teachers is rarely requested and they are not involved in decision-making and policy development processes. In addition to low remuneration and poor working conditions, the lack of trust in and recognition of teachers as education professionals may be a contributing factor that deters students from pursuing a career in the teaching profession when they enter tertiary education. To rectify this, governance structures within education must prioritize enhancing the agency, autonomy, motivation, leadership and decision-making power of teachers.⁶⁷

In response to these challenges, the UN Secretary-General convened a High-Level Panel (HLP) on the Teaching Profession in 2023. The HLP's recommendations focus on enhancing teacher

autonomy, increasing investment in teacher training, and fostering inclusivity and equity in education. These strategic measures aim to tackle the persistent global teacher shortage and elevate educational quality, ensuring that educators are well-prepared and supported to meet diverse student needs amidst evolving educational demands. By reinforcing teacher autonomy and providing substantial professional support, these initiatives aspire to make the teaching profession more appealing and sustainable.

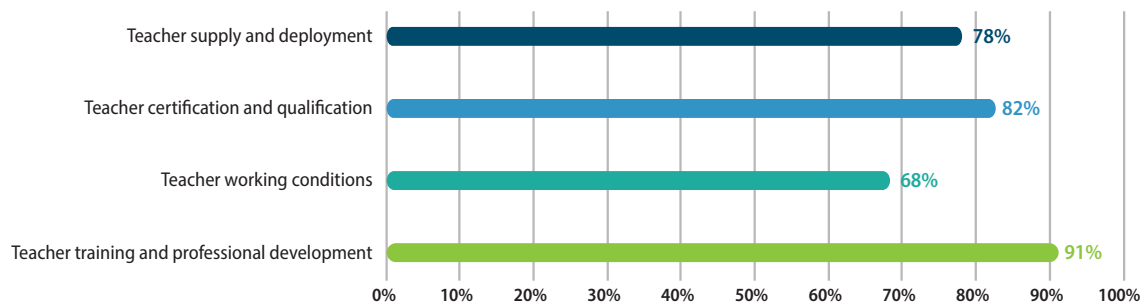
Figure 3.6 shows that 91% of countries have taken actions towards teacher training and professional development. The graph displays countries' commitments to design and enhance quality and inclusive pedagogical training and professional development programmes that are aligned with educational priorities, teacher standards and career development policies. Further highlighting countries' commitments to this sub-theme, **Figure 3.7** shows that 58 countries (or 79% of those that submitted

both a national commitment and a survey response) committed to teacher training and professional development and took action to achieve this goal.

3.3.1 Address teacher shortages through empowerment, enhanced training and collaboration

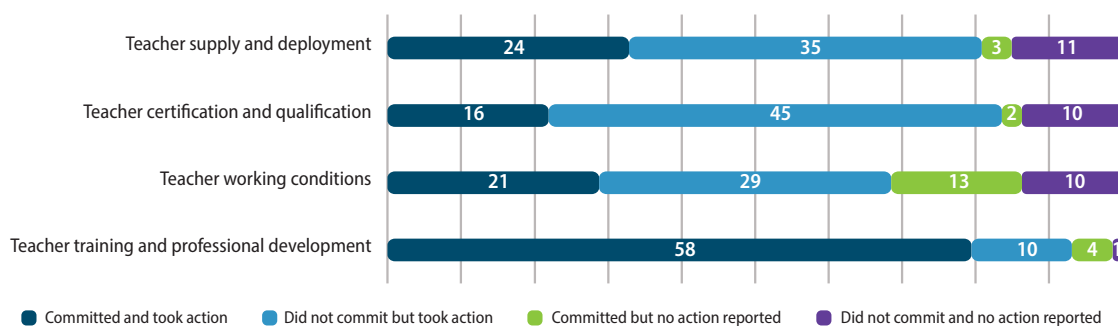
Teacher shortages still stand as a major challenge across education subjects or geographic areas. Both developed and developing countries are facing this challenge. The chronic shortages of teachers stem from a multifaceted interplay of factors, including limited attractiveness of the teaching profession, ineffective recruitment strategies, poor retention rates and insufficient training.⁶⁸ Addressing the pressing issue of teacher shortages requires a systemic and holistic approach that includes empowering teachers through professional development and the provision of greater autonomy.

Figure 3.6 Percentage of countries that have undertaken transformative actions related to sub-themes under teachers (n=91 countries)



Data Source: Survey on Country Actions to Transform Education, 2023.

Figure 3.7 Comparison of country commitments and actions per sub-theme under teachers (n=73 countries)



Data Source: Survey on Country Actions to Transform Education, 2023.

In addition, the *Global Report on Teachers*⁶⁹ highlights the importance of social dialogue and teacher collaboration in reshaping the teaching profession, with teachers being placed at the forefront of a new social contract for education.⁷⁰ In response to this challenge, a number of countries (e.g. Estonia, Germany, Iceland, Indonesia, Netherlands, Kyrgyzstan, Mauritius, Switzerland) reported that they are making significant efforts to tackle teacher shortages through professional training programmes, legislative reforms to facilitate teacher training, recruitment drives, and collaboration between governments and educational institutions.

To address the critical teacher shortage and enhance educational quality, Mauritius has taken action to solve its serious shortages by creating additional primary school teacher posts in all subject areas and actively recruiting 600 trainee primary school educators, with an expected result of an increase of 16.4% in the primary teaching workforce. The Netherlands has responded to teacher shortages by establishing the Education Agreement and investing 160 million euros through the National Growth Fund to structure the professional development of teachers. This initiative is complemented by a significant increase in teacher training capacities and a comprehensive campaign to recruit and retain educators, featuring mentoring and support programmes. The Dutch National Education Desk aids in recruitment by providing detailed career information and personalized advice to potential educators from diverse backgrounds. Schools can also apply for subsidies to facilitate the integration and certification of immigrant teachers, further broadening the potential workforce. Switzerland is addressing teacher shortages through legislative measures adopted by the Parliament that prioritize targeted data collection and systematic evaluation of educational reforms. These initiatives aim to develop long-term strategies to address teacher shortages by improving recruitment, training and retention based on scientific evidence and thorough analysis.

3.3.2 Establish and maintain a comprehensive system for teacher qualifications and certifications to ensure the provision of high-quality education

The *ILO/UNESCO Recommendation concerning the Status of Teachers* (1966)⁷¹ underscores the importance of the qualifications, abilities and qualities of teachers in promoting effective learning.⁷² The term ‘qualification’ refers to the academic and professional credentials required to access the teaching profession, such as degrees and specialized training. On the other hand, ‘certification’ is one of the key requirements in the hiring process for educators. It serves as a measure of the quality of education provided, including the recognition of teachers’ credentials and the assurance that the processes to access the profession are transparent and equitable and that qualified or certified teachers have met the established standards of competencies.⁷³ Teacher competency frameworks and teaching standards, whether at the national or regional levels, provide a shared understanding of the knowledge and skills that teachers should possess. Some countries (e.g. Germany, Kyrgyzstan, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates) implemented comprehensive evaluation systems to ensure high standards of teaching and learning outcomes. Kyrgyzstan has made major improvements in its certification process by automating it, creating an electronic platform and providing advanced training to a large number of its teaching staff in 2022 and 2023. The UAE has implemented strict certification standards for teachers to ensure that they meet the required academic qualifications and teaching experience set by the Teacher Licensing decree.

The enhancement of teacher professionalism requires better-qualified educators. This involves restructuring teacher education and continuous professional development as well as promoting peer-learning and collaboration among teachers to support their professional growth.⁷⁴ Many countries (e.g. Andorra, Armenia, China, Estonia, Ecuador, El Salvador, France, Germany, Hungary, Indonesia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway, Oman, the United Arab Emirates, Uruguay, Zambia) reported on actions to enhance teacher training and increase professional development opportunities. Facing an acute

demand for highly qualified teachers, German Länder (states) have substantially expanded access to teacher training programmes. This expansion not only increases capacity at universities but also enhances the structure and content of the training to meet modern educational demands. From 2015 to 2023, the *Qualitätsoffensive Lehrerbildung* initiative, backed by up to 500 million euros from the Federal Ministry of Education and Research, aimed to elevate the quality of teacher education. This initiative involved 72 higher education institutions across Germany, which were selected through a competitive process to develop and implement projects that improve the training infrastructure, thereby directly enhancing teacher qualifications and certification standards. Teachers in Andorra must possess ISCED level 6⁷⁵ qualifications for nursery and primary education, while secondary teachers are required to have ISCED level 7 or master's degrees in their respective fields of expertise. China has taken action to address teacher qualifications by establishing a comprehensive qualification system, ensuring standards for education, training and professional development. Additionally, the country has focused on enhancing teacher training programmes, with the aim of providing educators with the skills and knowledge they need to effectively deliver quality education, particularly in primary and secondary school settings.

3.3.3 Overcome recruitment and retention challenges through improved working conditions and remuneration

The TES called for decent working conditions and remuneration to make the teaching profession more attractive and motivate practicing teachers, thus securing the entry of young talent into the profession to tackle the global teacher shortage.⁷⁶ An important vehicle to make teaching more attractive is enhancing the agency and autonomy of teachers, empowering them to make curricular and pedagogical decisions, fostering social dialogue and involving them in educational policy-making processes.⁷⁷ Currently, numerous teachers face challenging working environments, unstable contracts, low salaries, limited recognition and overwhelming workloads.⁷⁸ Enhancing teachers' working conditions, recognizing their contributions

and promoting their participation in social dialogue are essential for the transformation and quality assurance of education.

Many countries (e.g. Andorra, Bangladesh, Cuba, Estonia, Germany, France, Lithuania, Montenegro, Pakistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Netherlands, Tunisia, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Zambia) have implemented initiatives to improve working conditions for teachers, which is essential for attracting and retaining high-quality educators. These initiatives include special laws on teachers' status, social campaigns, salary increases, flexible salary adjustments, additional compensation for extra assignments, and investments in professional development and workload reduction. Bangladesh institutionalised World Teachers' Day, ranked it as the 2nd highest category of national events and conducted nationwide celebrations to recognise and elevate teachers' social status and promote teacher professionalization. Kazakhstan adopted a special law "On the Status of Teachers," which is an unprecedented legislative act aimed at protecting the rights of teachers, defining their main responsibilities and social guarantee. Estonia enhanced the working conditions of teachers by raising their monthly pay from 1,412 euros to 1,749 euros. Additionally, a differentiation fund was established to allow school principals to make flexible salary adjustments. The minimum salaries of kindergarten teachers have been raised and additional salary increases are awarded according to competency in the Estonian language and qualifications. However, the current economic and energy crises caused a delay in implementing these additional salary raises. In France, teacher working conditions have been improved for the upcoming 2023 school year. Teachers of all education levels witnessed a significant raise in their monthly net salary, with an average increase of 158 euros. This raise applies to teachers in primary and secondary education, as well as education and guidance staff. The "teachers' pact" provides an opportunity for teachers to take on additional assignments voluntarily, with a compensation of 1,250 euros gross per year per assignment. A budget of 1.9 billion euros has been set aside for teachers' pay increases starting in September 2023. In addition, an extra 900 million euros has been allocated for the teachers' pact, which aims to enhance career opportunities

for teachers and education staff. The Netherlands has also improved teacher working conditions and professional development through the government's 'Education Agreement,' which outlines several key initiatives aimed at improving the education system. These include efforts to standardize salaries for primary and secondary teachers, allocating 160 million euros towards a national action plan for teacher professionalization and providing an annual budget of 300 million euros to alleviate teacher workload in schools. Furthermore, schools are supported in hiring immigrants as teachers through a special financial arrangement, which includes a 10,000-euro subsidy for education and support. In Pakistan, too, the government has increased teacher salaries to attract and retain qualified teachers, improve their financial status and

motivate them to perform better. Efforts have been made to provide career progression opportunities for teachers, which includes promotion and leadership roles within the education system. In the United Arab Emirates, teacher working conditions are being enhanced through policies that ensure competitive salaries, timely payment and benefits, such as health insurance, alongside substantial sums allocated for school renovation and modern amenities to create comfortable teaching environments. The Ministry of Education in Zambia has implemented policies, including the 2022-2026 Ministerial Strategic Plan, aimed at improving teacher working conditions. These efforts include the development of a comprehensive teacher policy, strategic planning, budget allocation for teacher recruitment and the establishment of social dialogue platforms.

3.4 Learning contents and methods

In the face of a rapidly changing global landscape, the imperative to reimagine and transform education has never been more urgent. Central to this transformation is a holistic approach that reforms pedagogy, curriculum, teaching and learning methods, and continuous, lifelong learning opportunities. The *Reimagining Our Futures Together* report proposes a comprehensive reform that aims to cultivate diverse knowledge forms through interdisciplinary and intercultural perspectives – for example, the importance of mainstreaming environmental sustainability and social and emotional skills into the curriculum.⁷⁹ Such an approach prepares learners for future challenges and shapes resilient, well-rounded individuals. These diverse yet interconnected initiatives are indicative of the global commitment to transforming education. By addressing the curriculum's purpose, content as well as teaching, learning and assessment methods, countries are laying the foundation for a future where learners are equipped with the necessary knowledge, attitudes, values and competencies to thrive in and contribute to a rapidly evolving world.

'Content' refers to the knowledge, skills, attitudes, values and competencies learners are expected to acquire, and 'methods' relate to the approaches and ways teaching and learning is facilitated and content is delivered.⁸⁰ The curricular contents reflect

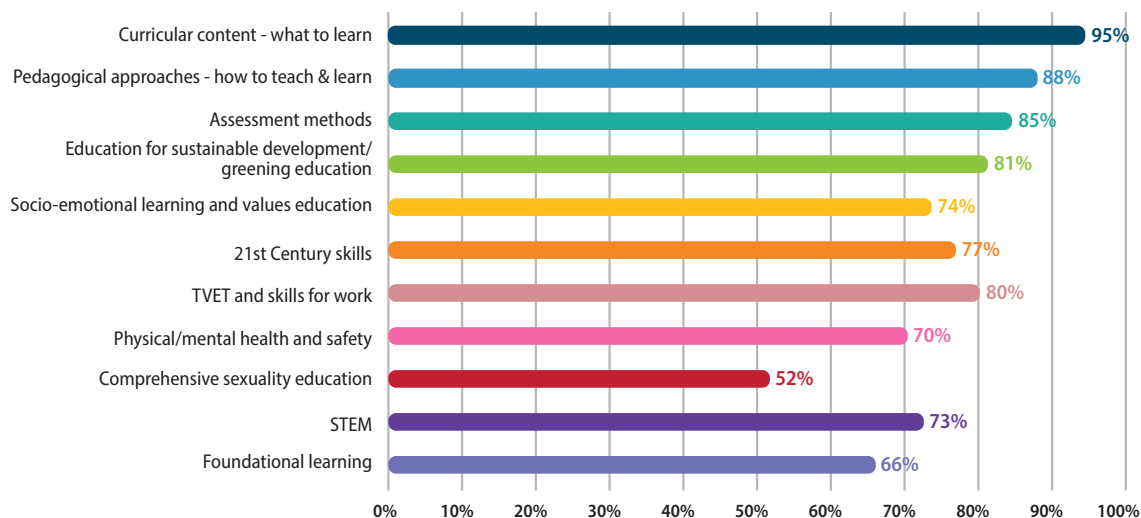
the 'purpose' – *why, what and how* – to educate and learn in light of societal aspirations. To transform education, content must include not only traditional academic knowledge areas and subjects but also forward-looking '21st-century' competencies, such as autonomous, critical thinking, problem solving, creativity, communication and inter-personal skills and digital literacy. Moreover, to create a more inclusive, sustainable and peaceful world, global citizenship as well as local and indigenous knowledge are important aspects to teach learners to value diversity and take responsibility and action to resolve societal, global and even planetary concerns.

Methods should also shift towards more interactive, learner-centred and real-world problem-solving. The Transforming Education Summit (TES) explored such educational contents and methods, including innovative teaching and learning methods; forward-thinking curriculum design and development processes; effective assessment strategies; the integration of environmental education and socio-emotional learning; future competencies development, while remaining mindful to maintain physical and mental well-being; and incorporating science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) within a humanistic approach to meet the evolving demands of the 21st century.⁸¹ To fully realize these changes, it is crucial to embrace

a new perspective on learning and education systems. The TES advocated a reimagined view of education as a holistic, lifelong process. This involves learning to adapt and create, live together and live fulfilling lives. As noted previously, to achieve this reimagined view of education, both the contents and methods of education must be rethought.⁸² Achieving this vision demands a fundamental change in how education is approached. Transformation involves rethinking the purpose of education along

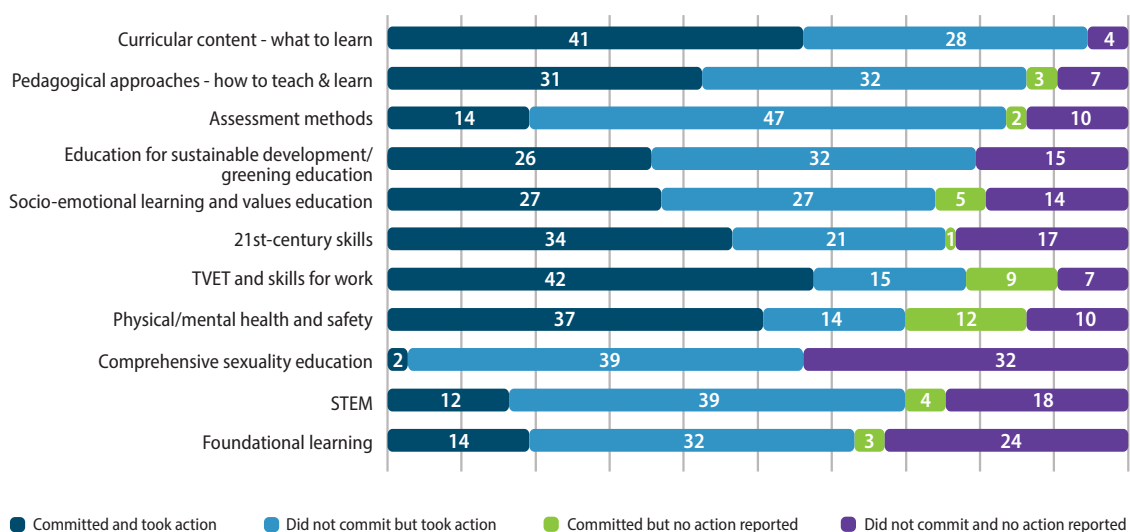
with the curriculum, content design, teaching and learning methods, and assessments to foster critical thinking, creativity and problem-solving skills while bridging the gap between traditional educational methods and future needs. Transforming contents and methods encompasses integrating digital tools to support personalized learning, innovative pedagogical approaches, curriculum redesign and cultivating a learning environment that promotes autonomous, critical and caring thinking, creativity,

Figure 3.8 Percentage of countries that have undertaken transformative actions related to sub-themes under content and methods (n=91 countries)



Data Source: Survey on Country Actions to Transform Education, 2023.

Figure 3.9 Comparison of country commitments and actions per sub-theme under content and methods (n=73 countries)



Data Source: Survey on Country Actions to Transform Education, 2023.

and lifelong learning.⁸³ Indeed, the evolution of ‘learning contents and methods’ to transform and organize education discussed here have broader ramifications that will impact system-building, policies, programmes, practices and financing.

Figure 3.8 shows that 95% of countries have taken actions towards renewing curricular contents, while most countries also modified or adjusted pedagogical approaches and assessment methods (88% and 85%, respectively). As for more specific areas of learning and teaching contents and methods, over eight out of ten countries reported to have undertaken transformative actions in education to support sustainable development/greening education (81%), and TVET and skills for work (80%). Noting that digital literacy and skills are listed under ‘Digital transformation and learning’ (see Section 3.6), this finding may reflect the responsiveness of many education systems to the green and digital transitions of societies and economies. On the other hand, relatively fewer countries have reported on taking actions toward comprehensive sexuality education (52%) and foundational learning (66%), representing the lowest reported areas of action. **Figure 3.9** shows that of the 73 countries that submitted both a national statement of commitment and a survey response, the largest share of countries (42) made a commitment and took actions on TVET and skills for work.

3.4.1 Promote holistic learning and well-being of learners equipped with diverse knowledge, skills and competencies needed for the future

The survey responses show that the imperative to reimagine and transform education has never been stronger. Countries around the globe have already embarked on the journey of educational transformation by updating their curricula to reflect the current environmental, technological and societal shifts; build more resilient learners; and prepare them for the challenges of the 21st century.⁸⁴ The skills and learning areas particularly highlighted around the TES include: (i) education for sustainable development/greening education; (ii) STEM; (iii) technical and vocational education and training systems (TVET) and skills for work; (iv) 21st-century skills; (v) social and emotional learning and values education; (vi) physical/mental health and safety; (vii) comprehensive sexuality education;

and (viii) foundational learning (see Annex 1 for descriptions). The next few paragraphs will delve into each area more fully.

(i) Education for sustainable development/greening education:

Countries are making commitments to the advancement of education for sustainable development, fostering the acquisition of knowledge, skills, attitudes and values that will empower learners to acknowledge the interconnection of economic, cultural, social and environmental issues to create sustainable and better futures. Strategies comprise greening education to get every learner climate-ready by including climate change and environmental education in school curricula, teaching materials, pedagogy and assessments.⁸⁵ Climate change education, curricula and pedagogy across educational levels and provisions, as well as within lifelong and life-wide learning perspectives, are key drivers to cement the education of new generations to build a better present and future. Several countries (e.g. Bangladesh, Estonia, France, Honduras, Kuwait, Latvia, Libya, Mali, Oman, Saudi Arabia, State of Palestine, Türkiye, United Arab Emirates and Uzbekistan) report on including and updating environmental education. Honduras reports incorporating environmental education, risk management and climate change in all areas of schooling. Oman reported on launching the second phase of the Green School project that focuses on environmental sustainability within educational institutions. It encourages schools to implement eco-friendly practices and infrastructure to promote greener futures. The project started in selected schools in September 2023 and ran until April 2024. It comprises two main elements: a sustainability curriculum that includes guides for students and teachers on six environmental topics: waste management, climate change, renewable energy, afforestation, water consumption and zero carbon neutrality; and a practical school project where each school implements an initiative related to one of these topics in their building.⁸⁶ This project underscores the pivotal role of transformative curricula and pedagogy in equipping learners with the values, attitudes, knowledge and skills required to navigate a complex world while preparing them to face the challenges related to climate change and implement strategies to combat its impact.

Box 4 Call to action: transforming education to transform the world

The world faces a multitude of complex and interconnected challenges, central to which is the existential threat posed by the climate crisis. These challenges demand an education system that not only reflects these realities but also anticipates and actively responds to them. As highlighted in the **TES Thematic Action Track 2 discussion paper on Learning and Skills for Life, Work, and Sustainable Development**⁸⁷, a fundamental transformation across levels of education is needed to equip learners and societies with the values, attitudes, knowledge, skills and resilience needed to effectively respond to the climate crisis and other sustainability challenges. Indeed, education is increasingly recognized as both a victim of and a solution to the climate crisis.

Global Initiative: Greening Education Partnership

To respond to the mounting urgency of the twin challenges posed by climate change and the need to transform education, the **Greening Education Partnership (GEP)**⁸⁸ was launched at the UN TES. As an inclusive and collaborative platform for governments and other stakeholders, the GEP aims to foster collaboration and synergies that will prepare every learner to acquire the knowledge, skills, values and attitudes to tackle climate change and promote sustainable development. Through a lifelong learning and whole-institution approach, the Partnership contributes to the **Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) for 2030 framework**⁸⁹, the **Berlin Declaration on Education for Sustainable Development**⁹⁰ and **41 C/Resolution 16**⁹¹, which calls for climate action to be instated as a core curriculum component.

Climate Conference of the Parties (COPs) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change has emerged as a crucial platform to amplify the critical role of education in addressing the climate crisis. During the COP28 in Dubai, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), the first Annual Meeting of the GEP was held and 45 Member States endorsed the Declaration on the Common Agenda for Education and Climate Change.

The GEP is structured around four action areas: greening schools; curricula; teacher training and education systems' capacities; and communities. Each area has a dedicated working group to facilitate the focused and effective delivery of the joint work plan of action, including through quarterly meetings and biannual work plans. As of March 2024, 85 Member States⁹² and over 1,100 organizations have joined the Partnership. The partners have a diverse geographical, political and cultural reach, spanning the fields of education, environment, climate adaptation and mitigation, and sustainable development.

Good practices

1. Countries are integrating the whole school approach. Costa Rica's Education for Sustainable Development Policy emphasizes the establishment of sustainable educational centres and the adoption of an institutional sustainability model. Accreditation schemes, awards and school networks serve as pivotal mechanisms to promote a holistic approach to school improvement exemplified by programmes, such as the Eco-Schools Programme. In Iceland, over 50% of primary and secondary schools and 40% of pre-primary schools participate in an eco-school project, following certain standards in environmental practices and learning. Moreover, Oman has implemented a certification system for green schools, acknowledging schools affiliated with the Green Schools Network for their environmental efforts.

2. Countries are reviewing curricula to mainstream climate change education holistically – across various knowledge areas and subjects, considering the environmental, social and economic pillars and viewing them as essential competencies. Costa Rica, UAE, Cyprus, Dominican Republic, Kyrgyzstan and Albania have integrated sustainable development, climate change and environmental protection concepts into their national curricula across multiple subjects and grade levels. Colombia has made environmental education compulsory, incorporating critical aspects, such as climate change, biodiversity and risk management into its curriculum. Other countries, including Cambodia, Kenya and Ecuador, are in the process of reviewing or revising their curricula.

3. Countries are reviewing teacher-training programmes for both in-service and pre-service teachers to integrate climate change and sustainability issues. Colombia's National Environmental Education Programme for 2022-2026 – a collaborative effort between the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Environment – aims to train teachers from 5,000 schools and support 13 priority territories in updating the National Environmental Education Policy.

Cambodia prioritizes Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) by integrating these topics into general in-service teacher training programmes at all levels, with plans to develop a specific course focused on sustainability. Additionally, the Dominican Republic and Germany have established comprehensive educational frameworks, including teacher training, to address climate change across disciplines. In Palestine, the National Institute for Educational Training (NIET) offers sustainable development courses for both pre-service and in-service teachers. Albania, Nigeria and Armenia have accredited programmes and modules covering environmental issues, sustainable development and climate change. Collaborative projects in Hungary and Iceland provide free professional development courses for educators, emphasizing continuous learning and capacity building.

4. Countries have legislation, policies or action plans to mainstream climate change into their education systems. Several countries, including Mauritius, Germany, Argentina, Namibia, Colombia, Albania, Bangladesh, Kenya and Cuba, have legal frameworks addressing education for sustainable development and climate change. In Germany, ESD is embedded in federal and state-level legal frameworks for schools, vocational education and higher education. Armenia mandates lifelong environmental education across all educational levels. Additionally, numerous countries have established comprehensive policy frameworks to guide efforts in climate change and sustainability education, while climate action is increasingly integrated into formal education systems worldwide. Many countries (e.g. Kenya, Kyrgyzstan, Estonia, Uzbekistan, Nicaragua, Hungary, Iceland, Cyprus) have targeted strategies, plans or specific Education Sector Plans to directly address climate action. The Netherlands has convened an inter-ministerial working party to enhance and support the role of education in sustainable development. The working group organizes a conference and webinars on sustainability in schools, leadership, school buildings, citizenship, curriculum, pedagogy and didactics.

5. Several countries increasingly recognize the importance of a lifelong learning approach within a holistic community. Some countries have implemented lifelong learning policies and plans, either at the national level (e.g. Germany) or locally through municipalities (e.g. Albania). Youth remain pivotal in these initiatives, with countries including Kyrgyzstan, Indonesia, Iraq, Malawi and South Sudan emphasizing their involvement. Various countries have established lifelong learning centres, community education centres, youth clubs and local government initiatives (e.g. Andorra, Côte d'Ivoire and Mauritius). Initiatives, such as the My Action for the Planet campaign in Cuba, aim to empower individuals and communities to address climate-related challenges and enhance resilience. Estonia prioritizes the development of green competencies for both adults and youth within vocational, higher education and lifelong learning frameworks. France has launched a resource hub on biodiversity issues to foster public awareness and collective action, while Portugal has initiated a 'Green Skills & Jobs' Programme that offers short- and medium-term courses. Malaysia is establishing a National Advisory Group on ESD-2030, comprising leading agencies, NGOs and CSOs dedicated to Education for Sustainable Development.

The way forward

As contributions to the GEP, UNESCO launched a Greening Curriculum Guidance and a Green School Quality Standard in June 2024⁹³ to support Member States and provide the basis for progress monitoring. Strengthening financing of greening education is a prerequisite for success, including through the establishment of a possible UN Multi-Partner Trust Fund on Greening Education. UNESCO and Save the Children are jointly implementing an initiative on Climate Smart Education Systems in around 20 GPE countries most vulnerable to climate risks, starting with Zimbabwe, Malawi, South Sudan and Cambodia. This GPE-funded initiative will enhance the capacities of countries to mainstream climate change mitigation, adaptation and environmental sustainability into education sector plans, budgets, strategies, curricula and capacity development.

The sharing of good practices, opportunities for collaboration and mutual learning will be facilitated through GEP Working Group meetings, leading to the second GEP annual meeting at COP29 in Azerbaijan and a global stocktake at COP30 in Brazil, in particular to assess how commitments regarding the role of education to address the climate crisis are reflected in the Nationally Determined Contributions and National Adaptation Plans.

(ii) STEM education, embedded in humanistic approaches, encourages a holistic understanding of how scientific and technological principles operate in real-world contexts, representing a shift in traditional pedagogy towards a more hands-on, problem-based learning. STEM education's interdisciplinary focus and hands-on approach are instrumental in solving real world problems through critical thinking, creativity and innovation.⁹⁴ STEM is critical to addressing many global and local challenges, such as climate change, and pivotal for sustainable and fair development as foundational fields in creating jobs in a tech-driven world. As such, many countries (Albania, Andorra, Angola, Argentina, Aruba, Armenia, Bangladesh, Belgium, Chile, China, Côte d'Ivoire, Cuba, El Salvador, Estonia, Ethiopia, Kazakhstan, Kuwait, Latvia, Lebanon, Lithuania, Montenegro, Nepal, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Senegal, Singapore, South Sudan, Spain, State of Palestine, Thailand, Timor-Leste, Türkiye and the United Republic of Tanzania) reported on advancing STEM education. Ecuador, for example, is working to develop scientific and digital skills with the Science, Technology, Engineering, Agriculture, Mathematics + Health approach through the implementation, execution and evaluation of methodologies that incorporate technologies for learning and to instil this knowledge in teachers and students. Pakistan has started the Metric-Tech Program, a pilot project to produce competent public sector schools. Monaco has instated one hour of computer programming per week from kindergarten to secondary schooling.

(iii) Technical and vocational education and training (TVET) and skills for work are increasingly being integrated into various levels of education systems, particularly at secondary, post-secondary and tertiary levels.⁹⁵ The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic further demonstrated the importance of TVET in economic recovery and development, emphasizing its crucial role in enhancing youth employability and in the reskilling and upskilling of workers.⁹⁶ UNESCO has identified three priority areas for TVET: (i) develop skills for all individuals to learn, work and live; (ii) develop skills for inclusive and sustainable economics; and (iii) develop skills for inclusive and peaceful societies.⁹⁷ TVET curricula must adapt to help an evolving and transitioning workforce to meet the needs of the 21st century.⁹⁸ In this context, countries are transforming TVET

systems by identifying new competencies needed and providing learners with the appropriate skilling, upskilling and reskilling required for social inclusion, employment, entrepreneurship and access to green and digital economies.⁹⁹ Several countries (e.g. Angola, Aruba, Argentina, Armenia, Bangladesh, Brazil, Estonia, Kyrgyzstan, Latvia, Madagascar, Saudi Arabia, Switzerland, Oman, Timor-Leste, and the United Arab Emirates) report on efforts to expand and strengthen their TVET programmes, emphasizing their role in equipping students with practical skills needed by and directly applicable to the labour market needs and contributing to sustainable development goals. For example, Kyrgyzstan reported that it is working to elevate the status of TVET and to increase student enrolment by improving pathways between education levels.¹⁰⁰ The country has created new inclusive curricula and programmes pertaining to the training students in energy, light industry, electric power, IT, crafts and public catering, services, metalworking and construction. As a result, the proportion of vocational lyceums introducing dual education (combining vocational education and apprenticeships) has increased from 11% to 40% over two years, with the involvement of 80 employer organizations. These efforts indicate that Kyrgyzstan's initiatives align with contemporary job market demands, provide flexible learning pathways and support lifelong learning.

(iv) Skills for the 21st century – also known as foundational skills for life and work – refer to the competencies and skills increasingly needed for our everyday lives in today's interconnected and rapidly evolving world¹⁰¹, and they include but are not limited to: (i) ways of thinking (i.e. creativity, autonomous, critical and caring thinking, and metacognition); (ii) ways of working (i.e. communication, collaboration and solidarity); (iii) tools for working (i.e. Information and communication technology (ICT) literacy); and (iv) the ability to live in the world (i.e. citizenship, personal and social responsibility).¹⁰²

Skills for the 21st-century skills also include those acquired through social and emotional learning and values in education that will be further discussed below. Social and emotional learning focuses on the acquisition of skills and knowledge to manage

emotions, establish and maintain supportive relationships, make caring and responsible decisions, and achieve personal and collective goals, which are part of a broader set of personal, interpersonal, social and citizenship competencies necessary to thrive in an increasingly disruptive world. Several countries (e.g. Albania, Aruba, Bangladesh, El Salvador, Estonia, Jordan, Kuwait, Libya, Nicaragua, Pakistan, Senegal, Singapore, Spain, Timor-Leste, Tunisia, Türkiye, United Arab Emirates, United Republic of Tanzania, Zambia) report on having implemented actions to ensure students acquire the “knowledge, skills, values and attitudes that are integral to life in the 21st century”;¹⁰³ especially through curricular reforms. Kuwait reported on developing a new curriculum over the past five years that includes 21st century skills and values, while also including a new class in the science curriculum called ‘Applications and Practices’, which enables students to use 21st century skills to design, research and implement projects related to the STEM curriculum. Tunisia reported that their educational system is based on strengthening 21st century skills in educational programmes to develop the skills, abilities and behaviours that teachers and learners need to engage in society and adapt to rapid transformations and prepare them to enter the labour market.

(v) Integrating socio-emotional learning (SEL)

and values education can contribute to cultivating well-rounded individuals capable of navigating the complexities of a disruptive world. SEL is crucial to managing emotions and building effective communication, playing a significant role not only in cognitive, but most importantly, social, emotional and relational development and learning. Even though SEL is not a panacea for addressing fundamental issues of social justice, evidence shows that SEL, especially when co-created and placed within socio-cultural and ecological contexts, can strengthen both the knowledge, skills and attitudes of individuals and communities that lead to social transformation. SEL leads not only to the achievement of positive life outcomes, but also to reduction in stress, anxiety and depression; better mental well-being; reduced school dropouts; improved social behaviour; reduced bullying and harassment; improved connectedness to learning in school and academic achievements; improved recovery post-exposure to emergency and trauma;

and reduced inequality, social disadvantage, discrimination and exclusion.¹⁰⁴ SEL should be integrated into all facets of education and requires supportive classroom environments that promote integrity and belonging.¹⁰⁵ Moreover, values and civic education programmes involving human rights and global citizenship prepare learners to engage with and resolve global challenges, contributing to a more just, peaceful, inclusive and sustainable world.¹⁰⁶ SEL and values education together can help learners build the skills to communicate as compassionate, empathetic and self-regulated citizens. Several countries (e.g. Albania, Bahrain, China, El Salvador, Ecuador, Estonia, Jordan, Kyrgyzstan, Lithuania, Mauritius, Montenegro, Republic of Korea, Singapore, Thailand, Tunisia, United Arab Emirates, Uruguay and Uzbekistan) report the integration of SEL into curricula, emphasizing the development of empathy, collaboration and global citizenship. This holistic educational approach enhances academic success and cultivates learners as active, compassionate participants in a global society. For example, Jordan integrated social and emotional skills into the mathematics and Arabic language curriculum in kindergarten, first and second grades, showcasing how social and emotional learning can be integrated into different subjects. To foster a conducive learning environment for students, Estonia aims to support teachers in creating a diverse learning environment that prioritizes a learner-centred approach to education.

(vi) Physical/mental health and safety: When learners are free from harm, and their physical and mental health and safety are protected and encouraged through content and nurturing school environments, they are better set up for success in school and beyond. Mental health and well-being are critical to a learner’s overall health and help boost healthier, more socially connected and more productive students.¹⁰⁷ Schools are uniquely positioned to help promote and support children’s and young people’s mental health and well-being during a rapid developmental period.¹⁰⁸ School health and nutrition programmes play a critical role in promoting physical and mental health and safety as well as the overall well-being of learners.¹⁰⁹ El Salvador reports that part of their My New School education reform is focused on

health and nutrition. The country has started a School Feeding and Health Program with funding amounting to USD 22 million and state that the Program was initiated because nutritional status is directly related to academic performance and poor nutrition reduces learning capacity, leading to dropout. Health-promoting schools take a whole-school approach that encompasses school policies, curricula, environments, communities and health services.¹¹⁰ Several countries (e.g. Albania, Andorra, Angola, Aruba, Argentina, Bahrain, Chile, China, Cote d'Ivoire, Ecuador, Estonia, Germany, Hungary, Jordan, Libya, Monaco, Norway, Republic of Korea, Saudi Arabia, Singapore, Türkiye, United Arab Emirates, Uruguay) reported on initiatives to promote learners' mental health. These initiatives range from addressing bullying and online abuse to integrating mental health education into the curriculum, showcasing a global commitment to creating supportive educational ecosystems. Albania is expanding its psycho-social services by developing a questionnaire on the perception of bullying and violence at schools and organizing information sessions for students to learn about online abuse and bullying to help foster a more inclusive learning environment. China reported that primary and secondary schools carry out mental health education in conjunction with relevant curricula and offer compulsory courses in mental health at common universities.

(vii) Comprehensive sexuality education (CSE) is a curriculum-based process of teaching and learning about the cognitive, emotional, physical and social aspects of sexuality. CSE provides learners with knowledge, skills, attitudes and values that will empower them to realize their health, well-being and dignity; develop respectful social and sexual relationships; consider how their choices affect their own well-being and that of others; and understand and ensure the protection of their rights throughout their lives.¹¹¹ CSE programmes and curricula must be culturally appropriate and adapted to the values and customs of where they are implemented, while maintaining CSE as an approach based on human rights and gender equality.¹¹² Although comprehensive sexuality education received the fewest responses in the survey, some countries (Argentina, Ecuador, Germany, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Switzerland, Timor-Leste and Zambia) reported

on their inclusion of CSE into laws and policies, curricula, programmes and enabling environments. Schools as well as non-formal and community-based settings play a critical role in implementing CSE where trained educators can provide trusted, scientific and credible information and skills building to learners. Switzerland is mapping the sexuality education implementation in different cantons through a quantitative and qualitative analysis of courses; the training of teaching staff; teaching materials; and defining the trainers' roles. Argentina's National Comprehensive Sexual Education Programme coordinates the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of CSE actions in all jurisdictions of the country. Jordan has created a health awareness programme for students in grades 5-10. Germany reported curriculum-based sexuality education in schools that address contemporary topics, including the pluralization of lifestyles; equal rights for girls and women; gender identity; public discourse and LGBTQIA2+ rights; prevention of AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases; and the implications of public discussions on sexual violence against children and adolescents. Zambia reported that over the past few years, CSE has been institutionalized and integrated into various relevant subject areas and courses at school. Learners receive self-esteem skills and knowledge that equip them to combat drug abuse and early pregnancy as well as build other complementary skills that can contribute to a better quality of life.

(viii) Foundational Learning, basic literacy, numeracy and transferable skills, such as social and emotional skills, remain high on the global education agenda due to the persisting learning crisis. Foundational learning equips learners with the essential skills to undertake further learning and educational opportunities. Several countries (e.g. Ecuador, Indonesia, Namibia, Republic of Korea, Timor-Leste, United Arab Emirates and Zambia) are actively engaging in initiatives to bolster foundational learning. Zambia reports implementing a Catch-Up programme for learners in Grades 3, 4 and 5 who are not yet able to read, write or solve simple mathematical problems. The programme assists learners to grasp numeracy concepts, literacy concepts and skills through practice and discussions.^{113, 114}

Box 5 Call to action: ensure foundational learning as a key element to transform education

The Call to Action: Ensure Foundational Learning as a key element to Transform Education (CtA)¹¹⁴ articulates the shared ambition by the global education community to ensure all children achieve foundational learning. Countries and organizations committed to: 1) taking urgent and decisive action, where learning levels are low, to ensure all children, including the most marginalized, realize their full potential; 2) reducing the global share of children unable to read and understand a simple text by age ten, by half by 2030; 3) immediately enrolling all children and keeping them in school, particularly marginalized girls; increasing access to remedial and catch-up learning and teach children at their current learning levels; supporting teachers by giving them the tools that they need; and supporting the health, nutrition and psycho-social well-being of every teacher and child; 4) working together to close the education resource gap and enable the investments, leveraging technologies and other reforms needed to effectively advance foundational learning.

Global Initiative: Coalition for Foundational Learning

Together with the launch of the CtA, the Coalition for Foundational Learning was established by 6 partner organizations (Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, The UK's Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO), UNESCO, UNICEF, USAID and the World Bank). The Global Partnership for Education (GPE) later joined the Coalition. The Coalition is working through three work streams: 1) coordinated support to countries; 2) availability and use of learning data; and 3) communication and advocacy. To date, the below has been achieved:

- **Coordinated support:** The Coalition has developed support offers for curriculum development, classroom teaching and system support. Countries, including Zambia and Ghana, have actively sought these offers. The Coalition has pioneered new ways of working and collaborating – for example, by supporting authorities in Pakistan alongside the World Bank and FCDO to accelerate the foundational learning agenda.
- **Learning data:** The Coalition developed a tool to help country teams identify learning challenges, prompting the first-ever support request from Malawi, focusing on learning data and the evaluation of learning assessments. Moreover, a menu of assessment options supports country teams in addressing gaps in learning data or strengthening existing data.
- **Communication and advocacy:** Sierra Leone organized a regional conference on foundational learning and brought together eight Ministries of Education. Other events held at the UNGA margins and the African Union Pre-Summit Roundtable Event gathered ministers, development partners and CSOs, among others, to advocate for foundational learning and explore how the Coalition can offer support.

Good practices

1. Countries are investing in the monitoring of learning at various levels in various forms, especially at the classroom and/or national levels. Some countries are harnessing the power of learning assessments to inform teaching-learning processes through classroom-based, continuous formative assessments to better inform teachers (e.g. Albania, Bangladesh, Cuba, France, Malaysia, Portugal). Use of technologies in assessments is also mentioned by some countries (e.g. Bangladesh, Chile, Kyrgyzstan). Assessment of learning in early years is also being used to diagnose foundational learning issues at an early stage (e.g. Cote d'Ivoire, the Gambia, Germany, Jordan, Latvia, Portugal, Republic of Korea, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, Sierra Leone, Timor-Leste, Togo).

2. Countries are reviewing/revising/adjusting the curriculum to focus on foundational learning for all.

To address the learning loss and/or ensure the mastery of foundational learning by all, some countries are adjusting the time allocation and/or the treatment of contents with a focus on foundational learning (e.g. Cuba, Dominican Republic, France, Honduras, Indonesia, Kyrgyzstan, Lao PDR, Lebanon, Malawi, Malaysia, Nicaragua, Pakistan, Portugal, Saudi Arabia, Zambia). Learning in early years is being reviewed/reformed in several countries (e.g. Argentina, France, Lebanon, Mauritius) while several others are integrating social and emotional learning in their curriculum (e.g. Bangladesh, Chile, Estonia, Indonesia, Libya, Lithuania).

3. Countries are prioritizing supporting teachers with training and relevant tools. More than 80% of the responding countries are supporting teachers with continuous professional development and the provision of improved teaching/learning materials as well as tools. Some countries are leveraging digital tools to support teachers (e.g. Bahrain, Indonesia, Kyrgyzstan, Latvia, Lebanon, Madagascar, Malawi, Malaysia, Monaco, Namibia, Togo, Türkiye).

4. Countries are addressing learning loss from the COVID-19 pandemic and ensuring foundational learning by providing catch-up or remedial programmes.

Large-scale “catch-up” programmes were implemented in many countries (e.g. Bangladesh, Colombia, Jordan, Kenya, Latvia, Lebanon, Libya, Nepal, Portugal, Republic of Korea, South Sudan, Türkiye), often mobilizing volunteer teachers and/or university students to close the gap. Four countries mentioned that they are using the Teaching at the Right Level approach (Angola, Côte d’Ivoire, Morocco and Nigeria). Remedial programmes are being regularly offered to those in need, such as students with learning difficulties (e.g. France, Kuwait, Lao PDR, Lithuania, Mauritius, Monaco, Namibia, Senegal, Singapore), refugees (e.g. Estonia) and children with special needs (e.g. Kyrgyzstan, Lithuania).

5. Countries are supporting the health, nutrition and psycho-social well-being of teachers and children.

In light of the critical importance of physical and mental well-being to promote better learning, countries are taking actions, such as implementing school health programmes (e.g. Angola, Aruba, Syrian Arab Republic) and school meal programmes (e.g. Armenia, Colombia, Dominican Republic, Estonia, France, Honduras, Iraq, Japan, Libya, Malawi, Mauritania, Mauritius, Nicaragua, South Sudan, Timor-Leste). Several countries are providing well-being and mental health support to students (e.g. Bahamas, Bangladesh, Belgium, China, Estonia, France, Germany, Japan, Kenya, Kuwait, Latvia, Lebanon, Malawi, Mauritius, Nicaragua, Oman, Palestine, Singapore, Tunisia) and to a lesser extent to teachers (e.g. Bahamas, Lebanon, Estonia, Latvia, Malawi, Oman, Singapore). **The way forward**

- Making assessment more accessible, inclusive and efficient at all levels by harnessing technology and developing digital platforms that provide timely and substantial feedback and adaptive learning pathways. Creating an age-appropriate toolkit for early detection and intervention at early years, drawing on global and local experiences and practices.
- Developing/adapting curricula to strengthen inclusivity and social and emotional learning (SEL) as core foundations for all learning. Curricula are being reshaped to reflect cultural diversity and inclusivity, emphasizing the use of the mother tongue in early education through collaborative community efforts as well developing intercultural competencies across all educational levels. SEL is being woven into national curricula as a fundamental element, with resources and training provided to educators to ensure effective delivery.
- Enhancing teacher support with digital tools and global exchange. In the rapidly evolving educational landscape, teachers must be equipped with advanced digital tools and resources to significantly improve their teaching methodologies to address the diversity of learners’ contexts, circumstances, capacities and needs. Global teacher exchange programmes help foster a collaborative and caring environment. The adoption and adaptation of the Teaching at Right Level approach, including SEL, is encouraged.
- Broadening the reach and impacts of remedial and catch-up programmes. Partnerships with NGOs, universities and the private sector are crucial to extending remedial and catch-up programmes, focusing on communities marginalized or impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Strengthening data collection and monitoring. Improving data collection on foundational learning processes and outcomes as well as well-being indicators enables targeted interventions. A Global Foundational Learning Observatory can be considered to monitor trends, share insights and serve as a knowledge hub.
- Leveraging early care and stimulation. Early Childhood Care and Education is critical to prepare young children for foundational learning and lifelong learning. Integrating SEL and stimulating executive functions from the earliest years will lay a robust foundation for continuous learning and development. Emphasizing early developmental support, parenting and parental support, and the nurturing of emotional intelligence will help ensure that learners are well-equipped for success at all stages of life.
- Scaling up advocacy for foundational learning. Efforts to raise awareness about foundational learning are intensifying through global forums and advocacy campaigns, and are complemented through the sharing of promising practices, tailored tools and resources.

Some countries concentrate on the transition from pre-primary to primary levels as well as early primary. For example, Indonesia is implementing a ‘fun’ transition programme from early childhood education to elementary school to ensure an adequate educational foundation while Jordan is implementing the Gradual Reading Books Project, a programme launched by the Ministry of Education in cooperation with the Reading and Arithmetic Initiative that aims to provide students in grades 1-3 with stories inside the classroom where students move between different levels. Moreover, Jordan’s Reading and Arithmetic Initiative for Arabic Language and Mathematics for grades K (pre-primary) to 3 aims to enhance students’ reading and arithmetic skills. On the other hand, Ecuador has chosen to focus particularly on learners with unfinished schooling through the provision of educational services for young people, adults and senior citizens to close the existing literacy gap through classroom, blended and virtual learning.

3.4.2 Adopt dynamic pedagogical approaches that are learner-driven to empower students to actively shape their education

Transforming education hinges not just on what to learn but critically on how to learn, teach and assess. Along with renewing curricular contents, countries are changing and innovating pedagogical approaches with an emphasis on valuing building a sense of community, interconnectedness and collaboration over individual competition.¹¹⁵ This comprehensive approach to education transformation highlights the global commitment to nurturing well-rounded individuals equipped to thrive in an ever-changing world. The Futures of Education initiatives delve into learner-centred pedagogy¹¹⁶ and advocates for a shift in pedagogical approaches from fixed to fluid, recognizing that knowledge is fluid, dynamic, contested and subject to reinterpretation. The fluidity of knowledge also includes encouraging diverse perspectives, recognizing local and indigenous knowledge, and fostering inter-cultural exchange.¹¹⁷

The fluidity of knowledge requires teaching methods that encourage discussion and open-mindedness to help develop a wide-ranging and inclusive view of knowledge as continually evolving.¹¹⁸ Learner-centred pedagogy also advocates for learner

autonomy, transforming learning from passive recipients of knowledge to active creators of their educational path and democratic participation, underscoring the importance of creating classrooms where learners can freely express themselves and participate in decision-making. Such transformation implies a shift in power dynamics, encouraging teachers to act more as guides and facilitators than authoritative figures while advocating the need for cultural sensitivity and adaption, stressing the need for adaptable pedagogies that respect cultural differences and local contexts.¹¹⁹ In this ideal paradigm, teachers and learners are co-partners in developing curricula.

Several countries (e.g. Albania, Argentina, Aruba, Bangladesh, Belgium, Chile, Colombia, Cuba, Ecuador, El Salvador, Estonia, Sierra Leone, Timor-Leste, Tunisia, Türkiye, United Arab Emirates, the United Republic of Tanzania, Uruguay and Zambia) are making commitments to change how students learn and teachers teach, reviewing the values underlying pedagogy and the dynamics between teachers and students as well as among students to shift towards designing new pedagogical approaches and methods that are future oriented. El Salvador reports on a new educational reform, ‘My New School’ – the new national curriculum emphasizes how to learn rather than what to teach. The reform adopts an approach and curriculum structure, where curriculum is seen as a practice with an emphasis on skills and competencies rather than subjects and content. As part of the reform, 46 new study programmes have been renewed in different circular areas. Some of the ways in which countries are working to update pedagogical approaches to provide learners with more agency in the learning process in the younger years is through play-based learning. Play-based learning can provide learners with a space to be creative, learn to cooperate and work together to solve real-world problems. Play-based learning can also help build autonomy and independent learning.¹²⁰ Through play-based learning, guides and teacher facilitators allow learners to explore and work together with peers to solve problems. For example, Tunisia reports on building learning frameworks around various pedagogical approaches, including creativity, playful, project-based learning and learning

in adoptive authentic situations. Sierra Leone, for instance, reported introducing new teaching materials, play-based learning and updated curriculum frameworks that signal a broader move towards more engaging and future-oriented teaching methods. Zambia reported that they have placed learner-centred pedagogies at centre stage and encouraged this approach in all lessons at all levels. Some of the programmes that have embraced this approach include the Zambia Education Enhancement Project (ZEEP).¹²¹

3.4.3 Adapt assessment methods to curricular contents and learning approaches to effectively support every learner's holistic development

Learning assessments are visualized as tools to support the development of all learners within a comprehensive understanding of the curriculum and pedagogy. They are crucial because they provide data on the effectiveness of education systems and programming. Assessments allow key stakeholders, such as parents, students, educators and policymakers, to understand where students are on their journey to achieve learning outcomes.¹²² Assessments can also help identify learning gaps and disparities within and across student groups, which can inform targeted and personalized interventions to improve educational equity and quality.¹²³ Data-driven assessment approaches foster continued improvement and can help mobilize additional resources to student groups in need. Methodological approaches to implementing learning assessments involve several key strategic steps and considerations to make the best use of the assessment and how it can be used to inform decisions. These areas include: (i) defining the purpose of the assessment; (ii) what will be tested; (iii) what data will be collected; (iv) who will be assessed; (v) how will they be assessed; (vi) who will administer the assessment; (vii) when and how often will the assessment take place; (viii) how the data will be used and published after

the assessment; (vi) and the method in which the assessment will be administered.¹²⁴

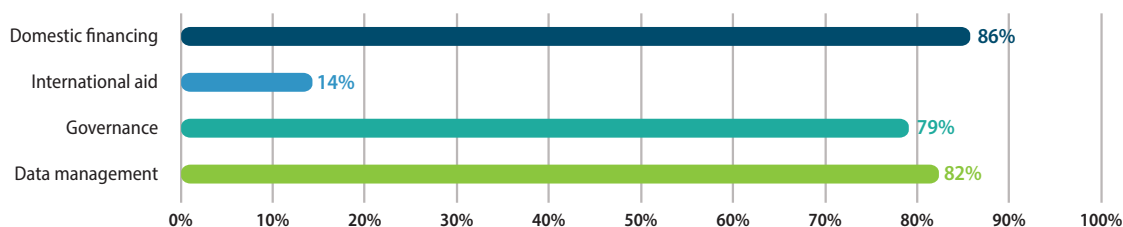
Assessments are crucial for measuring the effectiveness of education, identifying learning gaps and informing policy. Assessment practices should be used to support broader educational goals rather than create competitive academic environments and to indicate any adjustments that need to be made in pedagogical methods.¹²⁵ To varying degrees, several countries (e.g. Albania, Angola, Bangladesh, Belgium, Estonia, France, Japan, Kyrgyzstan, Lao PDR, Lebanon, Lithuania, Malawi, Monaco, Namibia, Nepal, Nigeria, Pakistan, Spain, Timor-Leste, United Arab Emirates, the United Republic of Tanzania and Zambia) have taken action to review and update student assessment and evaluation methods to better align with national educational priorities. Included are assessments for learning (e.g. classroom and formative assessments) and assessments of learning (e.g. examinations and summative assessments), both at the school level and at the national, cross-national or regional levels.¹²⁶ For example, Timor-Leste is revising assessments so that exams measure more competencies than rote learning. Broadening what is included in assessments can help better meet the full holistic development needs of learners. The Bahamas has developed Pacing Guides that accompany the curriculum to better track progress. They have instated national pacing guides at the preschool, primary school and high school level that when completed will confer 21st-century skills to graduates. The pacing guides outline key concepts and skills to be taught and proposes a suggested time for each subject, aiding in instructional planning. The guides aim to ensure continuity, transparency, accountability, smooth transitions, standardization and comprehensive assessments. Cote d'Ivoire has also integrated timetables devoted to remediation that focus on designing and implementing new evaluation formats.

3.5 Governance and data management

Central to the development of effective and equitable education systems is the establishment of robust governance and efficient data management systems, reinforced by the active involvement of a diverse array of stakeholders. This collaborative approach ensures that educational systems are not only transparent and accountable but also robust enough to face future challenges head on.¹²⁷ Broadly, governance refers to the processes, policies and institutional arrangements that connect the many actors in education, including those in such areas as finance, management and regulation, from the national finance or education ministry down to the classroom and community.¹²⁸ Transforming education demands a commitment to transparency, efficiency and accountability in governance, where governance and data management work hand in hand to foster educational systems that are more responsive, transparent and accountable.

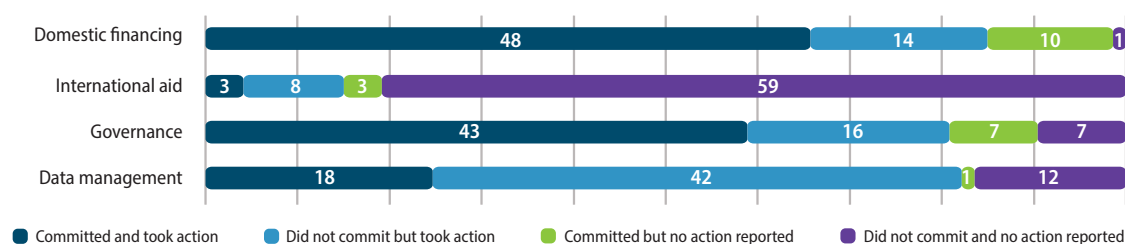
Survey responses highlight the commitment of numerous countries to a whole-of-society approach that actively engages a diverse array of stakeholders, including families, students, communities and the private sector involved in governance processes. A whole-of-society approach recognizes that addressing sustainable development requires cross-sector collaboration. The approach enhances coordination and synergy, aligns goals, avoids the duplication of efforts and leverages resources effectively by promoting shared responsibility among stakeholders, increasing their commitment to shared goals. It brings diverse perspectives to discussions and solutions.¹²⁹ Such collective action is pivotal to developing and implementing educational programming as it increases transparency in decision-making and resource allocation and enhances accountability.¹³⁰ Adopting decentralized governance models is also becoming increasingly common as it grants

Figure 3.10 Percentage of countries that have undertaken transformative actions related to sub-themes under governance and financing (n=91 countries)



Data Source: Survey on Country Actions to Transform Education, 2023.

Figure 3.11 Comparison of country commitments and actions per sub-theme under governance and financing (n=73 countries)



Data Source: Survey on Country Actions to Transform Education, 2023.

local authorities more autonomy in decision making to fulfil local needs and adapt solutions to their diverse contexts. Data management systems are an essential element to creating an efficient, accountable and equitable educational system, and yet the timeliness, reliability and use of these systems remains one of the major challenges for many countries.

Figure 3.10 shows a relatively equal percentage of countries undertaking actions towards domestic financing, governance and data management.

Figure 3.11 shows that 59 out of 73 countries (81%) that submitted both a national statement of commitment and a survey response reported transformative actions in governance and data management. However, 59% of the countries committed to and took action on governance, while 58% of countries did not make a commitment to data management yet still took action.

3.5.1 Strengthen the whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach to policy making and implementation

Strengthening whole-of-government, whole-of-society and open government approaches is crucial to enhancing educational governance and involves multiple stakeholders, including families, communities and the private sector, to ensure inclusivity and efficiency. These collective efforts promote transparency, accountability and meaningful public participation, which makes educational systems more adaptable, equitable and responsive to community needs. Commitments to improving education governance can take a whole-of-government approach in which coordination across ministers and central and sub-national authorities is supported. Countries are also committed to a whole-of-society approach, involving multiple stakeholders, such as families, students, communities and the private sector involved in governance processes. Collective action is crucial to implementing effective governance models that take a whole-of-society approach.¹³¹ Whole-of-government and whole-of-society systems recognize non-state actors' essential roles and diverse participation levels.¹³² These actors include those in civil society, academia and the private sector, each playing critical roles

as agenda-setters and lobbyists, offering expert advice, implementing actions, and enforcing and evaluating initiatives.¹³³ Non-state actors play a vital role to inform and engage citizens, connecting stakeholders, building capacity, raising awareness and enhancing transparency and accountability.¹³⁴ They also play an essential role in identifying national priorities and disseminating review outcomes to the public. The collaboration among stakeholders allows for more enriching dialogue and ensures a more inclusive approach to transforming education. Educational systems must be capable of adaptation, considering the evolving needs of the population, the job market and increasing uncertainties. Strong, resilient and adaptable education systems must promote collaboration among actors from different areas of government and within the wider society to ensure that educational policies reflect actual needs; issues are identified and managed quickly; and marginalized populations are served effectively. Engaging with voices outside of central ministry can also ensure the cross-pollination of ideas and good practices and that service providers are held accountable to their beneficiaries; marginalized voices are heard; and the best use is made of sub-national structures.

Several countries (e.g. Estonia, Ethiopia, Iceland, Indonesia, Latvia, Malawi, Malaysia, Nepal, Nigeria, Senegal, South Sudan, Spain, the State of Palestine, the United Arab Emirates and Zambia) mention the intention to engage with a variety of stakeholders on the importance of collaboration across sectors to help build and develop local autonomy. For example, Iceland reports that the governance system for education is being revised. Through open meetings and ongoing consultations, a new policy to restructure school services is being developed with input from municipalities, teachers, principals and other stakeholders. Many countries (China, Belgium, Estonia, Ethiopia, El Salvador, Latvia, Malawi, Mali, Republic of Korea, Sierra Leone and Zambia) note the importance of cooperation at every level of government, cross-nationally and with international organizations. For example, Zambia reports that they are committed to coordinating and collaborating across line ministers, such as health, education and community development as well as engaging sub-national and key stakeholders

(cooperating partners and NGOs), specifically in developing Zambia's Enhancing Early Learning Project supported by the Global Partnership for Education. Latvia reports as part of their school network reorganization that their goal is to ensure high education quality for every child regardless of the location of the school. The Ministry of Education and Science extensively consults with municipalities, reviewing different optimization scenarios together as it is not a top-down exercise but an approach that requires agreements from both sides to be achieved. In July 2023, the Ministry of Education and Science submitted a report entitled *Complex solutions for providing high-quality education in general, basic and secondary education* for public consultation, allowing the public (partners, teachers, students) to help define the characteristics of good schools and to further evaluate the quality of each educational institution.

3.5.2 Empower and develop the capacity of decentralized tiers of government

Decentralization in education governance refers to redistributing authority from central to local levels within the education system that encompasses various approaches, including deconcentration, devolution and privatization. By transferring authority to more local units of government, such as provinces or municipalities, decentralization aims to enhance input quality, increase programme relevance, foster innovation and improve the efficiency of resource allocation, with a view to improving educational outcomes.¹³⁵ The motivation behind decentralization includes not only improving educational quality and operational efficiency but also adapting to local needs and preferences. This strategy aims to enhance the efficiency of governance, promote public involvement in decision-making, and improve accountability and resource utilization at the local level. However, it requires careful management to avoid exacerbating disparities among localities due to unequal resource distribution, insufficient capacities at the local levels, and/or the misaligned distribution of roles and responsibilities. The complexity of decentralizing education lies in determining the optimal balance of authority distribution, ensuring schools are accountable to the right

entities and defining the state's role in regulating and empowering schools to fulfil their responsibilities. This complexity underscores the diversity across different countries, revealing that no education system is entirely centralized or decentralized. Implementing decentralization effectively demands a strategic, context-sensitive approach to meet specific educational objectives and ensure equitable access to quality education for all.¹³⁶

For example, Oman reports decentralizing and strengthening its governance system by creating a governance office and an internal audit division as part of a broader strategy that is guided by the 2023 School Education Law (Royal Decree No. 331/2023). This law and the Ministry's 10th Five-Year Development Plan (2021-2025) emphasize governance and aim to enhance the educational system's legal and institutional framework, improve monitoring processes and elevate data quality to achieve strategic educational goals. Tunisia also includes governance in their strategic goals for the Education Sector Plan 2023-2025 and the Strategic Plan 2026-2035. Its Ministry of Education created a Central Governance Cell with branches created in various departments within the framework to guarantee the right of every natural or legal citizen to access information to enhance the principle of transparency. China is working to improve educational laws, regulations and policies from the central to local governments to regulate education governance. China has a central and local education supervision system and a team to supervise and inspect the implementation of educational laws, regulations and significant educational policies.

To successfully implement and sustain decentralization initiatives, government authorities at varying levels of education systems and citizens must be empowered while context-sensitive approaches to decentralization are the key to making a smooth transition.¹³⁷ Empowerment demands recognizing the importance of the participation of individuals at all levels and the 'middle tier' – the space between schools and state-level policy-making – as a promising avenue to transform education. Thus, developing

the capacities of the middle tier can serve as a critical lever to strengthen the delivery and efficiency of education systems.¹³⁸ Latvia reported on a school network reorganization. In July 2023, its Ministry of Education and Science report, *Complex solutions for providing high-quality education in general, basic and secondary education*, was submitted for public consultation. It defined the characteristics of a good school, allowing the public (parents, teachers, students, etc.) to further evaluate the quality of each educational institution, demonstrating the importance of the inputs of communities that the schools serve.

Increasing school autonomy also serves to strengthen and empower the voices and collaboration of teachers and parents to make key decisions. Increasing school autonomy enhances the ability of schools to provide services that meet the specific needs of their communities.¹³⁹ Several countries (e.g. Albania, Andorra, Argentina, China, Estonia, Japan, Latvia, Malawi, Netherlands, Oman and Senegal) reported on the principles of autonomy, localized control, decentralization and active participation from localized forms of government in their educational governance systems. These approaches allow for more tailored and community-specific decision-making processes that help ensure that educational policies and practices align closely with local communities' unique needs and circumstances. For example, the Netherlands' national Ministry of Education, Culture and Science primarily provides funding, sets quality standards and determines overall educational attainment targets, while granting schools the autonomy to manage their educational quality and digital infrastructure so long as they meet these government-set targets.

3.5.3 Improve data management systems to be more integrated, open and useful for decision-making

Policy decisions and implementation should be made based on reliable data and research evidence to ensure their effectiveness as well as the sound governance of education systems. Governance models should emphasize monitoring mechanisms to ensure that reliable and timely data is available and up-to-date.¹⁴⁰ Several countries (e.g. Aruba,

Albania, Argentina, Armenia, Bahamas, Bahrain, Bangladesh, Brazil, China, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Estonia, Ethiopia, France, Jordan, Kyrgyzstan, Lao PDR, Lebanon, Libya, Madagascar, Malawi, Oman, Republic of Korea, Singapore, Saudi Arabia, Tunisia and Zambia) highlight the importance of data management and its digitalization to enhance the educational governance, planning and decision-making processes.

In particular, countries are committing to implement or improve an educational management information system (EMIS), which is defined as 'a system for the collection, integration, processing, maintenance and dissemination of data and information to support decision-making, policy-analysis and formulation, planning, monitoring and management at all levels of an education system.' Integrating data management systems is crucial because it allows for a unified and comprehensive understanding of various factors and outcomes within the field at various levels. The ability to link different sources of data (e.g. student performance, teacher effectiveness and financial factors) allows educators and policymakers to gain a more holistic view of the educational landscape.¹⁴¹ This type of integration of data management systems supports better decision-making by identifying trends, finding gaps and evaluating the effectiveness of programmes and interventions.¹⁴² Integrated data management systems also support a coordinated approach to address challenges as they can improve efficiency and effectiveness in policy implementation and resource allocations. Argentina has developed the National Educational Map, a geo-referenced information system intended for the planning and monitoring of educational policies to provide a tool to analyse local educational processes and the collaborative participation of jurisdictions.

Open data management systems improve decision-making by promoting greater stakeholder engagement and accountability through enhanced transparency and accessibility.¹⁴³

Open data management systems improve the process of data collection, processing, analysis and dissemination.¹⁴⁴ It creates user-friendly forms for data entry and storage; facilitates access and use of data for various users; and enables the sharing of information in a multi-user environment.¹⁴⁵

Open systems allow for a variety of stakeholders, including parents, educators and policymakers, to access and utilize data. The accessibility of data encourages more active participation in policy-making processes, enabling a better-informed public to hold institutions accountable and foster improvements in education quality.¹⁴⁶ The openness and accessibility of data foster informed decision-making and enhance public engagement in policymaking.¹⁴⁷

Connected to whole-of-government and whole-of-society approaches to governance are the ‘open government’ models, which stress the importance of fostering a free exchange of ideas and information to foster the meaningful participation of its citizens.¹⁴⁸ ‘Open government’ refers to rendering information regarding data, decision-making and procedures open to the public for scrutiny.¹⁴⁹ Creating an open government model allows for more transparency, enabling the public to participate in informed decision-making and shape how their educational systems work as well as develop educational strategies that are inclusive, equitable and best serve the community’s needs.¹⁵⁰ ‘Open school data’ refers to the totality of published school data, including funding, school enrolment, teacher qualifications and academic results.¹⁵¹ The availability of data varies from school to school. With increased digitization, collecting, distributing and managing data has become more accessible. The availability of open school data can enhance transparency and comparative analysis among schools.¹⁵² For instance, Libya has created an advanced data system that provides correct and reliable data, especially for national exams, where the data of all students will be available for more than 40 years. Students can now easily request documents from the nearest office and will not need to travel far. The Republic of Moldova has created a public access portal (SIME) to for displaying and downloading publicly available education data.

Data management systems should be used to guide decision-making processes. Effective use of data management systems allows for the monitoring and assessment of educational outcomes across different demographics and regions. Effective use of data management systems will also enable continuous improvements by

providing real-time data to be used to analyse the impacts of policies and interventions, allowing for adjustments based on outcomes while also creating more adaptive and responsive systems.¹⁵³ Programmes and policies can be optimized when grounded in actionable data, allowing policymakers to trace the effectiveness of various educational programmes and interventions while ensuring that resources are allocated to areas where they are the most needed and can have the biggest impact.¹⁵⁴ By using data to guide decisions, educational systems can be more adaptive, specifically targeting underlying factors that shape outcomes.¹⁵⁵

Ethiopia is enhancing its data management and statistics capacity to help achieve middle-income economic status in less than a decade. Their EMIS is available at decentralized levels, with support from the respective ICT offices. It collects and processes education performance data to enhance service delivery. Their Education Statistics Annual Abstract provides information on general education so that evidence-based decisions can be made in any intervention. The United Arab Emirates (UAE) reports conducting regular data-driven evaluations of education policies, such as curriculum changes and teacher training programmes, to assess their effectiveness. The UAE also emphasizes collaboration among multiple stakeholders. Jordan has new plans for the support and development of data infrastructure to inform decisions, and Indonesia is working on building its data software systems.

3.5.4 Promote transparency and accountability in governance

Transparency in governance emphasizes the need for open and accessible decision-making to all stakeholders affected by educational policies, ensuring that all parties understand how decisions are made, who is making the decisions and why they are being made.¹⁵⁶ Transparency in decision-making helps promote trust among stakeholders to understand the decision-making processes and provides the necessary information for individuals to meaningfully participate.¹⁵⁷ This entails the open provision of data while ensuring that it is accessible and usable.¹⁵⁸

Accountability in governance refers to making public officials and agencies answerable for their actions and decisions.¹⁵⁹ Accountability can take many forms, from the availability of open data, evaluations, audits and assessments to assessing the effectiveness of policies and practices.¹⁶⁰

Transparency and engagement of various actors in decision-making promotes equitable, accountable, inclusive education systems. The open sharing of information and decision-making builds trust and accountability and helps inform decisions. For example, when monitoring mechanisms (e.g. budget tracking tools) are combined with improved access to information, it has been seen to reduce leakages and facilitate more informed decisions and accountability by allowing the public to see where funds are supposed to go versus where they are actually going.¹⁶¹ Public Expenditure Tracking Surveys (PETS) have been shown to better monitor government allocations to schools.¹⁶² Data should also be used to make equitable decisions in fund allocation to promote more transparency and accountability. 'Open budgeting' can help establish a more transparent system through public access to budgetary information.¹⁶³ Data can also guide fund allocations to ensure equity in fiscal decisions. Several countries (e.g. Albania, Armenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Estonia, Lebanon, Malawi, Morocco, and South Sudan) indicate a focus on structural financial management or administrative reforms that could contribute to the more efficient use of budget reports on actions to improve governance practices by making these more transparent. For example, to improve efficiency, South Sudan has increased the capacity of Education Transfer Monitoring Committees (ETMCs) by creating state-level committees with the mandate to monitor and track education funds

disbursed to states, counties and *payams*. Each ETMC meets monthly to review state performance on different financial processes and accountability.

The adoption of open data practices and effective monitoring mechanisms are steps towards ensuring transparency and accountability within educational governance as it can help highlight and remove inefficiencies as well as cut leakages in public administrations.¹⁶⁴ Available data also allow citizens and the local community to participate in decision-making processes and hold governing institutions accountable. Defined stakeholders' roles in governance models can also contribute to transparency by establishing clear responsibilities and expectations, thereby enhancing the accountability of each role.¹⁶⁵ Clarity among stakeholder roles allows for a better understanding of individual responsibilities in the decision-making process. It can also promote greater participation and oversight by creating systems that are responsive and open to evaluation and examination.¹⁶⁶ These types of defined roles and oversight can help protect educational systems from corruption and malpractice.¹⁶⁷

Costa Rica's Ministry of Public Education has created SABER (*Sistema de Administración Básica de la Educación y sus Recursos*) – a technological tool to help carry out monitoring processes, promote transparency and enable the traceability of information at all levels, with the aim of achieving continuous improvement in the education system. All educational centres in the country – both public and private – are required to provide information on a monthly basis on the SABER platform. The information collected helps generate useful calculations regarding resources required by various populations, regions and educational centres.

3.6 Digital transformation and learning

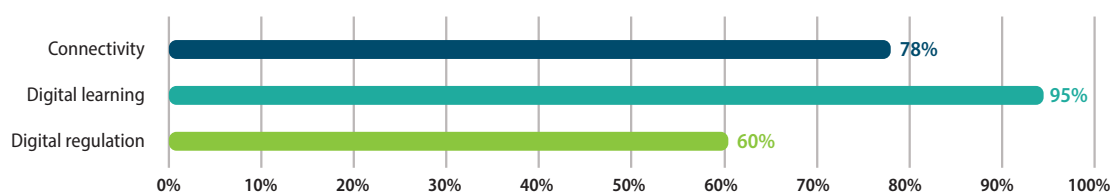
Rapid technological evolution is reshaping every aspect of our society, including education. One of the five Thematic Action Tracks of the TES, ‘digital transformation and learning’ illuminates the role of technologies in larger systemic efforts to transform education and lifelong learning.¹⁶⁸ The ‘Call to Action: Assuring and improving quality public digital learning for all,’¹⁶⁹ launched during the Summit, identified three keys – content, capacity and connectivity – to unlock the power of digital learning while highlighting the need to centre the most marginalized.

As articulated in the 2023 Global Education Monitoring Report, the use of technology should be on the terms of education, guided by the four principles of inclusion, equity, quality and accessibility.¹⁷⁰ If applied appropriately, digital technologies can expand access to education, support teachers’ development and tasks, and foster autonomous learning for diverse interests and lifelong skills. Yet, the digital transformation of

education is often marred by unfulfilled promises – inadequate access to connectivity and devices exacerbates the ‘digital divide’; quality content, effective pedagogies and support systems tend to be overshadowed by the disproportionate focus on hardware provision; and many digital learning programmes fail to address the needs of marginalized communities. Furthermore, the growing dependence on technology risks the commodification of education, requiring thoughtful governance to balance private-sector involvement and ensure accountability and transparency.

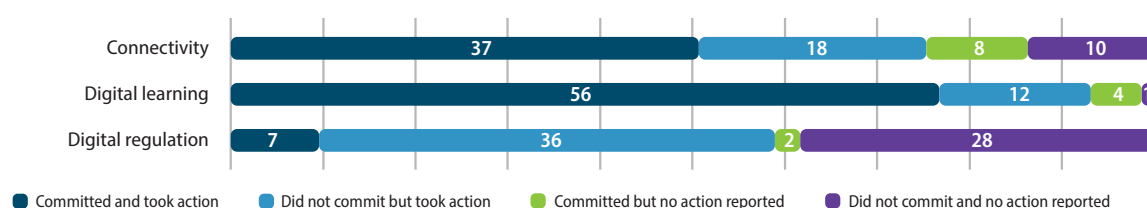
The following section offers a glimpse into the trajectories that countries are taking in the digital transformation of education – in particular, as they correspond to the three sub-themes of connectivity, digital learning and regulation. It also aims to shed light on how the underpinning principles highlighted during the TES translate into actions at the country level.

Figure 3.12 Percentage of countries that have undertaken transformative actions related to sub-themes under digital transformation and learning (n=91 countries)



Data Source: Survey on Country Actions to Transform Education, 2023.

Figure 3.13 Comparison of country commitments and actions per sub-theme under digital transformation and learning (n=73 countries)



Data Source: Survey on Country Actions to Transform Education, 2023.

Figure 3.12 shows that 95% of countries have taken actions towards digital learning. This could have been in part catalysed by the COVID-19 pandemic. As **Figure 3.13** shows, although 49% (36 countries among those who submitted a national statement of commitment and a survey response) did not make a specific commitment to instate digital regulations, they are still undertaking actions in that area. This showcases countries' commitments to regulations even if they are not reported.

3.6.1 Ensure the safe and responsible use of technology while addressing the 'digital divide'

Robust and reliable digital infrastructures are prerequisites for digital transformation. Its strategic importance is evident in the survey responses with 71 out of 91 countries reporting actions taken in this regard. Many countries have dedicated budgets to equip schools with internet connectivity and devices (e.g. Aruba, Andorra, Armenia, Brazil, Cuba, Dominican Republic, Montenegro, Netherlands, Oman, Spain and Germany). For instance, from 2020-2024, the German federal government provided 6.5 billion euros to improve the digital infrastructure across some 40,000 schools in the country. The National Strategy for Connected Schools of Brazil was launched in late 2023 with a goal to connect all Brazilian schools to the internet by the end of 2026. Financing for connectivity requires leveraging strategic partnerships and a whole-of-government approach. Examples include Angola, where the Ministry of Education partners with the Ministry of Telecommunications and Information Technologies to provide connectivity; Sierra Leone, which is expanding school internet access through partnerships with the GIGA initiative and Starlink; and the State of Palestine, which is linking schools to the internet in collaboration with the Palestinian Telecommunications Company.

While prioritizing connectivity for education, some countries have rolled out initiatives to promote equity and inclusion, especially for rural and underserved areas. For example, Spain is providing 300,000 portable devices for the most vulnerable students through its Education System Digitalization Program (#EcoDigEdu); the Netherlands, through

the Equal Opportunity Alliance (*Gelijke Kansen Alliantie*), is analysing the need to foster equitable education and to promote equal opportunities for all students, including in digital learning; and Latvia, through the 'Computer for Every Child' initiative, aims to equip every student and teacher with a computer and establish a computer library in every school by 2025. The emphasis on equity and inclusion has been entrenched in policy instruments in some cases. For instance, Bosnia and Herzegovina has adopted the 'Guidelines for improving online and blended teaching and learning in educational systems in the context of quality (and) inclusive education.'

Linguistic and cultural diversity can be undermined in the digitally connected world as most publicly available information online, including open educational resources, is made available in a limited number of dominant languages.¹⁷¹ From the survey responses, two countries have reported the teaching of local languages via technology: Mauritius has been promoting the preservation and promotion of ancestral languages through digital learning and Estonia is expanding access to and enhancing the quality of Estonian language education through digital solutions.

However, universal connectivity and device access are not the end of the digital transformation story – only when the use of technology is safe and fit for purpose can it play a positive role in teaching and learning. In this regard, several countries have reported actions to address security and privacy concerns: France's 2023-2027 Digital Strategy for Education has a component to enhance the robustness, security, quality and eco-responsibility of IT tools; Norway has constituted a committee to investigate the impact of screen use on children's and youth's learning and well-being; Bahrain introduced a 'Safe Use of Technology Policy' to cultivate digital citizenship and cybersecurity awareness; and the Flemish Government of Belgium is engaging with international and regional stakeholders on discussions around the human rights implications of digitalization, notably on privacy.

3.6.2 Strengthen teacher support and digital learning content as cornerstones for effective digital learning

For many, digital learning emerged as a vital lifeline for the continuity of education during the COVID-19 pandemic and it continues to impact education worldwide. The overwhelming majority – 86 out of 91 countries – reported having taken actions around digital learning after the TES. Of note is the capacity development and training of teachers that include the provision of support and professional development in digital pedagogies (e.g. Andorra, Aruba, Argentina, Bangladesh, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Chile, Côte d'Ivoire, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Indonesia, Mali, Republic of Korea, Spain, Türkiye, Uruguay, Uzbekistan). For example, within the framework of the national programme 'Books to Learn', Argentina has provided virtual training to over 260,000 teachers in 2022; the Dominican Republic is training 100,000 teachers in the pedagogical use of ICT; Uzbekistan is implementing the 'One Million Programmers' project that incentivizes teachers to complete training via teacher prizes; and Mali has trained more than 1,600 teachers in digital education, particularly in the production and use of digital resources.

Conversely, digital learning content tends to be routinely overlooked and a critical gap remains in the provision of digital content that is inclusive and representative of diverse student populations. Hence, the launch of the UNESCO-UNICEF joint initiative on Gateways to Global Digital Learning to support governments to create, maintain and improve platforms that make free and high-quality digital learning content easy-to-find and easy-to-use (Box 6). The survey responses also reflect less prominence afforded to this aspect. Out of 91 countries that have reported actions taken to advance digital learning, only a handful have cited examples of digital learning platforms, including the Smart Education of China which serves as an all-encompassing platform that hosts a wide range of curriculum-aligned learning resources; Angola's first ever 'virtual school', *Xilonga*, that complements the country's teaching and learning; Lao PDR's Wisdom Bank (*Khang Panya Lao*) to support the learning platform for primary and secondary education; the Madrasati platform of Saudi Arabia

to provide a comprehensive solution to facilitate distance learning processes; and the Tunisia Future Platform that is a result of consolidating various digital platforms for education.

Côte d'Ivoire, notably, has further updated the 'My school at home' platform (*Mon école à la maison*). Launched during the COVID-19 pandemic, the platform offers pre-recorded video and audio content to pre-primary, primary and secondary students across different time schedules and following the national curriculum. Hosted by a local network that can be accessed offline, the platform now includes 7,000 lesson plans and many self-correcting quizzes with new learning content being developed every day.

Digital learning encompasses more than a mere digitalization of existing practices; it also involves the development of adjusted pedagogy and relevant skillsets to meet the evolving demands of living and thriving in the new digital paradigm. In this vein, some countries have been updating their school curriculum. For instance, in Bangladesh, the new curriculum includes digital literacy and digital citizenship as a mandatory subject for all; the Republic of Moldova has made digital education a compulsory module in grades 1 to 4; and Estonia has updated its national curriculum for primary and upper secondary education, giving teachers more freedom in pedagogical choices whilst promoting digital literacy as a general competency.

3.6.3 Foster the governance of education digital transformation with policy support and cross-sectorial cooperation

A consensus emerged from the outcomes of the TES that technology should be steered to serve the purposes of education – as articulated in the 2021 *Futures of Education Report*: "Numbers without narratives, connectivity without cultural inclusion, information without empowerment, and digital technology in education without clear purposes, are not desirable."¹⁷² To this end, governments need to elaborate policy instruments that engage all education stakeholders because effective digital governance requires collaboration across sectors and disciplines to create policies that are adaptive, inclusive and forward-thinking.

From the survey responses, 56 out of 91 countries have reported actions in ‘digital regulation’ – a notable increase from the pre-Summit commitments. These positive responses show that non-binding policy instruments form the backbone for the governance of digital transformation in education. For example, Andorra adopted the Digital Strategy for Education 2022–2025, focusing on digital skills and teacher support as well as the security, accessibility, quality and eco-responsibility of digital tools in education systems; Ethiopia published the Digital Education Strategy and Implementation Plan 2023–2028 to operationalize its digital education strategy; Lithuania has developed an auxiliary measure, ‘Digital education transformation (EdTech)’; adopting a holistic approach to build digital competency, encouraging digital innovations in education and co-creating digital resources; and Montenegro has elaborated the Strategy for Digitalization of Education in Montenegro and its respective Active Plan.

As seen, some countries are showcasing proactive government policies in digital education through comprehensive national strategies. However, the integration of such policies into broader national digital transformation plans remains limited. However, two examples that stand out are Switzerland, which has adopted the Digital Switzerland Strategy that is binding for their federal administration and provides a framework for other players in the digitalization process, with one pillar being ‘training and skills’; and Zambia, which is guided by a wider National ICT Policy, highlighting the human resources and skills component to ensure ICT access and utilization at all levels of education.

Furthermore, decision-making in the digital transformation of education should be evidence-based and informed by quality educational data. A few countries have highlighted their activities to digitally collect, analyse and use educational data. For instance, in Indonesia, the Basic Data on Education system (Dapodik) serves as the main data source for education and is used for a wide range of educational programmes planning, and the United Republic of Tanzania’s updated Education and Training Policy (version 2023) has also strategized on data management at all levels of education. Issues concerning data safety have also been

evoked by some countries. Notably, the UAE has enacted a Personal Data Protection Law to safeguard the privacy of individuals’ digital information, including student data; Japan has published *Notes on the Use of Educational Data* and uses ‘Guideline for Educational Information Security Policy’ to guide the provision safety and security for educational data; and Lebanon is currently working towards aligning its educational projects and activities with the existing global practices in data protection.

3.6.4 Galvanize systematic efforts to review and reflect on the emerging trends in technologies and harness them for the benefit of education

The dynamic and ever-changing nature of digital technologies never ceases to impact the education sector. This is evidenced by the recent breakthroughs in generative artificial intelligence (AI), which poses fundamental challenges to education and research. In navigating the disruptions brought about by emerging technologies, education systems are increasingly expected to adeptly respond and steer their appropriate use, whilst protecting education as a public good amidst the stormy seas of radical societal and technological changes.

Some countries have been incorporating emerging technologies into curriculum and training programmes to better prepare students and teachers for a future shaped by these innovations – Türkiye is utilizing virtual reality to support TVET education; Singapore is implementing national projects to build AI literacy for all students; and Jordan is currently formulating the National Blended Education Strategy to address the use of AI in teaching and assessment. Meanwhile, some countries are leaning towards an emphasis on ethical guidelines for the use of emerging technologies – for example, the Republic of Korea is integrating AI into its education sector through a series of strategies and guidelines, including the Digital-Based Education Innovation Strategy and the Ethical Principles for Artificial Intelligence (AI) in Education. The rapid iteration of technology also gives rise to new skills demands that education needs to address. To this end, some countries have rolled out coding and advanced STEM programmes, including Columbia, Côte d’Ivoire, Spain and Albania.

While global efforts are underway to accelerate the digital transformation of education, reflected in the wealth of good practices gathered from the survey responses, there remains room for further initiatives, including rendering connectivity not only ubiquitous, but also meaningful, inclusive, equitable and sustainable,

both financially and environmentally; building robust governance for digital transformation in education through coherent and cross-sectorial cooperation; and asserting education sector's agency in responding to technological evolution and steering the ship towards a humanistic vision of education.

Box 6 Call to action: enhancing access to quality public digital learning for all

The TES Call to Action asserts that three 'keys' are required to unlock the power of digital learning: content, capacity and connectivity. The **content key** demands high quality, curriculum-relevant digital teaching and learning material that is freely available to all students, learners, teachers and caregivers through digital learning. The **capacity key** demands that teachers, learners and other education stakeholders have the skills and knowledge needed to leverage digital tools for learning. And the **connectivity key** demands that all schools and individuals can benefit from the educational advantages that come with good quality and affordable internet connections. Countries made commitments to advance progress across all three 'keys' in recognition that this will orient the digital transformation towards inclusion, equity and quality, in line with the 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development and the SDGs.

Global Initiative: Gateways to Public Digital Learning

The TES process clarified that numerous international initiatives are being used to assure the connectivity key and the capacity key. The content key, however, is routinely overlooked. The UNESCO-UNICEF Gateways to Public Digital Learning Initiative seeks to rectify this. It is a global initiative to help countries cooperate and share knowledge on how to create, maintain and improve platforms that make free and high-quality digital learning content easy-to-find and easy-to-use.

The Gateways Initiative is focused on platforms because platforms help education authorities consolidate, organize and assure the quality of digital learning content. Platforms are what make content findable and usable to learners and other stakeholders, such as teachers and families. No other international initiative exists to help improve the accessibility, quality, usability and findability of digital education content and ensure it is a public good.

The Gateways Initiative has three main components:

- The first component maps and describes existing public learning platforms to showcase the innovations and diversity of approaches countries are taking to support public education in online and digital environments.
- The second component shines light on good practices through knowledge exchange across national borders.
- The third component establishes norms and standards to help countries ensure the quality of public digital learning platforms.

Progress and good practices

Progress has been made through the Initiative's three main components:

- **Global platform mapping:** UNESCO and UNICEF have analysed and evaluated leading digital learning platforms in 50 countries and gathered detailed information on platforms in approximately 20 other countries. Countries are asked to cooperate with UNESCO to ensure their public digital learning platforms are accurately identified, characterized and described on the Gateway Map, which will be shared publicly at UNESCO's Digital Learning Week conference in September 2024. The TES follow-up survey revealed that a strong majority of countries (nearly 80%) have a public digital learning platform.
- **Establishing communities of practice through knowledge exchange:** Countries are eager to learn from one another on how to develop, sustain and enhance high-quality public digital learning platforms. The Gateways Initiative has formed an international community of practice comprised of professionals, usually from ministries of education, who oversee major digital learning platforms in their respective countries. These experts are invited to participate in monthly 'Digital Education Dialogues' where they share ideas and strategies among peers. The April 2024 event featured a conversation with the team that built the national digital learning platform in Egypt, which shared how they sustain and improve a public digital learning platform that supports education and research for tens of millions of students and teachers. The initiative also facilitates in-person exchange through study visits

to countries with notable digital learning platforms, with the first study visit held in Cairo in May 2024, in cooperation with the Egyptian Ministry of Higher Education, to learn from Egypt's experiences in building and expanding the Egyptian Knowledge Bank (EKB), Egypt's national digital learning platform. Finally, the initiative conducts case studies on major digital learning platforms to disseminate experiences and lessons learned in specific contexts.

- **Collaborative Development of Norms and Standards:** Although countries and the international community have been formulating norms and standards for education within physical and social school settings, equivalent guidelines for bolstering public education in digital and online realms are rare and require elaboration and improvement. To bridge this gap, UNESCO and UNICEF have formed a reference group composed of 20 digital learning experts tasked with formulating quality standards for public digital learning platforms. These standards will align with broader UN initiatives on digital transformation, notably the UN Secretary-General's Roadmap for Digital Cooperation and the upcoming Global Digital Compact, an integral component of the Pact for the Future. Countries will be invited and encouraged to provide feedback on the norms and standards when they are released for review in September 2024 at UNESCO's Digital Learning Week conference and to use them when they are finalized.

The way forward

The Gateways Initiative aims to realize a future where every student, teacher and family can find the digital learning content they need to extend and enrich education. In this technology age, learners have a right to free, good-quality and curriculum-aligned educational resources in online as well as offline spaces. The Gateways Initiative works with countries to ensure school-based education is supported with digital learning platforms that are guaranteed by public authorities.

Gateways is essential because it facilitates international cooperation to help countries build and improve public digital learning platforms and content. This cooperation encompasses knowledge sharing, benchmarking, content creation, technology exchange and the identification of best practices. Countries are strongly encouraged to join the initiative if they have not already and benefit from its three components that all aim to shine a much-needed light on how to ensure that digital learning content empowers learners, teachers and families and accelerates progress towards SDG Goals, particularly SDG 4 targets.

3.7 Early childhood care and education

Early childhood care and education (ECCE) refers to a broad range of services, activities and interventions for children from birth to eight years of age, aiming to protect them from harms; promote good health and nutrition; and support their physical, cognitive and social and emotional development.¹⁷³ While different terms may be used to denote different age groups and programmatic focus,¹⁷⁴ they all recognize the critical importance of early experiences in shaping a child's future well-being and learning, and emphasize the interconnectedness of developmental domains thereby underscoring the need for a holistic and integrated approach to a child's health, development and learning.

Research evidence from different disciplines have helped boost both public awareness of the critical importance of and governmental commitment to ECCE. Neuroscience has demonstrated that a child's early experiences shape their brain architecture and can lay either a strong or a fragile foundation for his/her development, learning and behaviours.

Educational research shows that participation in ECCE programmes builds key foundational learning skills, including social and emotional skills and boosts children's school readiness, thus reducing the gaps between socio-economically advantaged and disadvantaged children. Investments in young children, particularly those from marginalized groups, yield the greatest long-term economic returns. Yet, access to quality ECCE programmes and a positive home environment is far from universal and is unequally distributed across and within countries. The average 6.6% of national and sub-national education budgets – and 2% in low-income countries – invested in pre-primary education is far below the global target of at least 10% recommended by UNICEF.¹⁷⁵

The TES reaffirmed that a truly transformative education should promote the holistic development of all learners from the earliest stages of life. The UN Secretary-General lauded early childhood education as a critical tool to prevent and reverse inter-generational inequalities and

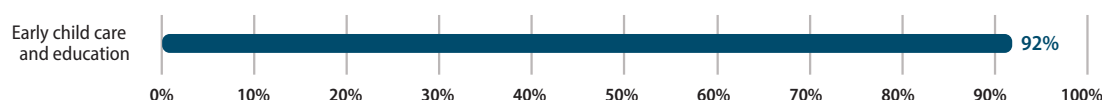
one of the most important investments to improve educational outcomes.¹⁷⁶ As the first high-level intergovernmental education event following the TES, UNESCO convened the World Conference on Early Childhood Care and Education (WCECCE) in November 2022, which adopted the Tashkent Declaration and Commitments to Action for Transforming Early Childhood Care and Education, including guiding principles and strategies under four categories: (1) equitable and inclusive quality ECCE services for all; (2) ECCE personnel; (3) innovations for advancing transformation; and (4) policy, governance and finance.¹⁷⁷

Figure 3.14 shows that 92% of countries have taken actions towards ECCE, including expanding access to enhance early childhood care and pre-primary education, boosting inclusion, equity and quality, strengthening accountability and monitoring as well as policy, governance, financing and advocacy. **Figure 3.15** shows that 41 countries or 56% of those that submitted both a national statement of commitment and a survey response did not make a specific commitment towards ECCE but still undertook actions, indicating that countries are still committed to ECCE but may not have specifically committed to the sub-theme.

3.7.1 Expand and diversify access to holistic and integrated ECCE to reach the most vulnerable

SDG Target 4.2 emphasizes the universal access to quality early childhood development, care and pre-primary education so that all girls and boys are ready for primary education. Many countries (e.g. Chile, Estonia, Germany, Jordan, Lao PDR, Norway, Oman, Saudi Arabia, Sierra Leone, Spain, United Arab Emirates, Zambia) report on their recent efforts to expand the provision of ECCE services and provide high-quality services adapted for young children from disadvantaged and vulnerable groups, including low-income families, migrants or refugees, minority groups, single-parent households or rural residents. For example, Chile and Jordan constructed or expanded ECCE centres and reallocated unused spaces to meet the growing demands. Jordan also implemented a flexible working hours programme and simplified licensing procedures for kindergarten service providers to expand the absorption capacity.

Figure 3.14 Percentage of countries that have undertaken transformative actions related to sub-themes under early childhood care and education (n=91 countries)



Data Source: Survey on Country Actions to Transform Education, 2023.

Figure 3.15 Comparison of country commitments and actions per sub-theme under early childhood care and education (n=73 countries)



Data Source: Survey on Country Actions to Transform Education, 2023.

Since 2019, Germany's federal government has been providing the federal states with additional funds to expand the access to and improve the quality of ECCE services nationwide, levelling the quality differences between federal states and reducing or eliminating service fees. Guided by the Saudi 2030 Vision, Saudi Arabia has placed high importance on expanding kindergartens, aiming to attain a 90% enrolment rate by 2030. To this end, its Ministry of Education has been constructing, renovating or expanding kindergartens, and providing subsidies to cover student fees as well as provide vouchers for children from families benefiting from social security. The Ministry also developed the *Rawdaty* online platform to reach children in the regions without kindergarten programmes to provide digital educational content.

Countries that guarantee free ECCE or pre-primary education through legislative and policy measures tend to have considerably higher enrolment rates, while making pre-primary education compulsory has an even stronger association with education participation.¹⁷⁸ Several countries have reported on recent measures to eliminate or reduce ECCE fees (e.g. Belgium, Japan, Kuwait, Mauritius, Morocco and Norway) or have made pre-primary education compulsory (Bangladesh, Belgium, Cyprus, Kuwait and Lithuania; forthcoming in the United Republic of Tanzania). Mauritius announced the policy of free pre-primary education in March 2023 to be fully implemented from January 2024. Some countries took a targeted approach by making pre-primary education compulsory to reach children in disadvantaged or vulnerable contexts. In Türkiye, pre-school education is compulsory for children with special education needs between age 37 and 66 months. In the Flemish Region of Belgium, where pre-school education participation is free and thus quasi-universal for children from age 2.5 to 6 years, the last year of pre-primary has become part of compulsory education (age 5 to 18 years) to improve the uneven and irregular participation of vulnerable groups. Similarly, while guaranteeing preschool education access for children from age 2 years, Lithuania plans to implement compulsory preschool education for children from at-risk families through the Child Guarantee initiative, starting in 2024.

Several countries referred to actions specifically to provide holistic ECCE for children with special needs and vulnerabilities to narrow the developmental gaps between the advantaged and disadvantaged children (e.g. Bangladesh, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Honduras, Lithuania, Mali, Mauritius, Montenegro, State of Palestine, Tunisia). In so doing, some countries place more importance on the involvement of communities and families and the provision of culturally and linguistically relevant services. In Ecuador, early childhood teachers conduct community or home visits for young children aged 3-4 years – in addition to centre-based programmes – to promote integrated, personalized development support through family involvement. Bangladesh developed pre-primary textbooks for students from ethnic minority groups, while providing ECCE to forcibly displaced children from Myanmar in their own language. In Montenegro, preschool education attendance of Roma children and children with disabilities increased through specific teacher capacity strengthening and the introduction of assistive technologies.

3.7.2 Improve the quality of ECCE curricula and pedagogy

As foundations for future learning, living and well-being, ECCE is expected to not only prepare children for primary education, but also help them develop and practice skills, values and attitudes to live harmoniously and respectfully as members of society and as global citizens. ECCE curricula and pedagogy should therefore build on the latest scientific evidence and “local knowledge to develop child-centred, play-based, fully inclusive, and environmentally and gender transformative learning approaches that affirm multilingual education and the promotion of mother tongue language of instruction.”¹⁷⁹ In effect, many countries have revised their ECCE curricula with a view to providing a unified national curricular framework and standards with pedagogical approaches (e.g. Albania, Japan, Jordan, Lithuania, Mauritius, Nicaragua, Republic of Korea, Saudi Arabia, Singapore, United Arab Emirates). For example, the Republic of Korea revised the standardized common curriculum (the Nuri Curriculum) in 2019 to incorporate child-centred and play-based approaches and provide a strong focus on the transition from ECCE

to primary school with pilot projects implemented since 2022. Singapore's Nurturing Early Learners Framework was revised in 2022 to provide updated guidelines for quality teaching and learning with a stronger emphasis on developing children's values, social and emotional competencies and learning dispositions. Revised pre-primary curricula and accompanying pedagogical tools are also to be implemented in Jordan and Mauritius in 2024.

Several countries have undertaken actions to align pre-primary curricula and pedagogy with those of primary education and facilitate school transition (e.g. Argentina, Bangladesh, Côte d'Ivoire, Estonia, France, Netherlands, Republic of Korea, Tunisia). Indonesia has launched a programme, *Transisi PAUD-SD yang menyenangkan* (joyful early childhood-primary education transition), to shift from the traditional focus on foundational literacy and numeracy skills, which primary schools often test for when accepting new students. The programme aims to raise awareness on the importance of children's broader, holistic development and play-based learning; eliminate the primary entry tests; and provide a 10-day introductory period for new entrants to primary school. As part of the Primary Education Development Programmes, Bangladesh introduced pre-primary education in nationalized primary schools and created one pre-primary teacher post per school, totalling 26,000 teacher posts. The country has piloted a two-year pre-primary education with a curriculum and materials to be scaled up from 2024.

3.7.3 Empower ECCE educators and caregivers to serve as a transformative force

Teachers are the backbone of all good education systems.¹⁸⁰ The TES called for fundamental change in how societies value teachers and how teachers approach and fulfil their roles. Well-trained, qualified, motivated and well-supported ECCE personnel is the critical element of quality ECCE provision as the quality of child-educator interactions is one of the most important predictors of young children's learning and development outcomes.¹⁸¹ Despite the complexity and high levels of skills demanded, ECCE educators and caregivers usually face multiple challenges, including low professional recognition,

inadequate working conditions and remuneration, and insufficient training and professional development opportunities.

Several countries (e.g. Albania, France, Lithuania, Mali, Montenegro, Morocco, Saudi Arabia, Singapore, State of Palestine, Uzbekistan, Zambia) highlighted their efforts to strengthen their ECCE workforce through training and continuous professional development, using revised ECCE curricula or teacher training curricula or standards. Some countries did so while improving their working conditions and remuneration (e.g. Armenia, Mauritius). As part of its education reform roadmap for 2022-2026, Morocco introduced a certificate training programme for preschool teachers, with nearly 9,000 teachers trained in 2022-2023, including 5,000 new recruits. Germany's federal programme 'Skilled Labour Initiative: Attracting young talent, retaining professionals in early education' supported federal states to recruit and retain more ECCE professionals, make training more practice-oriented and provide career development opportunities for experienced professionals. Mali implements training for community-based early childhood educators (*mères éducatrices*) to improve their teaching practices. Lithuania adopted the new preschool education curricular guidelines in September 2023 and continues to strengthen the qualifications of pedagogues in curriculum implementation and child assessment. Moreover, the country will embark on a new initiative in 2024 to create a network for ECCE practitioners and leaders for peer learning and capacity development.

On the other hand, few countries reported recent actions and changes made in terms of updating or upgrading qualifications or competency frameworks to support the development of a quality ECCE workforce. One standout was the Government of Zambia that raised the minimum qualification of early childhood education teachers from certificate to diploma, Bachelor's, Master's and PhD programmes in early childhood education. Another example is Belgium's French Community whose government approved the accreditation of a new Bachelor's degree programme in ECCE; nine institutions have obtained this accreditation and several of them opened the first year this programme was launched in September 2023.

3.7.4 Increase investment, improve governance and strengthen monitoring and assessment

The Tashkent Declaration calls for “a whole-of-government, multi-sectoral and integrated approach to ECCE policy development, provision and coordination” and commits Member States to ensure further improvements of policy and legal frameworks to guarantee the right of every child to inclusive, quality care and education with emphasis on equity, inclusion and gender equality.¹⁸² As signatories to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, several countries (e.g. Andorra, Bangladesh, Cuba, Kuwait, Spain) reaffirm their commitment and legal obligations to protect young children’s rights to health, education and well-being as stipulated in their constitutions and other legal frameworks. A number of countries (Germany, Malawi, Namibia, Nicaragua, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, South Sudan, Togo) also refer to the existence or recent development of national ECCE policies that are holistic in nature.

The Tashkent Declaration also calls for new measures to increase funding for ECCE through increased public expenditures and well-regulated partnerships.¹⁸³ The survey did not shed light on new funding measures, but many countries did underscore the importance they give to holistic ECCE and its investment, which is indirectly evidenced by the policy measures undertaken (i.e. free provision, coverage expansion, targeted equity-oriented programmes, workforce development) which require increased resources. Some countries mention the contributions of donors and partners (e.g. Sierra Leone, Jordan, Uzbekistan) that enabled ECCE expansion and quality improvement.

With international experience revealing the difficulties of implementing effective ECCE policies,¹⁸⁴ some countries moved forward by developing ECCE strategies or implementation plans (e.g. China’s Pre-School Education Action Plan, France’s nursery education plan 2022-2023, Nepal’s National Strategy for Early Childhood Development 2021-2030 and Norway’s National Kindergarten Strategy 2023-2030). Others included ECCE in broader national development or education strategies or plans (e.g. Colombia’s

National Development Plan, the Estonian Education Strategy 2021-2035 and Morocco’s education reform roadmap for 2022-2026).

Governance is critical to the coherence of countries’ ECCE systems not only because the multi-dimensional nature of ECCE calls for the involvement of diverse sectors, institutions and actors, but ECCE services are provided by diverse private bodies and without good governance, ECCE services can result in fragmentation, uneven quality, gaps and overlapping services. Some countries highlighted their efforts to improve multisectoral/multi-ministerial collaboration and coordination as well as engagement of diverse actors, such as families, communities, civil society organizations and the private sector, in developing and delivering holistic ECCE services (Cuba, Ethiopia, Jordan, Mauritius, Oman, Suriname, Timor-Leste, Uzbekistan). Surprisingly, few countries mentioned the regulation of ECCE centres and programmes to ensure adequate standards and quality of care and education provided by diverse private actors. Bahrain, however, highlighted this as a cornerstone of its guidelines for independent ECCE institutions to follow when setting up and running ECCE centres and providing effective ECCE services.

Strong leadership and a multisectoral approach – be it via a lead ministry, a supra-ministerial office or an autonomous early childhood agency – is vital. Under the leadership of the Office of the Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Education, Chile has undertaken a major efficiency measure to geolocate and match existing ECCE offers (i.e. unutilized places within ECCE centres across different state-funded ECCE service providers) and demands (i.e. children on waiting lists).

This tool also informed the National Plan to Increase the Coverage of Early Childhood Education (August 2023) and helped identify the best strategic locations to build or refurbish ECCE units and centres. Timor-Leste’s ECCE sector is led by the Office of the Vice Prime Minister, which raises its profile and ensures an integrated approach from all relevant ministries. Singapore’s Early Childhood Development Agency is a regulatory authority for the entire early childhood sector for learners under the age of seven that sets and oversees the quality

standards for ECCE, while setting standards for, facilitating and overseeing the training and professional development of early childhood professionals.

Monitoring and evaluation of ECCE policy and programmes is critical for evidence-based policy decisions. Rigorous data collection and disaggregation by gender and other characteristics is essential to understand who is participating in and learning through ECCE and who is not. For example, Bangladesh conducts an Annual Primary School Census to closely monitor the progress and

retention of children in pre-primary education, while Bosnia and Herzegovina initiated an evaluation of the strategic approaches defined in the Platform for the Development of Preschool Education 2017-2022 to inform the measures to improve the inclusion of children in disadvantaged situations (e.g. rural residence, low family income) along with those with disabilities and special needs. In terms of using evidence for policy and planning, Lebanon is currently developing a costed ECCE action plan until 2030 based on the survey, demographic and financial data collected from both public and private schools to improve the provision and the quality of services.

3.8 Higher education and research

Higher education is an integral part of the SDG 4 Education 2030 agenda, which aims to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education from a lifelong learning perspective. SDG Target 4.3 requires equal access for all to affordable quality technical, vocational and tertiary education, including university and Target 4.b demands a substantial expansion of scholarships made available for developing countries to access higher education. SDG Target 4.4 highlights the outputs of higher education, including the development of skills for employment and entrepreneurship. Additionally, higher education institutions play a key role in research and community engagement, which support and enable the achievement of other SDGs. The sustainable financing of public higher education provision is thus critical for safeguarding the equitable access to and quality enhancement of higher learning. Higher education can contribute to the global agenda in several ways, including preparing an effective skilled labour force as well as creating, disseminating and applying knowledge to further professional development and community engagement.¹⁸⁵ The latter – the research function of higher education – can serve as the innovation engine, contributing to the sustainable socio-economic development of a country.

Higher education systems have undergone dramatic changes over recent decades, with growing enrolments, student mobility and new ways of learning and diversified providers

emerging, including private providers, distance and blended learning, international joint degrees and transnational education. These have direct implications for the delivery, recognition and quality assurance of higher education, compounded by the increasingly diverse student population that includes adult learners, working students, graduates, international students, refugees and displaced persons.¹⁸⁶ The existing challenges in higher education – unequal access, rising costs and lack of financial sustainability along with quality assurance, relevance and technological transformation and divide – were exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, exposing the systemic fragilities of higher education and research. In this context, the importance of higher education as a global public good and an integral part of the right to education throughout life was recognized and heightened; and so were the critical roles of higher education institutions for knowledge production, education and social responsibility.

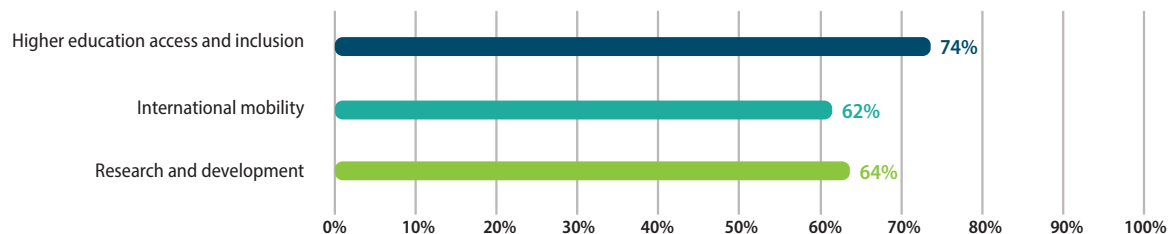
In the face of multiple global challenges, such as climate change, armed conflicts, income inequality and declining democracy, the Third UNESCO World Higher Education Conference (WHEC) held in Barcelona, Spain, in May 2022 emphasized the need to “reinvent higher education” as a basis for building a safe, more just, democratic and sustainable world and to forge a new contract for higher education – also echoed by UNESCO’s Futures of Education report. The conference culminated in the roadmap ‘Beyond

Limits' to reinvent higher education in the decade ahead with six key principles to guide higher education systems and institutions toward 2030: inclusion, equity and pluralism; academic freedom and participation of all stakeholders; inquiry, critical thinking and creativity; integrity and ethics; commitment to sustainability and social responsibility; and excellence through cooperation rather than competition.¹⁸⁷ Advocating for a more humanistic agenda for higher education, the roadmap recommends addressing major challenges, transitioning from elitism to equitable access, focusing on holistic student learning experiences, fostering interdisciplinary collaboration, adopting lifelong learning approaches, building integrated systems and embracing technologically enriched learning experiences. Moreover, the Joint Statement on Transforming Higher Education in Emergencies,¹⁸⁸ launched at the 2023 World Innovation Summit for Education in Doha, urges governments and

the international community to take a systemic approach to address the inclusivity, resilience and crisis consideration in higher education, connecting directly to the TES Call for Action (see **Box 3**).

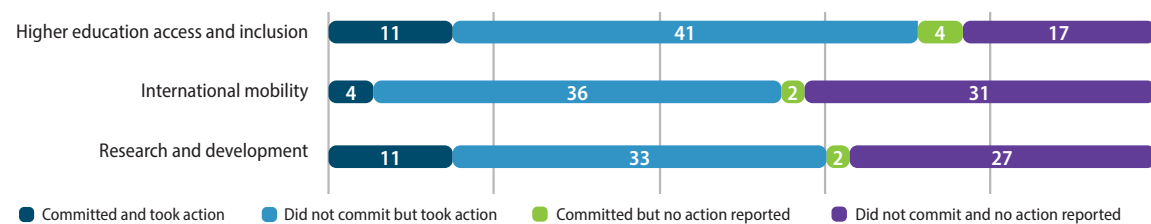
Figure 3.16 shows that 74% of countries that participated in the survey have taken actions toward higher education access and inclusion, including measures to make higher education more accessible according to the dimensions of non-discrimination and physical and economic accessibility. As **Figure 3.17** shows, of the 73 countries that submitted both a national statement of commitment and a survey response, 41 countries or 56% are undertaking actions towards higher education access and inclusion but did not make a specific commitment towards this sub-theme. This highlights once again that countries were still undertaking action even when they did not commit to the theme.

Figure 3.16 Percentage of countries that have undertaken transformative actions related to sub-themes under higher education and research (n=91 countries)



Data Source: Survey on Country Actions to Transform Education, 2023.

Figure 3.17 Comparison of country commitments and actions per sub-theme under higher education (n=73 countries)



Data Source: Survey on Country Actions to Transform Education, 2023.

3.8.1 Allocate adequate resources to higher education to ensure equitable access to inclusive quality higher education

Sufficient and equitable resource allocation is imperative to ensuring the quality of higher education and research. The available resources, both financial and human resources, are key and conditional to ensure the teaching, learning and research capacity and quality. Although the latest data from the World Bank indicates that overall government expenditure on tertiary education has risen by approximately 45% from 2000 to 2020, driven by increased enrolment and participation, the investment on a per-capita basis has not shown similar growth and has even stagnated or decreased among many of the world's poorest and most marginalized, especially low-income countries. This stagnation or decrease in per-capita investment poses significant challenges. While total expenditure has increased, the allocation per student has not kept pace with the rising student population, leading to issues such as overcrowded classrooms, inadequate educational materials and underpaid academic staff. This disparity underscores the urgent need for targeted policies and international support to ensure equitable and adequate funding for higher education in low-income countries.¹⁸⁹

Regarding further commitment to investing in higher education, the survey results have revealed a few substantial changes. Argentina's Higher Education Virtualization Plan (VES Plan 2020-2023), for instance, totals \$7,225,113,167 ARS (approximately USD 7,754,310) more investments across 248 projects in the field. It provides important resources for potential qualitative and quantitative improvements in the field of higher education. Progressive commitment was also made by other countries. El Salvador's National Higher Education Policy (PES) has significantly enhanced access to higher education through national and international scholarships, funding for language studies and a USD 37,000 government fund allocation to support higher education initiatives. The policy also promotes internationalization by fostering knowledge exchange as well as the mobility of academics, students and researchers. The Dominican Republic is progressively increasing

its R&D investment to reach 1.5% of GDP by 2025. Other countries have also committed to prioritizing higher education funding, including Estonia, which has allocated a one-time 10 million euro addition in 2023 along with an annual increase of funding in 15% increments for the past four years. In addition, the government has also applied relevant policies to accommodate student loan mechanisms at the individual level, increasing equitable access opportunities for all. The Netherlands has also planned to increase its finances in higher education through the Research and Science Fund (5 billion euros for ten years) and the structural budget for advanced programmes and research (700 million euros annually). Similarly, Armenia legislates financial support for educational institutions and student learning.

Monetary contribution remains one of the vital resources required for any further development in higher education, but a variety of other resources are also needed, such as adequate infrastructural equipment. The Government of Albania has committed to taking reasonable actions to consolidate the ICT infrastructure of the country. Hungary is adopting a fully electronic admissions process to increase the productivity of the system. In Norway, a one-billion Norwegian krone investment was promised to help boost artificial intelligence and digital technology research over five years. Meanwhile, the speed of digital development is at an all-time high, and relevant policy provisions should also be made to ensure the quality of the digital learning experience. Bahrain, for instance, is working on ensuring remote learning quality through relevant policymaking.

Advancing the inclusion agenda implies that countries need to enhance both the quality and equity aspects of higher education. According to the data from the UIS, although enrolment in higher education has more than doubled over the past two decades, the need to address equitable higher education access remains. The global enrolment ratio stands at 42%, but it is as low as 9% in sub-Saharan Africa.¹⁹⁰ While the relatively high cost of higher education persists and the affordability of higher education poses a particular concern for developing and under-developed countries, the return on

investment does not always meet expectations due to a dysfunctional labour market and depending on the level of socio-economic development in a country.

In this context, many countries have set the inclusion agenda as a prioritized action in higher education as reflected in their national strategies. For instance, Bahrain has expressed its commitment to policies that broaden higher education access, aligning with labour market demands for qualified human capital. Lithuania reported that the priorities for the development of higher education's social dimension focus on identifying underrepresented groups and implementing measures to lower barriers to entry and study success. The policy includes projects such as 'Inclusive Higher Education,' which aims to support students with disabilities, and the allocation of state-funded places for short-cycle studies and bachelor degree programmes. The Estonian government also emphasizes the importance of creating diverse and accessible learning opportunities for all at all levels. For its part, Bangladesh is working on the decentralization of its higher education system, establishing one university per district and implementing unified admission tests for public universities from 2023-24. By doing so, Bangladesh aims to increase the scale of admissions and facilitate the application process.

Regarding measures undertaken to remove the cost barriers to higher education, the survey results indicate that a scholarship mechanism is the most common solution used. For instance, the Jordanian authority offers official scholarships and loans through the Student Support Fund, while in the Dominican Republic, the National Plan for Inclusive Education focuses on scholarships for low-income students. In France, the government

has raised eligibility scales for student grants, benefiting an additional 35,000 middle-class students. A few countries reported on scholarship opportunities for international students. Norway, for instance, proposes a scholarship scheme for foreign students, while the Republic of Korea also expanded its Global Korea Scholarship programme. The United Arab Emirates (UAE) offers scholarships to both national and international students, fostering a diverse higher education environment. On the other hand, Colombia is expanding coverage and implementing a free education policy, aiming to increase higher education access from 53% to 62%. Mauritius also abolished tuition fees, enhancing equity in accessing higher education.

In addition to the expansion of access to higher education and the provision of financial support, some countries have been working actively on gender equality in higher education. In countries including Chile and Mauritius, concrete incentives aim to increase female learners' enrolment in technology areas, with additional spots opened for women in STEM careers. Additionally, under the Fourth National Plan for Equality between Women and Men 2018-2030, Chile established targets to enhance female participation in STEM fields. A notable measure is the introduction of the 'More Women Scientists' (+MC) programme that creates additional spots for women in STEM fields, aiming to boost their enrolment. Other inclusion/equity measures include Cuba's policies to ensure the inclusion of students with disabilities in higher education and Lithuania's investment of 9.9 million euros in the 'Inclusive Higher Education' initiative that aims to enhance accessibility and academic success for students with disabilities, exemplifying a dedicated effort to integrate inclusivity at the core of its educational strategy.

3.8.2 Promote internationalization, academic recognition and mobility in higher education

While the inclusion agenda needs to be advanced at the country level, the inclusive aspect of the internationalization of higher education also requires further concrete actions. Today, out of 254 million students worldwide, 6.4 million are studying abroad, up from 2 million in 2000. More than half of the 6.4 million are studying outside their region.¹⁹¹ In November 2019, the Global Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education was adopted by the 40th session of the UNESCO General Conference. The Global Convention entered into force in March 2023 and establishes universal principles for fair, transparent and non-discriminatory recognition of higher education qualifications that give access to higher education, offering avenues for further study and employment. As of April 2024, 28 countries are States Parties to the Global Convention. It is implemented in complementarity with the five second-generation regional recognition conventions, which continue to promote academic recognition, mobility and inter-university cooperation within their respective regions.

At the regional level, European countries are actively pursuing the regionalization of higher education. For instance, Andorra's Law 14/2018 aligns its policies with the Bologna process, promoting student and teacher mobility and enhancing the coherence of higher education systems in Europe. Albania reports ongoing efforts to internationalize its system, while Cyprus also acknowledges the impact of regionalization on its higher education system. Monaco – like Andorra and Hungary – is one of the 56 States Parties to the Lisbon Convention for the European region and is implementing a national qualification framework and promoting the diploma supplement within its higher education institutions.

The Government of Hungary is actively promoting and strengthening higher education mobility through bilateral and multilateral recognition agreements, and is already a State Party to both the Global Convention and the Lisbon Convention for the European region. Indonesia's Merdeka

Belajar Kampus Merdeka (MBKM) policy promotes a student-centered approach to learning and provides opportunities for innovative experiences beyond their majors, fostering creativity and independence. Bahrain has taken significant steps to support internal student mobility and enhance national accreditation standards. Other countries, such as the Netherlands, are also making relevant policy adjustments to improve the quality of higher education for international students, in line with their commitments under the Lisbon Convention.

Other policies that reflect the internationalization of higher education include the United Republic of Tanzania's 2014 Education and Training Policy (Version 2023). This policy highlights the importance of strengthening regional and international cooperation, emphasizing international mobility in higher education. For the East Africa region, the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) has served as a key driving force for the regionalization of higher education, on recognition and other relevant activities. The UAE government has attracted prestigious foreign universities, such as NYU, Heriot-Watt University, the University of Wollongong and the Rochester Institute of Technology, to establish branch campuses in Dubai, offering students opportunities for international exposure and to obtain a high-quality education.

3.8.3 Provide adequate funding for research and promote exchanges and cooperation

Research is one of the key roles and contributions of higher education institutions and constitutes a strong link to the social economic development of a country. In most countries, the research component is an inter-ministerial matter that is cross-disciplinary in nature. Policy recommendations worldwide emphasize the need for strengthened cross-disciplinary and cross-border collaborations in research. However, research funding has increasingly become an alarming issue due to austerity measures and other reasons. Public research funding as a total percentage of the GDP has been stagnating in most countries and further evidence suggests that the existing funding gap is large. The world average level of investment in R&D

was 2.71% in 2021¹⁹², and according to the 2021 *UNESCO Science Report*, 4 out of 5 countries devote less than 1% of their GDP to research and development.¹⁹³ In other words, further efforts will need to be made globally to strengthen R&D development.

To maintain the core function and the quality of research, sufficient resources must be allocated to this end. Many countries are indeed taking steps in this direction, including through fostering enabling and collaborative environments. In Albania, the National Agency for Scientific Research and Innovation is actively involved in projects aimed at enhancing its institutional capacity. The Government of Bangladesh has established the Bangladesh Research and Education Network (BdREN) to enhance technical skills in the domain of research and education, connecting 34 government, 8 private and 2 international universities; 12 medical colleges; 10 research institutions; and 3 government agencies. In France, the government has initiated a substantial increase in private sector-sponsored PhD-level research through the CIFRE programme, aiming for 2,150 annual Cifre theses by 2027. The first budget strengthened by the French research programming law in 2021 amounted to 63.3 million euro for 1,550 Cifre positions.

The CRES+5 conference in Brazil highlighted the importance of higher education as a

universal human right and a public social good. It underscored the need to resist its commodification and privatization. The conference emphasized the crucial importance of higher education in the pursuit of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), promoting the need for integrated policies that align educational strategies with these global objectives. In Norway, the Panorama Strategy (2021-2027) was set to guide its funding programmes for higher education and research cooperation, providing more effective coordination and research. The UAE is committed to investing in research institutions and centres of excellence in the field of research, raising the quality of its research agenda as well as its innovative dimension. The Republic of Korea has also been actively engaging in collaboration with global educational and research institutions to advance higher education through global collaborations, while its investment in the Global Korea Scholarship (GKS) programme and collaborative research initiatives fosters a culture of research and innovation. Uzbekistan's Science and Innovation Council has also contributed financial support to numerous scientific projects, including 141 international joint projects, totalling 153.88 billion Uzbekistani Som in value. Capacity development could also be made through strengthened international and regional collaboration. The State of Palestine, for instance, has set the objective to build research skills through strengthened international collaboration.

3.9 COVID-19 recovery

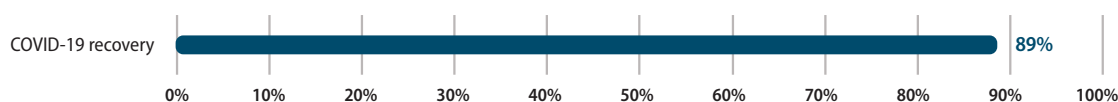
The COVID-19 pandemic has underscored the urgent need for transformative changes in national education systems within global education systems to tackle societal and educational inequalities and fundamentally rethink learning content and delivery to meet the needs of every learner. The road to recovery entailed the urgent need and the unique opportunity to create more effective and efficient educational systems by mitigating the pandemic's impact on student's mental health and well-being and recovering learning losses and developmental delays. The post-pandemic transformation should aim at closing learning loss and gaps, closing the digital divide, strengthening teacher support, promoting lifelong learning and sustainable development, and ensuring that adequate funding and governance are in place to support these endeavours.¹⁹⁴

The COVID-19 pandemic has had an unprecedented impact on education systems globally. It brought to light the inequalities around the world based on gender, race, ethnicity and socio-economic status as these inequalities were exacerbated due to unequal access to information, resources and support systems. The pandemic highlighted new educational challenges and opportunities for growth with the concerted push to develop education systems

that are more inclusive, effective, resilient and sustainable. This entails a holistic approach that spans the assessment of student needs, curriculum adjustments, improvements in instructional efficiency and a focus on psycho-social well-being.¹⁹⁵ Addressing students' academic and emotional needs is paramount, as is prioritizing strategic funding to support recovery and transformation efforts. Ensuring that education systems not only rebound but also evolve to meet future challenges is critical to prepare learners for the workforce and foster global economic growth. This recovery period underscores the importance of documenting lessons learned from the COVID-19 pandemic to build more resilient education systems.

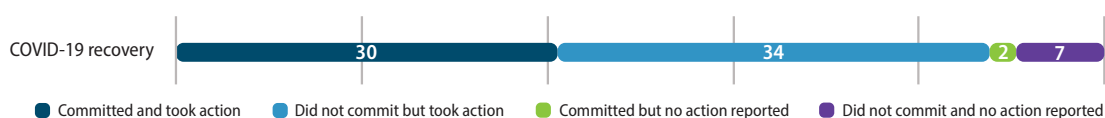
Figure 3.18 shows that 89% of countries have taken actions towards COVID-19 recovery. Figure 3.19 shows that of the 73 countries that submitted both a national statement of commitment and a survey response, 47% (34 countries) did not make a specific commitment toward COVID-19 recovery but still took concrete actions, indicating that while countries may not have committed explicitly to COVID-19 recovery, many have undertaken actions. This could be partly because many COVID-19 recovery plans are already in place.

Figure 3.18 Percentage of countries that have undertaken transformative actions related to sub-themes under COVID-19 recovery (n=91 countries)



Data Source: Survey on Country Actions to Transform Education, 2023.

Figure 3.19 Comparison of country commitments and actions per sub-theme under COVID-19 recovery (n=73 countries)



Data Source: Survey on Country Actions to Transform Education, 2023.

3.9.1 Build resilient education systems that ensure safe, continuous learning

UNESCO COVID-19 education response: Building back resilient provides a comprehensive framework to enhance education systems' resilience in the face of health emergencies and pandemics. It identifies resilience as a crucial attribute that enables learners, families, communities and systems to effectively withstand, adapt to and recover from crises, ensuring the continuity and quality of education.¹⁹⁶ The report underscores the importance of a multi-faceted approach that encompasses prevention, preparedness and response strategies to ensure education's continuity, safety and equity during disruptions. Strategies for resilience include developing crisis management protocols, integrating health education into curriculums, ensuring equitable access to learning, leveraging technology for remote education, offering mental health support, providing teacher training on resilience and adopting a pedagogical approach to prepare students for adverse circumstances. Community engagement and inter-sectoral cooperation are also highlighted as essential for a unified response to emergencies, alongside the need to learn from experiences to improve future crisis responses. Building resilient education systems necessitates a comprehensive approach that addresses immediate disruptions and strengthens long-term preparedness and adaptability. By fostering collaboration across sectors and learning from past crises, education systems can better prepare for future challenges, ensuring the safety, equity and quality of education for all learners in any circumstances.¹⁹⁷

Resilient education systems that can withstand health emergencies require a structured approach focused on preventive measures, preparedness activities and response actions.¹⁹⁸ Preventive measures aim to minimize the impact of pandemics by creating a safe school environment, promoting hygiene education and implementing 'syndromic surveillance' through tracking absenteeism. Preparedness activities should emphasize the importance of conducting health assessments to identify at-risk individuals, collaborating with health authorities to ensure schools can offer safe learning environments and planning for the use of schools as

shelters or emergency centres.¹⁹⁹ Preparedness also includes investing in infrastructure and resources to enhance school safety, supporting the mental health of students and staff and ensuring that teachers are prepared to continue education remotely if needed. These measures are designed to enable the education sector to effectively anticipate, respond to and recover from health and other emergencies, ensuring the continuity of education through diverse delivery modes and mitigating the adverse impacts of such crises.²⁰⁰

The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the rapid digital transformation of education. Perhaps one of the most prominent developments from the COVID-19 pandemic are the lessons learned in how technologies can be utilized to support learning. Countries are also relying on and investing in digital education and technologies as a measure to ensure continuous learning in the face of crises. Lithuania reported that its Ministry of Education, Science and Sports is investing European Union funds to reform education and science. The 'New Generation Lithuania' Economic Recovery and Resilience plan initiatives and the EU Funds Investment Program are directing over 1.1 billion euros into projects, ranging from the 'Millennium Schools' programme to digital education and science innovation. This strategic funding aims to modernize Lithuania's educational landscape and boost its scientific research and innovation capabilities. Albania reported focusing on enhancing the integration of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in education by training over 7,000 teachers and leaders in using online platforms, digital tools and inclusive teaching methods during the COVID-19 pandemic. This initiative includes developing digital content across curricula and creating video tutorials to support the implementation of programming languages and algorithms in teaching. Several other countries (Bahrain, Bangladesh, Belgium, Chile, Cuba, Cyprus, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Germany, Lao PDR, Latvia, Lebanon, Malaysia, Mauritius, Namibia, Nepal, Pakistan, Republic of Korea, Saint Vincent & the Grenadines, Saudi Arabia, Senegal, Singapore, Timor-Leste, Togo, United Arab Emirates, Uruguay and Zambia) also specifically reported on COVID-19 recovery and resilience plans.

Students must stay in school to transform education and recover learning losses from the COVID-19 pandemic. Schools are uniquely situated to support the holistic growth of a child, which encompasses their academic, social and physical health and well-being, to prepare them for the future. This growth cannot happen if learners are not in school. However, many students did not return to the classroom after the COVID-19 pandemic.²⁰¹ It is imperative to take the lessons from this experience and develop strategies to enhance the efficiency of education systems to keep learners in school during potential future emergencies. Kazakhstan reports acting operatively and effectively to ensure the continuity of learning through digital learning, strengthening the education system, supporting the modernization of teaching, updating curricula, and strengthening leadership at the school and district levels to ensure quality control. Lao People's Democratic Republic is prioritizing addressing school dropouts to ensure that children go to and remain in school to complete an entire cycle of quality education through five key action areas as outlined in the RAPID Learning Recovery Framework. The Dominican Republic implemented an extended day programme that adds two more hours of blended class with artistic and sports activities. Through their Educational Continuity and Learning Recovery Plan, the leadership of the Ministry of Education of the Dominican Republic (MINERD), UNICEF, NGOs and the local government saw a reduction of school dropouts by 20% compared to 2020 and have seen improvements in language and mathematics learning. Latvia provides students who are at higher risk of dropping out with personal consultation to help them manage the negative impacts of remote education on students' mental health, learning difficulties, depression and other psycho-social factors.

3.9.2 Adapt and build on the innovations introduced in response to the COVID-19 pandemic to advance educational equity and quality

Education transformation should leverage and build on the innovations and lessons learned from the COVID-19 response and recovery efforts.

By reviewing and revising pre-pandemic policies that no longer serve the future educational landscape, new innovative approaches can be implemented to move towards more sustainable futures.²⁰² One of the greatest developments from the pandemic is remote learning methods and tools, particularly for digital learning, which at the same time elucidated the digital gaps and the need to enhance teachers' and learners' digital skills for effective teaching and learning. Many countries (e.g. Albania, Bahrain, Bangladesh, China, Ecuador, El Salvador, Estonia, Ethiopia, France, Germany, Indonesia, Japan, Kyrgyzstan, Lithuania, Madagascar, Nigeria, Saudi Arabia, Senegal, United Arab Emirates and Zambia) reported actions on digital learning capacities in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Countries are focused on expanding internet connectivity to schools and learners, providing learners with a variety of devices to access online learning and ensuring content is relevant and of good quality. These efforts are working towards bridging the digital divide and ensuring educational continuity in future crises. In 2020, UNICEF recognized Kyrgyzstan's significant strides in providing access to remote learning.²⁰³ The pandemic led to Kyrgyzstan's acceleration of digitalization processes in education and the transition of the educational process to a digital format. Its Ministry of Education created a special educational portal where all video lessons were provided as well as links to all other educational platforms, electronic libraries and electronic dictionaries, platforms for online testing and more. The innovations that Kyrgyzstan made in response to the pandemic has helped to strengthen the future capacity for learning.

Schools can help close the learning loss gap by taking a targeted approach and focusing on foundational learning and on students who have fallen behind compared to peers.²⁰⁴ It is also critical to equip teachers with the necessary skills and support to help teach students with diverse academic and emotional learning needs.²⁰⁵ Regular assessments are needed to track progress over time. Assessing students can help target the implementation of remedial plans for students who need extra attention in certain areas.²⁰⁶ It is also critical to make learning accessible for every child and to keep them in school.²⁰⁷ Several

countries have implemented programmes to address learning loss. The Bahamas, for example, contracted a company to assess the amount of learning loss to provide recommended interventions to mitigate the loss and bridge the gaps. The assessment is completed online and reports can also be accessed virtually. The assessment is done in real-time and teachers can access the results immediately to begin tailoring programmes. In Morocco, the Ministry has put in place support, reinforcement and remedial measures for pupils with learning difficulties throughout the school year to remedy learning losses due to the pandemic. Andorra reports that academically, students have recovered from the losses of the 2019-2020 school year. They have continued to support work with specialized staff to personalize learning. Türkiye has implemented courses over the summer months, created an e-tracking system to monitor learning progress in schools after the COVID-19 pandemic, and increased education funding significantly over the past three years. The Institute of Education of the Republic of Azerbaijan (ARTI) implemented a mentoring programme to provide extra support to students and for the professional development of teachers. Jordan implemented the production of television lessons to broadcast on the Darsak platform and is working on filming classes on foundational learning, Arabic, English, mathematics and science.

3.9.3 Sustain and strengthen mental health and psycho-social support programmes for learners' and educational personnel's well-being and for future crises

The COVID-19 pandemic has shed light on the importance of mental health and psycho-social well-being for not only students but all individuals. Maintaining mental health and well-being are critical for learners to recover from the pandemic-induced learning disruptions and foster their future holistic learning and development. Education systems should also recognize mental health and well-being initiatives as foundational elements that should be embedded within educational systems. Not only should education systems recognize the psychological

impact of the pandemic on students, but mental health programming and support needs to be integrated into instruction to support the recovery process.²⁰⁸ The COVID-19 pandemic has made it clear that mental health and well-being are critical to a learner's overall health and can help boost the health, social connectedness and productivity of students.²⁰⁹ The extent of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on mental health and social development is not yet fully known, but the pandemic has clearly revealed the importance of schools in mitigating the impact and setting up learners for future success. Well-being programmes can help facilitate the holistic development and learning of students.²¹⁰ Supporting both students' and school staff's mental health is critical for transformation. When staff are supported, they can better support the children they serve, which creates the building blocks for lasting education transformation. Some countries (Andorra, Azerbaijan, Belgium, Chile, Cuba, Ecuador, Estonia, Germany, Japan, Jordan, Latvia, Senegal, Türkiye, Republic of Korea, United Arab Emirates) reported on initiatives to support the psycho-social health and well-being of teachers and/or students. Many of the initiatives started in response to the COVID-19 pandemic have been shown to have lasting transformational power if learners' psycho-social health and well-being continue to be supported and uplifted.

The Republic of Korea deployed mental health experts into schools, offering counselling sessions for students, faculty and parents. The Wee Project continued holistic assessments, counselling and healing programmes. Chile's COVID-19 recovery plan is devoted to improving mental health, and addresses social and emotional aspects, coexistence and gender equity to establish spaces of protection and social and emotional well-being. Belgium added additional school periods to provide reinforced and targeted pedagogical, educational and psycho-social support to students in ordinary and specialized primary and secondary education. This extra support is provided in conjunction with the work already being carried out in the classroom. Estonia reported initiatives put in place to help protect and support teaching staff's mental health.

3.10 Youth engagement

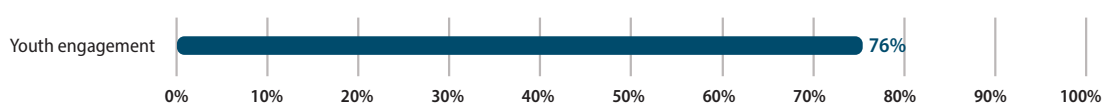
The projected global youth population, set to reach 1.3 billion by 2030, presents a significant opportunity to develop education systems that can meet the challenges of ongoing and emerging political, economic, environmental, health and social crises. However, realizing this potential requires the meaningful engagement of youth in policy and decision-making processes. What does *meaningfully* engaging youth mean? As defined by the UN, the core principles are that it is rights-based, safe, institutionally mandated, designated, resourced, transparent, accessible, voluntary, informative, reciprocally accountable, diverse, inclusive and recognizes youth as real partners.²¹¹ Youth participation requires opportunities and spaces where young people can express their views and opinions but also opportunities for decision makers to listen to those views and opinions and to take them into account.²¹²

In parallel to the health, education, economic and social crises brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic, there has also been a crisis of youth disengagement fuelled by limited educational opportunities, feelings of exclusion, apathy and

anxiety in the face of growing inequity, latent violence and open conflicts. It is also influenced by a distrust in government and institutions, political disillusionment and a perception of not being included in decision-making processes on issues of relevance.

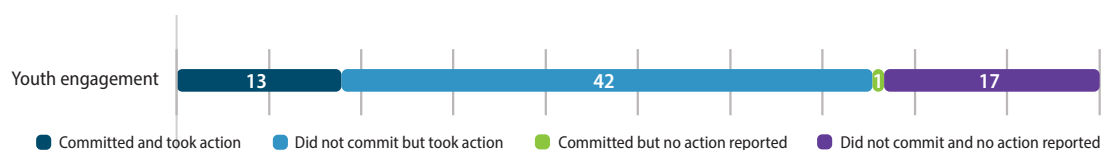
‘Nothing about us, without us’ has become the collective mantra of a generation. Policies, programmes and activities need to be developed with youth, rather than only for youth. Yet, despite progress, there continues to be frustration among young people, who often feel that they are used as tokens on the international stage (‘youth-washing’) and their ideas, when voiced, are not taken seriously. At the same time, governments may also not understand the value of engaging youth, viewing the time and cost investment as being too high, particularly with competing priorities combined with limited time and financial resources. Hart’s Ladder of Participation demonstrates that youth participation and engagement can take many forms – from manipulation and tokenism (essentially giving *the appearance* of participation) – to actual shared decision-making with adults.²¹³

Figure 3.20 Percentage of countries that have undertaken transformative actions related to sub-themes under youth engagement (n=91 countries)



Data Source: Survey on Country Actions to Transform Education, 2023.

Figure 3.21 Comparison of country commitments and actions per sub-theme under youth engagement (n=73 countries)



Data Source: Survey on Country Actions to Transform Education, 2023.

The ladder includes 8 rungs describing different levels of youth participation, starting at the lowest level: (i) manipulation; (ii) decoration; (iii) tokenism; (iv) assigned, but informed; (v) consulted and informed; (vi) adult initiated shared decisions with youth; (vii) youth initiated and directed; and (viii) youth initiated shared decisions with adults.²¹⁴ A description of each of these levels is included in the Notes.²¹⁵ The model views participation as a dynamic process. Finding the right level of participation is context-based – thus, a higher level does not always equate to better youth engagement. Different circumstances may require different levels of participation. The model demonstrates that participation can shift, be negotiated and occurs along a continuum. This is important as it illustrates the potential for change and progress. Thus, countries who are currently engaging youth in superficial ways within adult-driven activities can take stock and reverse course to adopt ways that are more empowering and genuinely consider the perspectives, voice and ideas of young people.

Involving youth as partners in making decisions that affect them “increases the likelihood that the decisions will be accepted, adopted, and become part of their everyday lives.”²¹⁶ Studies have shown that involving youth, particularly those from marginalized communities, in decisions leads to positive development, increased motivation and a sense of ownership.²¹⁷ Moreover, when youth and students participate in shaping policies, curriculum development and school governance, they develop valuable skills, including critical thinking, problem-solving and communication. As educational institutions increasingly recognize the value of youth involvement, the transformative potential of including youth in shaping their own educational journey is realized.

Figure 3.20 indicates that 76% of countries have initiated actions to engage youth. This includes commitments to incorporate youth and student leaders, particularly from vulnerable and marginalized communities, into decision-making bodies. As **Figure 3.21** shows, out of the 73 countries that submitted both a national statement of commitment and a survey response, 58% (42 countries) did not explicitly commit to youth engagement but still acted to achieve this.

3.10.1 Entrench youth engagement in the legal framework to ensure it withstands political shifts

Placing youth engagement within a country’s legal frameworks, particularly its constitution, helps establish a stable, fair and predictable foundation that also protects young people’s fundamental rights and freedoms. It is a powerful way to safeguard against the shifting tides of ideology, change in governmental priorities and societal trends. Beyond providing a tool for young people to hold their leaders to account and a mechanism for checks and balances, it also enhances a country’s credibility and reputation by fostering trust with all its constituents – youth citizenry especially. Albania, Belgium (Flemish Community of Belgium), Germany, Sierra Leone and Spain all report placing youth engagement in their legal framework.

Belgium has constitutional rules that require education stakeholders to be consulted for each legislative measure on education through the Flemish Education Council. Two student associations (the Flemish Association of Students and the Flemish Organization of School Pupils) are members of the Council, ensuring space for structured and democratic voices. Other examples include Sierra Leone that created a youth advisory group with representatives from all 16 districts. This group has now been formally recognized in the 2023 Education Act. Moreover, the Youth Council of Spain – a platform of more than 60 youth entities – was established by law in 1983 and formed by the Youth Councils of the Autonomous Communities and state-level youth organizations. Its governing council ensures the participation of youth associations in government by encouraging young people to participate in the political, social, economic and cultural development of Spain in a global environment, as reflected in Article 48 of the Spanish Constitution. In Albania, the role of the Youth Municipal Councils (YMCs) to monitor the implementation of youth policies and services at the local level and serve as a local accountability mechanism to gather youth voices from the community as well as address issues affecting youth within the municipalities is defined in the LAW No. 75/2019 ‘FOR YOUTH’.

As of September 2023, there are 59 YMCs established in 59 municipalities out of the 61 municipalities of the country, with the remaining two municipalities having initiated the process. Similarly, in Germany, student participation is institutionalized and regulated in detail in school laws and school co-determination laws of the federal states. Although they did not report that it was entrenched in law, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Monaco, Netherlands, Norway, Pakistan, Republic of Korea, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Spain, Togo and UAE did report the establishment of youth advisory groups or councils that inform the head of state and/or ministries, demonstrating the country's commitment to ensuring youth inputs at the highest levels. In Latvia, the Youth Council is involved and actively contributes to governmental decision-making processes and dialogues as a key stakeholder, while the Republic of Korea's Youth Advisory Board plays a role in scrutinizing and suggesting enhancements to youth-related policies within the education sector. In Lithuania, youth advisory bodies, such as the Youth Affairs Councils at both the national and local levels, establish effective platforms to engender closer cooperation and coordination between youth representatives and relevant institutions. These councils assess and discuss legal acts and strategies that impact the lives of young people.

In Monaco, the Young People's Economic, Social and Environmental Council, a para-governmental organization established in 2007, makes proposals to the Princely Government. Senegal has established an institutional framework for youth participation in the process of developing, implementing and evaluating educational policies through the National Youth Council that is an interlocutor with the State, local authorities, development partners and institutions of the Republic. Finally, the UAE states that it recognizes the importance of involving young people in decision-making processes, especially when crafting policies that directly impact their education. Youth forums, councils and advisory groups have been established to ensure youth voices are heard.

3.10.2 Develop and finance a youth policy, sector plan or strategy

Youth policies²¹⁸ are essential to addressing the unique needs, challenges and aspirations of the younger population on whom the economic and social vitality of a nation hinges. A well-defined youth policy is a strategic framework that must be holistic in its approach and include education, employment, health and civic engagement. In the long term, a well-articulated and well-resourced youth policy contributes to social cohesion and economic growth, and will help societies flourish to become more vibrant and resilient.

Education is key to any youth policy as it equips young people with the knowledge and skills necessary for personal, community-wide, social and economic development. Education also contributes to social mobility that is essential to breaking cycles of inter-generational poverty. Integrating Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) into youth policy equips young people with fundamental life skills, including empathy, communication and resilience, and promotes emotional intelligence to help them navigate the complexities of a diverse and increasingly divided and unpredictable world. Moreover, education must address both current skills-labour market gaps but also focus on cultivating future-proof skills that help prepare young individuals to meet the demands of a rapidly evolving job market characterized by uncertainties and emerging roles that are yet to be defined.

Albania, Bangladesh, Estonia, Iceland, Malawi, Nepal, Pakistan, Senegal, South Sudan and Uzbekistan report having a youth policy, sector and/or youth strategy. Estonia has developed and funded a 2021-2035 Youth Sector Development Plan, with a total estimated budget of 356 million euros over three years. It is considered one of the most important state-level policies regulating youth engagement and provides a wide range of development opportunities, a sense of security and strong support for young people. Albania's 2022-2029 National Youth Strategy and its Action Plan focus on ensuring equal rights and opportunities, support and engagement for vulnerable, marginalized youth and youth most affected by poverty, violence,

maltreatment, disability and social exclusion. This strategy intends to guide Albanian youth towards further action that positively affects their future with the three main objectives of encouraging active youth participation and engagement in policy making; providing career guidance and employment; and supporting youth well-being.

Admirably, Uzbekistan has a long history of incorporating youth policies in their legal framework, such as the Law on the Basics of State Policy on Youth in 1991, refined in 2016 as 'On State Policy on Youth', which provides a framework for the implementation of youth policies. Additionally, over 110 laws and by-laws have been implemented to protect the rights of youth.

3.10.3 Ensure youth are regularly consulted on educational issues

The analysis of the survey responses reveals significant variations in how countries ensure that youth voices are heard, ranging from supporting school-level decisions to informing decision-making processes. However, what is important is that every country makes a commitment and takes steps towards incorporating youth engagement, starting by consulting youth on educational issues. Several countries report consulting youth and soliciting their feedback (e.g. Albania, Argentina, Armenia, Aruba, China, Colombia, Cuba, Cyprus, Ecuador, El Salvador, Estonia, France, Honduras, Iceland, Japan, Jordan, Kuwait, Kyrgyzstan, Libya, Lithuania,

Madagascar, Malaysia, Malawi, Morocco, Monaco, Netherlands, Nigeria, Norway, Oman, Pakistan, Portugal, Republic of Korea, Senegal, Singapore, Spain, State of Palestine, Switzerland, Timor-Leste, Togo, Tunisia, UAE, United Republic of Tanzania, Uruguay and Uzbekistan).

For instance, in Cuba, youth and students form part of intergenerational social organizations (such as unions) where they participate in decision-making at the national to the educational institution level. In addition, within the institutional curriculum, they are afforded spaces for dialogue and reflection. Moreover, all young people participate in the construction of regulations, resolutions and legal norms of education as well as the country, including the Comprehensive Policy for Children. Tunisia reports consulting with youth and empowering them to express their opinion in education matters. For example, the Tunisian Ministry of Education organized regional study days – organized study days with students of the Higher School of Administration to discuss the problems of the educational system and think about possible solutions. It also invited students from various educational levels to participate in seminars for preparing the educational sectoral plan 2023-2025 and the strategic plan 2026-2035.²¹⁹ Aruba engages youth by requesting their input on their education communication platforms. Youth are also asked to provide their inputs on the PEN2030 strategic education plan. In addition, there is a youth parliament where youth can express themselves.

4. Education finance

4.1 Introduction

The previous chapters showcased the commitments of countries and the transformative actions countries have undertaken in relation to different SDG 4 thematic areas and sub-themes, including those highlighted through the various TES Calls-to-Action. The Transforming Education Summit (TES), however, tackled the crisis of education not only as a question of its equity and inclusion, quality and relevance, but also spotlighted the gravity of the education financing challenge and the differences between countries in terms of financial capacities and choice of investments.

The COVID-19 pandemic has further exacerbated the global learning crisis.²²⁰ Whereas before the pandemic, countries already required substantial additional resources to improve the access, quality and equity in education, the pandemic served as a wake-up call for countries to realize that even more investments will be needed to strengthen education system resilience to external shocks and ensure the continuity of education and training delivery to learners – for instance, through the provision of digital and remote learning opportunities. Despite this realization, government education spending remains largely insufficient to recover learning loss and transform education systems. After the COVID-19 pandemic, a third of upper-middle and high-income countries as well as two-thirds of low- and lower-middle-income countries cut their public education budgets and expenditures.²²¹

Although the importance of education is generally recognized by government public finance decision-makers, including ministers of finance,²²² education expenditures are sometimes seen as a cost rather than as a strategic long-term investment. Governments have to make trade-offs in spending priorities across competing sectors and challenges outside the realm of education, which is further limited by available fiscal space. Adding to this, over the past decade, the number

of low- and lower-middle income countries (LICs and LMICs) that are approaching critical debt levels is increasing. Total external debt stock of LMICs amounted to 9 trillion USD in 2022.²²³ In 2022, developing countries spent a record 443.5 billion USD to service their debt. Debt servicing costs are projected to grow by 10% for all developing countries over the 2023-2024 period and by nearly 40% for LICs. Servicing external debt has become increasingly burdensome for many LICs and LMICs, which is constraining fiscal space and leading to crowding out of spending on critical sectors, such as education, health and the environment.

Globally, financing gaps for sustainable development are growing incrementally. In a recently released UN report, the additional investments needed annually for developing countries to reach the goals of the 2030 agenda amount to approximately 4 trillion USD per year.²²⁴ As a subset of that, achieving individual country commitments and targets by 2030 would still involve rapid expenditure increases, which even optimistic assumptions on domestic revenue mobilization cannot match. The costs of achieving national SDG 4 targets in LICs and LMICs between 2023 and 2030 amounts to a cumulative total of 3.7 trillion USD²²⁵, or 461 billion USD per year on average. Many LICs and LMICs will not be able to mobilize sufficient funds to match the required investments, primarily due to limitations in their domestic revenue collection systems coupled with a narrow tax base. It is estimated that LICs and LMICs face an average financing gap of 97 billion USD per year between 2023-2030 to reach their national SDG 4 targets.

Compounding the lack of resources for the sector, the resources that *are* available for education are not always spent equitably or in the most efficient and effective ways. Many developing countries face barriers, such as weak enabling environments as well as policy and regulatory frameworks that lack appropriate incentives (i.e. monitoring public

spending, accounting for results, value for money), which stall progress in attaining their national SDG 4 targets. Typical sources of inefficiencies include inadequate public financial management systems and payroll management, flawed procurement processes, weak strategic planning and forecasting, underperforming governance and accountability structures, corruption, and 'ghost' teachers and civil servants, which results in wastages and leakages of public resources, ultimately decreasing the value for money of public investments in education.

While the financing of education has become increasingly difficult, exacerbating matters is the failure of the international donor community to deliver on its commitments to provide agreed levels of development assistance and allocate a sufficient share of support to education. Although domestic resources comprise the largest source of funding for education, international support is sorely needed to assist countries to transform their education systems and build capacities to expand their fiscal space (e.g. through supporting domestic resource mobilization, expanding the tax-to-GDP base, debt restructuring, improving accountability, etc.) and increase social sector spending.

In addition to the challenges countries experience in prioritizing and financing education, the current crisis witnessed in education also forebodes a future economic crisis. The global loss of learning accumulated during the COVID-19 pandemic and learning poverty experienced in LICs and LMICs has substantially increased in recent years. Converted in monetary terms, the economic equivalent of this global learning loss implies that this generation of students now risks losing 21 trillion USD in potential lifetime earnings in today's present value, or the equivalent of 17% of current global GDP.²²⁶ Therefore, undertaking action to improve learning outcomes also becomes an investment decision, which needs to be reflected in the financing strategies of countries as well as the global community.

Getting education on track therefore not only requires rethinking the content, quality and relevance of education, but also concerted action towards aligning support and efforts from the international community and refocusing the financial aid landscape (implicating multilateral agencies, banks, donors, funds, etc.). In parallel, progressive actions need to be taken by countries and their governments to re-prioritize education investment and improve domestic resource mobilization and spending efficacy.

4.2 A Call-to-Action to invest in education

Acknowledging the impending crisis in financing education, the *Paris Declaration: a Global Call for Investing in the Futures of Education* of the 2021 Global Education Meeting²²⁷ affirmed that education is an investment that requires sustainable funding, recognizing that domestic resources, including tax revenues, are essential and remain a primary source of funding for education. The 2021 *Paris Declaration* also reiterated the commitment of countries and the global community to allocating at least 4-6% of their GDP and 15-20% of public expenditure to education, and for donor countries to provide 0.7% of their Gross National Income (GNI) to official development assistance (ODA).

At the TES held in Paris in September 2022, a Call-to-Action on Educational Investment²²⁸ was launched, reiterating that transforming education financing will require going beyond existing commitments, such as the 2021 Paris Declaration, to find universal, sustainable and systemic financing solutions. This TES Call-to-Action²²⁹ urges all countries and all partners to take concrete action both domestically and internationally to mobilize more resources; increase equity and efficiency of spending on education; improve the quality and availability of education financing data; and improve spending accountability.

4.3 Domestic financing of education

Although the volume of resources raised for education remains largely inadequate, domestic revenues (complemented with household expenditures on education) are the most important and largest source for funding public education in a country – approximately 97% of education expenditure at country level is funded from domestic resources. In recent decades, GDP growth has been the biggest driver of increased resources for education, and this will continue to be important. In many countries, however, there may also be space to raise more revenues as a proportion of GDP and to allocate a larger proportion of government budgets to education.

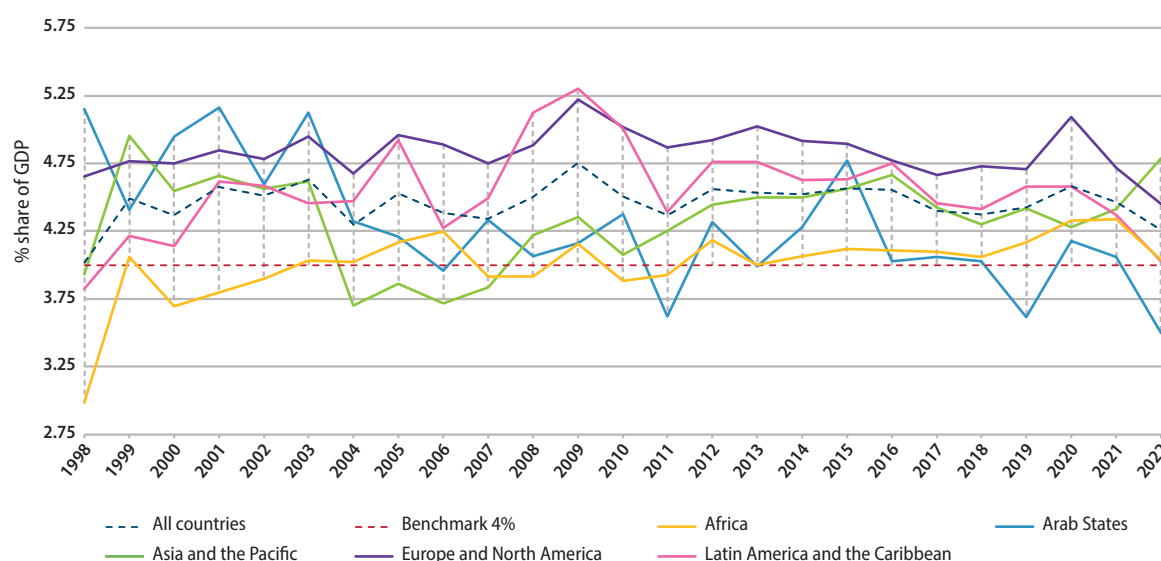
As shown in **Figure 4.1**, during the past 25 years, for all Member States with *available* expenditure data and across regions, the global *average* (all countries) of government spending²³⁰ on education as a percentage share of GDP was maintained above the 4% threshold. Two clear peaks occurred in 2008/09 (financial crisis) and 2019/20 (COVID-19 pandemic emerging), after which significant drops in education spending (as a percentage share of GDP) are observed.

When accounting for regional differences, countries from Europe and North America generally allocate a higher share of GDP to education compared to countries in Africa and from Arab States. The differences in education spending (as a percentage share of GDP) between high-income countries and LICs have been substantial over the years. Although this gap has been converging since 2005 (**Figure 4.2**), the gap masks disparities in absolute volumes and capacities of spending between advanced economies with a high GDP and a high percentage share of education spending from that GDP, compared to LICs.

Resource availability and spending on education between groupings of countries is unequally divided. High-income countries could allocate a lower percentage of their GDP to education and this would *still* represent a larger per capita expenditure on education when compared to the spending capacity of LICs.

In terms of volume of funding, LICs face a substantial funding gap compared to countries from wealthier regions – high-income countries

Figure 4.1 Regional evolution of government expenditures on education as a percentage share of GDP (average by region, 25-year interval)

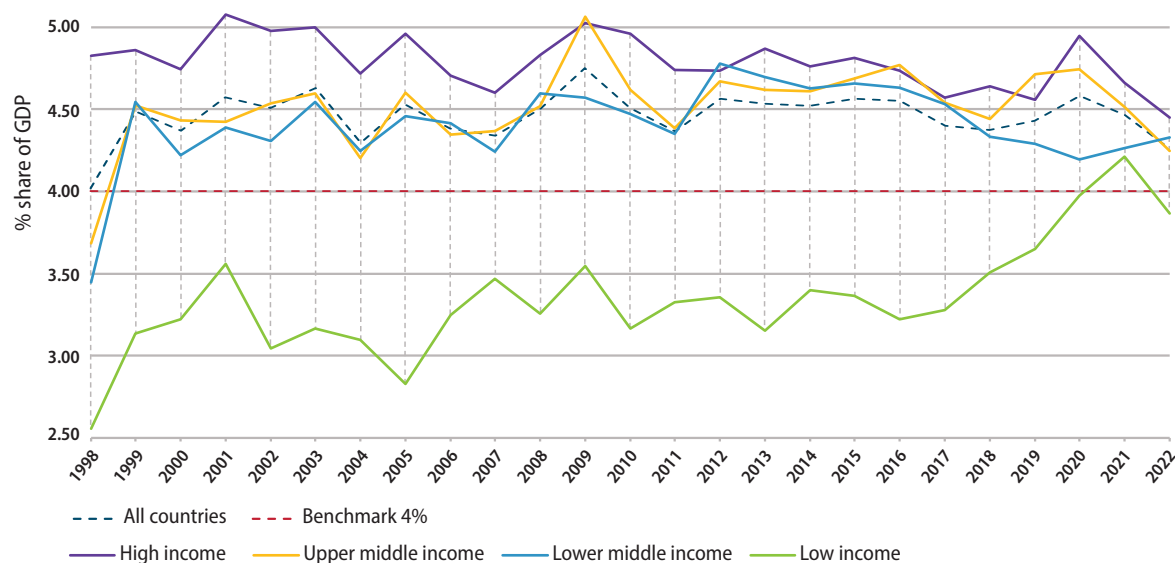


Data Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS) data, updated 06-2024.

can allocate a higher *volume* of resources to education as their GDP is substantially higher. Sub-Saharan African countries, which represent more than half of all LICs and LMICs in the world, is where the majority of the funding gap is

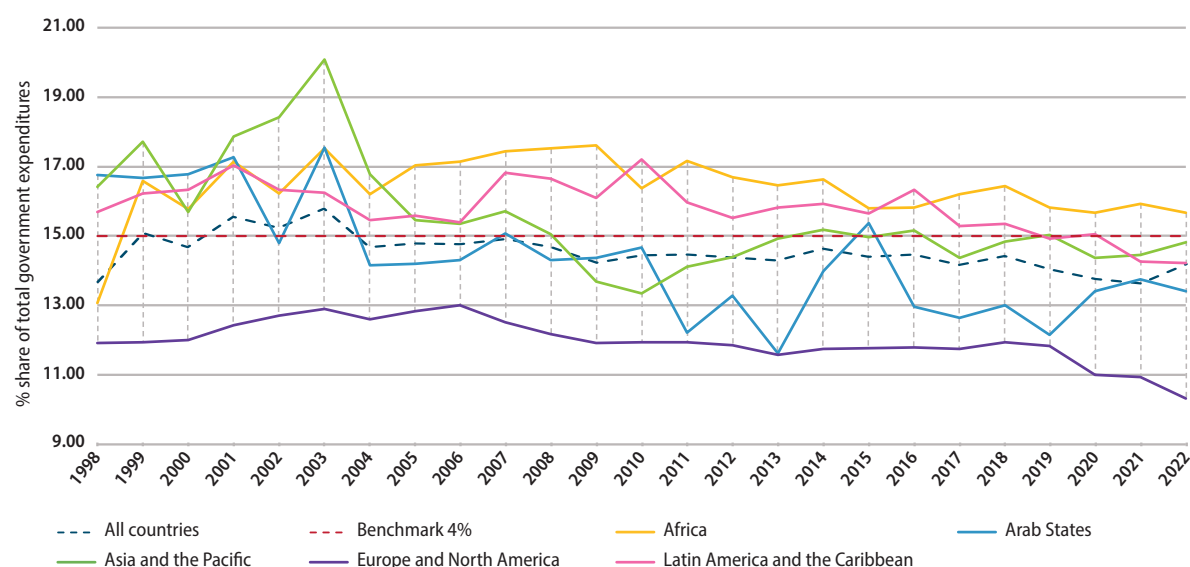
concentrated and also accounts for the largest share of the financing gap. Of the 97 billion USD annual global funding gap, the combined funding gap for the 44 LICs and LMICs in Africa amounts to 78 billion USD per year.²³¹

Figure 4.2 Disparities in government spending on education as a percentage share of GDP (average by income status, 25-year interval)



Data Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS) data, updated 06-2024.

Figure 4.3 Regional evolution of government expenditures on education as a percentage share of total government expenditures (average by region, 25-year interval)



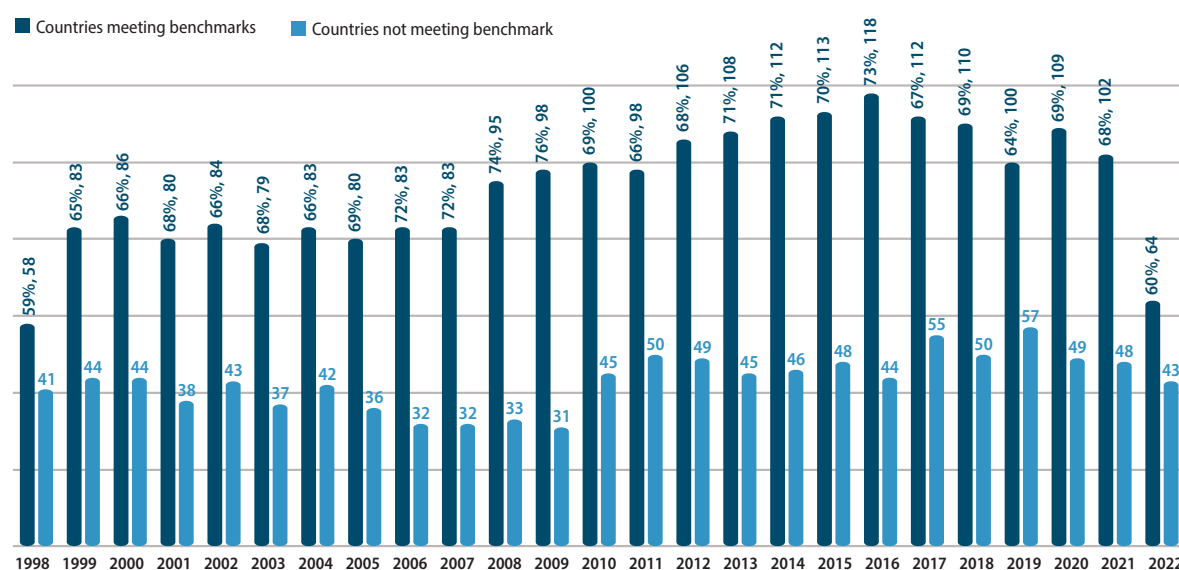
Data Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS) data, updated 06-2024.

Zooming in on government portfolios to assess the share of education public expenditure within total government expenditures reveals that, after 2003 and across all regions, education has gradually lost its priority position within overall government portfolios (see ‘all countries’ average in **Figure 4.3**). While on average, the regions of Africa and Latin America and the Caribbean have managed to maintain spending for education above the 15% benchmark, countries from Europe and North America fall below the 15% benchmark. This noticeable difference can be explained by varying public budget volumes available to high-income countries compared to LICs, which generally have low GDPs and prioritize basic social services in their government budgets.

When combining the two spending benchmarks, taking a 25-year perspective, the number of countries spending at least 4% of their GDP or at least 15% of their total government budget on education has gradually increased. However, from 2016 onwards, the percentage of countries with published data that met either one of the spending benchmarks has dipped below 70% (**Figure 4.4**). This provides further confirmation that education is slowly being de-prioritized within government portfolios.

Although the current international benchmarks on education spending provides a starting point to better understand the current state of *relative* spending on education by governments, they hide the fact that even if countries meet a benchmark, it does not account for the real or realistic volumes of spending needed to finance the countries’ education sector. For example, LICs may have relatively low levels of GDP yet can still meet the 4% or 15% benchmark, but the actual volume of resources available for education is insufficient to meet their national SDG 4 targets.²³² Meeting an expenditure benchmark therefore does not automatically imply that the education sector is adequately funded or whether available resources are allocated equitably and utilised efficiently across the sector. There is, therefore, a need to consider alternative education expenditure indicators, such as spending data per student and per level of education, to indicate the real comparative unit costs of education and make more informed decisions. To push past the ‘business as usual’ attitudes on spending and truly transform education systems to reach SDG 4 targets, countries need to make ambitious yet realistic estimations of investments needed per year/per learner to serve as a complement to the conventional 4% of the GDP and 15% of total government expenditure benchmarks.

Figure 4.4 Number of countries meeting at least one of either spending benchmarks (4% share of GDP; 15% share of total government expenditure)



Data Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS) data, updated 06-2024.

The TES Call-to-Action on Educational Investment encourages countries to undertake concrete actions to improve domestic financing for education, devise strategies to increase the volume of resources that can be allocated to the education sector and improve spending efficiency (value for money of educational investments). Out of 91 survey responses, a total of 78 countries (86%) reported concrete actions towards improving the domestic financing of education, with the majority (76%) of these countries taking measures to increase the volume of investments in education and protecting education budgets (legislatively) in times of crisis and fiscal constraint (**Figure 4.5**). Equally promising, more than half of the responding countries (56%) reported undertaking action towards improving the efficiency of spending on education.

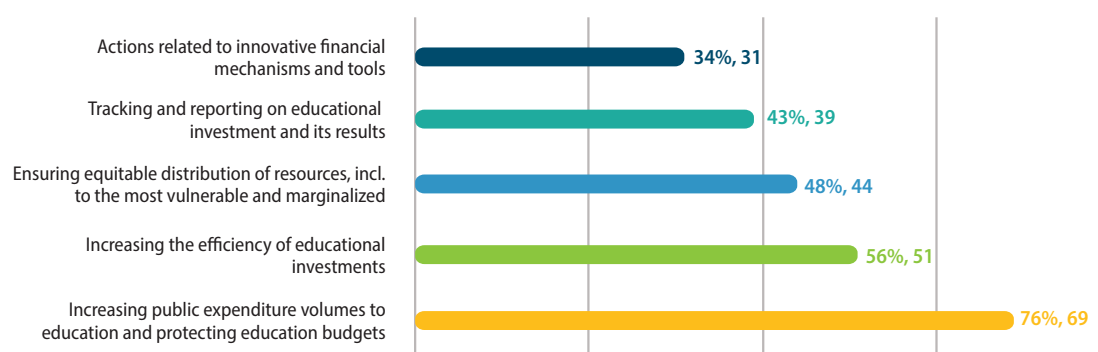
4.3.1 Increase public expenditure volumes for education and protect education budgets

Increasing the volume of domestic resources for education can be further facilitated through various strategies, including working on the creation of fiscal space (i.e. increasing overall government revenues and spending capacity) as well as devising strategies to sustainably fund education. A large number of countries (79% or 69 countries of 91 survey respondents) indicated that they are actively developing and implementing long-term financing strategies to boost investments in education (e.g. Albania, Argentina, Colombia, the Dominican Republic, Ethiopia and Montenegro) or enacting tax reforms to increase fiscal space to invest in education

(e.g. Madagascar, South Sudan, Uzbekistan). For example, Argentina proposed to adopt a new Education Financing Bill in 2023 (Law No. 25,075), which would ensure that for the coming ten years (until 2033) a minimum level of government funding would be allocated to education, progressively until reaching 8% of the GDP, which would move the target up from around the current mark of 5% of the country's GDP.

Several countries (e.g. Argentina, China and the Dominican Republic) have passed legislation that enshrines education budgets in national laws, which allows for a progressive increase in the volume of the budget allocated to education to meet or exceed spending benchmarks and protects (ring-fencing) education budgets in times of financial crisis and fiscal constraint. For example, the Dominican Republic passed legislation to incrementally increase its education budget allocation during the past 10 years to reach the international benchmarks on education expenditure (4% of GDP and/or 15% of total government expenditures). In addition, in 2021, the Government initiated an education finance reform by setting a minimum investment benchmark of 2,500 USD per year/per child, which fundamentally sets targets higher and shifts focus away from other funding benchmarks. Furthermore, public investment in education is legally safeguarded from budget cuts by a fiscal policy that ensures that the education budget is protected, and that education represents a minimum of 15% within total government expenditure.

Figure 4.5 Country actions undertaken towards improving domestic financing for education



Data Source: Survey on Country Actions to Transform Education, 2023.

4.3.2 Ensure equitable distribution of resources

In some countries, public spending on education is sometimes allocated in ways that disregard vulnerable segments of learners (e.g. girls and women, learners from poor or marginalized households or ethnolinguistic minorities, or learners with disabilities). Furthermore, richer households are generally able to secure better access to schooling and learning opportunities for their children, who are therefore more likely to reach the highest levels of education, which further exacerbates and perpetuates existing inequalities in society. Moreover, evidence shows that in many countries, spending is still distributed unevenly across education sub-sectors, with TVET and tertiary sub-sectors generally accounting for the highest unit costs and ECCE and primary education accounting for the lowest per capita spending.²³³ For instance, ECCE in some countries receives fewer public resources, implying that these services may only be accessible for households that can afford to pay for private sector operated day care and pre-primary education, putting children from poor households at a disadvantage when their formal primary schooling starts.

Governments need to ensure that education services of adequate quality are affordable and accessible to all learners. Nearly half of the countries (48% or 44 countries out of 91 survey respondents) indicated that they are undertaking actions to enhance the equitable allocation and distribution of resources within education, including efforts to ensure the fairness of resource distribution between education sub-sectors and among different groups of learners (e.g. children from families with the lowest income, those living in rural or distant areas, children with disabilities or the especially vulnerable). Countries taking concrete measures to improve equitable investment in education include Azerbaijan, Ethiopia, Indonesia and Tunisia. In Indonesia, for example, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research and Technology (MOECRT) has set specific goals for allocating resources to disadvantaged groups (e.g. low-income households, rural residents, children with disabilities, vulnerable populations) and is implementing an equity-based allocation formula

to ensure a fair distribution of resources across various education levels. Furthermore, the MOECRT is actively incorporating gender responsiveness into its public expenditure monitoring to enable better targeting of resources to improve education outcomes where gender disparities exist.

4.3.3 Increase the efficiency of educational investments

At country level, increasing the volume of public investments in education will need to be complemented by improvements to the efficacy of budget allocation and spending to ensure value for money of investments in education. One way of increasing resource availability for the education sector is to cut out inefficiencies in expenditures and decrease the share of funding that is lost to leakages. Strategies to increase the volume of resources available for education must therefore also be accompanied with measures to address inefficiencies and improve spending accountability. In addition, countries need to gradually shift focus from more traditional and incremental types of education budgeting and move towards better linking education outcomes and sectoral goals with education budgets and expenditure data to improve sector planning and ensure better utilization of available resources.

More than half of the countries (56% or 51 countries out of 91 survey respondents), including Angola, Iceland, Lebanon, Mauritius and Nepal, indicated that they are implementing concrete measures to increase spending efficiency and accountability within the education sector. Reported actions are geared towards improving linkages between education sector planning and budget programming (i.e. budgeting for results rather than inputs-based allocation), reducing leakages, increasing service delivery capacities and strengthening accountability frameworks. For example, the Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MEHE) in Lebanon launched a reform roadmap in 2023 that specifically addresses cost savings and efficiencies in the public education system and effectively improves sector governance. The specific reform includes the optimization of the network of public schools, the number of classrooms and the redeployment of teachers to

improve student-teacher ratios. The accountability of externally funded programmes to public education was also improved by linking programme and project planning with the budgeting cycle and by establishing a platform for structured periodic dialogue and reporting between the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Finance and external partners.

4.3.4 Track and report on the results of educational investment

The availability of sound and reliable data is imperative to making well-informed decisions, developing targeted education policies, strategies and activities, and conducting forward planning to improve the allocation and utilization of available financial resources. Several countries (43% or 39 countries out of 91 survey respondents), including the Netherlands, Libya, China, France and the Dominican Republic have taken concrete steps to improve data availability on education expenditures for monitoring and reporting purposes and align the education budget with expected sector outcomes to support education sector planning and decision-making processes. For example, the Ministry of Education of the Dominican Republic has implemented measures to improve the transparency and monitoring of education spending by establishing a 'Comprehensive Strategic Intelligence System' that collects and disaggregates data on coverage, resources, infrastructure and education outcomes by region, locality, educational level, gender, disability and ethnic origin. The system generates detailed reports on investments and budget execution in education both at national and regional levels. Publicly accessible monitoring dashboards were also created to allow for real-time monitoring of key investments, coverage and educational quality indicators. Implementing this data management system has greatly enhanced the capacity of the Ministry of Education to link evaluation results with forward budget planning and programming processes.

4.3.5 Actions related to innovative financial mechanisms and tools

Traditional approaches to funding public education (e.g. relying solely on raising public revenues and allocating government resources to education) may not generate sufficient resources for governments to finance their progress to meet national SDG 4 commitments and implement education policies. As noted earlier in this chapter, education spending is slowly being de-prioritized both within government portfolios as well as within international aid flows from donor countries. The COVID-19 pandemic has placed additional fiscal constraints on countries, forcing governments to cut education budgets in favour of investments in other sectors. While resources for education is spread more thinly, the education financing gap grows. Especially for LICs and LMICs, this financing gap has grown too substantial to be mitigated through traditional domestic resources and with aid provided by donor countries. To address the existing gaps in funding, there is a need for combined action to raise funds from complementary unconventional resources and through innovative financing mechanisms that can boost funding for the sector and increase the overall sustainability of funding education.

Approximately one third of countries (34% or 31 out of 91 survey respondents) indicate that actions have been undertaken to address existing resource gaps through innovative funding mechanisms and approaches, including by establishing public-private partnerships for the education sector or deploying special funding initiatives targeted at specific education challenges (e.g. rebuilding school infrastructure after natural disasters, absorbing refugees in the school system). Countries that provided concrete examples of innovative financing applications include Sierra Leone, Senegal and Côte d'Ivoire. In Côte d'Ivoire, a public-private pooled financing facility (Child Learning and Education Facility - CLEF) was deployed in 2021, aiming to improve access to primary education, promote children's rights and combat child labour. CLEF brings together the Government, foundations (Jacobs Foundation and UBS Optimus Foundation) and 16 companies from the cocoa and chocolate industry to raise funds to support education service delivery in cocoa growing regions and to build

education infrastructure (e.g. classrooms, bridge classes, community schools, school canteens and pre-school classrooms). Furthermore, Côte d'Ivoire is moving to reform its financial system and is engaged in restructuring its debt position. The country has completed several consecutive debt treatment agreements with France, which includes

a debt swap for education. This debt treatment agreement resulted in increased fiscal space with debt transformed into additional financing to invest in the country's education system priorities. In combination with the GPE Multiplier, this debt swap has freed up additional co-financing totalling 182 million USD for the education sector.

4.4 International support for education

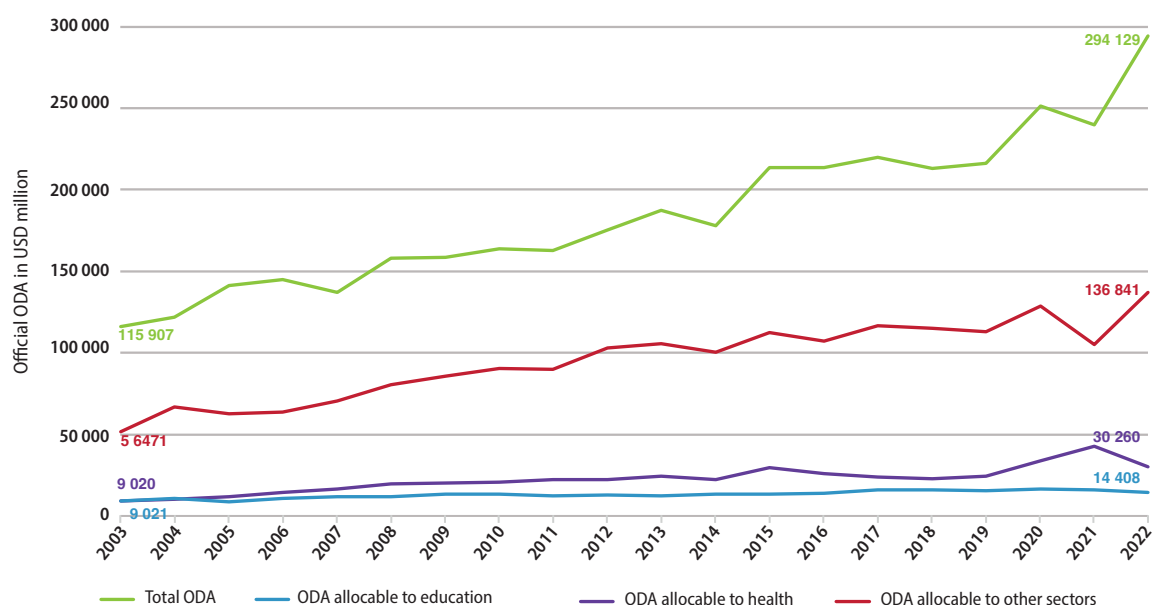
According to the OECD CRS Country Profiles, 55 countries are providing some form of development assistance, either as a DAC member,²³⁴ non-DAC member (e.g. Kazakhstan, Saudi Arabia, Türkiye), other official provider of ODA or as a provider of support for sustainable development (e.g. Indonesia). Out of these 55 donor countries, a total of 27 have responded to the survey,²³⁵ with 13 countries reporting concrete actions towards improving international aid to education.

Taking a 20-year perspective (2003-2022), the ODA commitments by official donors to developing countries and bilateral funding channelled through multilateral entities increased in absolute terms.

However, while total ODA has almost *tripled* over the 2003-2022 period, reaching more than 294 billion USD in 2022, the total volume of ODA that is allocable to the education sector has not kept pace with this relative increase but has instead remained stagnant for the past 10 years (**Figure 4.6**).

While total ODA commitments seem substantial, actual disbursement of committed ODA to developing countries is generally lower. Between 2013-2022, the average disbursed ODA amounts to approximately 93% of the ODA that was committed, which implies that the actual volume of disbursed ODA directed to support education development is even less.

Figure 4.6 Evolution of total ODA and ODA allocable to health and education from Official Donors (commitments, USD 2022 constant prices)



Data Source: [OECD Data Explorer](#) (2022), Aid (ODA) by sector and donor [DAC5], Creditor Reporting System (CRS), (accessed on 15 December 2023).
Note: Indonesia also reported actions on debt relief, but at a national level for its citizens (not international debt relief between countries and international financing institutions)

Total aid allocable to education reached 14.4 billion USD in 2022, but the share of sector allocable ODA directed to education has been declining since 2003 (12.9% to 7.9%). Although it has remained stagnant at around 10% of ODA during the past 10 years, it reached an all-time low in 2022 of 7.9% (**Figure 4.7**). In comparison, the share of sector allocable ODA to health is substantially higher than for education and has increased more than threefold since 2003, including a significant spike in investments from 2019–2021 as a response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

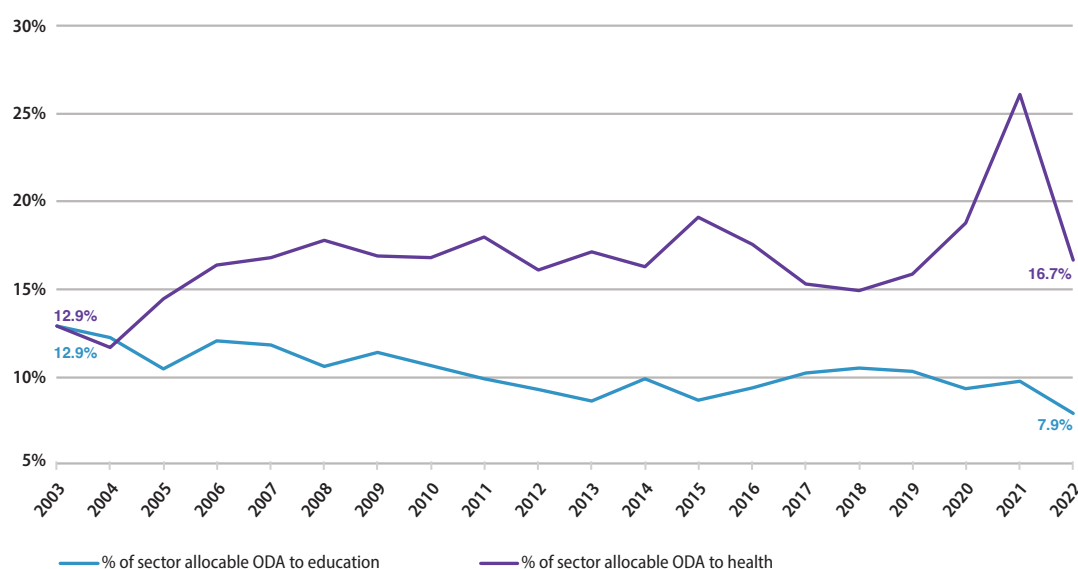
Internationally, donor countries failed to meet the agreed benchmarks in providing development aid (i.e. providing a minimum of 0.7% of GNI for development assistance) and to effectively allocate a minimum of 15%–20% of this assistance to education. In 2022, out of the 23 countries that are official OECD DAC members, only 5 (Denmark, Germany, Luxembourg, Norway and Sweden) have met the 0.7% benchmark (**Figure 4.8**).

The emergence of non-traditional donors is changing the global aid landscape. Countries such as Brazil, China, India, Saudi Arabia and Türkiye,

are not OECD DAC members but are contributing substantial amounts in aid to developing countries. Saudi Arabia and Türkiye are reaching the internationally agreed benchmark of 0.7% of GNI (0.74% and 0.79%, respectively in 2022). Furthermore, private donors and foundations (e.g. the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, the LEGO Foundation, the Jacobs Foundation) take up a relatively small part of ODA yet are increasingly investing in development cooperation from the perspective of knowledge exchange, contribution of specialised expertise and thematic interests, as well as in the form of technological solutions to development issues.

As noted, although domestic resources constitute the largest and most important share of education funding at the country level, international aid to support countries' educational transformation remains imperative to attaining SDG 4 targets. Countries not only require targeted technical and financial support in areas where education outcomes are lagging, but also in strengthening domestic financial capacities and achieving equitable resource allocation in education.

Figure 4.7 Evolution of the share of sector allocable ODA to health and education
(based on ODA commitments, 2022 USD constant prices)

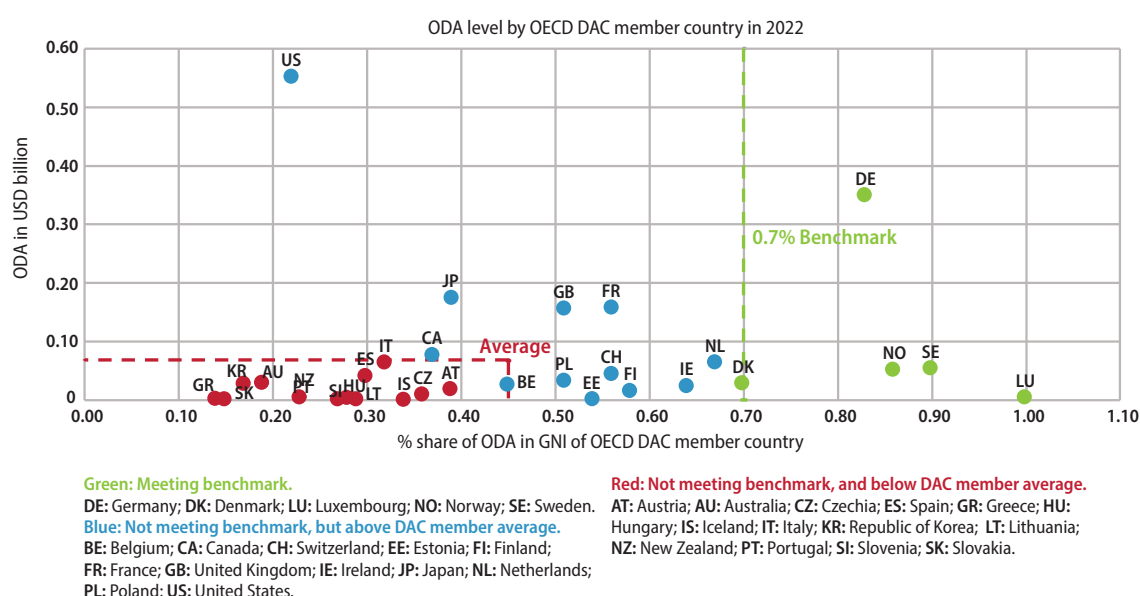


Data Source: [OECD Data Explorer](#) (2022), Aid (ODA) by sector and donor [DAC5], Creditor Reporting System (CRS), (accessed on 15 December 2023).

Therefore, in addition to calling on donor countries to meet the established benchmarks (specifically, allocating a minimum of 0.7% of GNI to ODA and to allocate 15% of this ODA to education), the TES Call-to-Action on Educational Investment urges the international community to prioritize global actions on tax justice and debt relief. This includes supporting international reforms that enable countries to expand their fiscal space, backing actions on debt relief and restructuring of international debt architecture, and promoting innovative financing mechanisms and smart aid financing to enhance resource availability for the education sector.

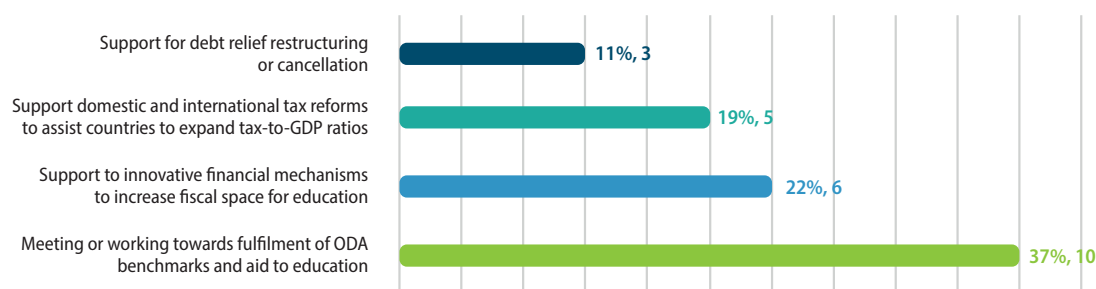
As shown in **Figure 4.9**, several donor countries that responded to the survey (e.g. France, Germany, Norway, Switzerland and South Korea) are supporting international and country level tax system reforms to widen fiscal space to allow more government spending on education. For example, Germany is one of the leading providers of ODA to support Domestic Revenue Mobilization (DRM) by promoting fair global tax systems. Germany plays a critical role in facilitating consensus on the Inclusive Framework on Base Erosion and Profit Shifting (BEPS),²³⁶ and in implementing the 15 Actions to combat tax avoidance, improve the coherence of international tax rules, ensure a more transparent tax environment and address the tax challenges.

Figure 4.8 ODA provided by OECD DAC members in 2022 (total volume in USD and as percentage share of GNI)



Data Source: [OECD Data Explorer](#) (2022), Flows by donor (ODA+OOF+Private) [DAC1], Flows by donor (ODA+OOF+Private) [DAC1], Aid (ODA) disbursements to countries and regions [DAC2a], Creditor Reporting System (CRS), (accessed on 15 December 2023).

Figure 4.9 Country actions undertaken towards improving international aid to education (ODA providing countries, n=27)



Data Source: *Survey on Country Actions to Transform Education, 2023*.

Although only three donor countries (France, Germany and Kuwait)²³⁷ reported actions on debt relief, this is an important area of action to address the sustainability of debt servicing, which can mean the difference between having an adequate minimum resource base allowing for the provision of public education services at a minimum maintenance level or not having sufficient fiscal space to invest in education that can lead to further degradation of education service quality. Addressing debt is especially important for LICs and LMICs, which are facing high levels of debt and a high debt servicing burden. In some countries, the amount for debt servicing is substantially higher than the amount the country spends on education. A recent example of countries engaging in debt relief include France, which has signed three debt reduction and development contracts (C2D) with Côte d'Ivoire from 2016-2025 (totalling 70 million euros), with the latest prioritizing investments in the education sector that allow Côte d'Ivoire to repay the loans to France, which in turn reinvests those payments to finance education projects in Côte d'Ivoire (see section 4.3.5).

In the years since the COVID-19 pandemic, the debt levels in some developing countries have increased to unsustainable levels. At the global level, there is a need for both creditors and debtors to recommit to strengthen the international debt architecture and to provide timely, predictable and fair debt restructuring and debt relief to countries in debt distress and at risk of default, which is negatively impacting social sector spending negatively.

Innovative financing for education is generally delivered through global mechanisms and partnerships, such as the Global Partnership for Education, the International Financing Facility for Education, the Education Outcomes Fund or Education Cannot Wait. Besides providing contributions to these global mechanisms (grant commitments, credit guarantees, etc.), countries also engage in the provision of innovative financing instruments at the regional or country level. For example, Switzerland supports an Impact-Linked Fund for Education (ILF for Education) – a catalytic financing mechanism aimed at increasing access to inclusive and equitable quality basic education – by offering positive impact-linked financial rewards to high impact organizations (HIOs) active in the education sector that are providing access to resources and commercial capital for scaling up activities without compromising their impact and are matchmaking private and public actors to combine their resources and expertise to meet the global education challenge.

In addition, while other sectors, such as health and climate, have attracted increased volumes of public and private funding, education has been left behind. There is a need for the education sector to be more centrally featured as an enabler for other priority development themes (e.g. education is considered an important driver for climate action) and join cross-sector resource mobilization efforts that would in turn also benefit education.

Conclusions

The United Nations Transforming Education Summit (TES) in 2022 generated significant momentum to boost education to the top of political agendas – global, regional and national – by mobilizing ambition, solidarity and partnerships among Member States to join efforts to transform education. The success of this endeavour is reflected by the high level and numbers of country engagement witnessed at the Summit’s first anniversary.

In total, 163 countries convened national consultations, bringing together government leaders, teachers, students, civil society, academia and other stakeholders and partners. A total of 143 countries submitted their national statements of commitment, with a view to transforming their education systems and improving the financing of education to achieve this transformation. The TES also generated several Calls to Action and global initiatives to mobilize greater financial, technical and political support for transforming education and accelerating country progress towards SDG 4. To realize its goal, the Summit follow-up requires continuous and collective efforts along with tangible actions at the national and local levels.

The survey responses show that in fulfilling their national commitments to transform education, many countries are pursuing SDG 4 and national targets with a transformative, whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach, building on existing systems and coordination mechanisms. There is no singular way to transform education. Approaches and strategies for transforming education need to be contextualized and adapted to suit countries’ realities, including political environments,

institutional capacities, as well as economic and socio-cultural conditions. Resource availability may be one of the most critical determinants shaping strategy choice. In general, the survey results indicate that countries tend to prioritize simpler, communication-focused actions over more resource-intensive endeavours, such as capacity development. To optimize the success of transformation endeavours, four conditions are essential: a) creation of a robust and shared vision among stakeholders; b) alignment of policies and implementation strategies to educate new generations on building better and sustainable futures; c) engagement and empowerment of local actors to serve as agents of change; and d) an effective governance structure to ensure accountability and commitment. These approaches and paths to transformation are complex and interconnected. As countries navigate these transformations, their efforts must be supported by sustained commitments, strategic investments, and genuine inclusion and partnerships.

In creating a robust, shared vision and broader support for national commitments, many countries rely on conventional communication and consultation methods for stakeholder

engagement. These methods include social dialogues and the provision of public information. While the ownership of the transformation agenda rests with education policymakers and their various stakeholders, it is crucial to widen and deepen this ownership by engaging ministries and agencies outside of education as well as local and school actors through intersectional and inter-institutional mechanisms of collaboration. Moreover, clear and actionable policies are imperative to ensure that aspirations materialize into tangible actions. In this sense, it is worth noting that seven out of ten countries reported to have incorporated TES commitments into their national education policies and/or plans through participatory revisions. However, countries seem to be less driven when it comes to translating education transformation policies and plans into actionable initiatives, with less emphasis placed on upscaling local initiatives.

The survey responses highlight efforts to transform education through holistic and integrated approaches and with a focus on innovation and inclusivity. Digital transformation and learning shone through as a key priority area, underscoring its critical contribution to every thematic area. Countries universally reported on working to enhance connectivity, develop digital resources and train both learners and educators on how to engage with digital learning. Despite the almost universal emphasis on digital transformation, many countries are rightly also seeking to ensure that such advancements do not deepen the existing digital divide. Updating curricula to meet the demands of the 21st century was also a prominent theme in survey responses, reinforcing the notion that transforming education is not just about new content or platforms but also about the approaches to make learning more interactive, reflective of real-world challenges and rooted in problem solving. The survey findings also indicate that countries remain dedicated to concentrating their efforts on the thematic areas closely associated with the five TES Thematic Action Tracks of inclusive, equitable, safe and healthy schools; learning and skills; teachers; digital learning and transformation; and financing of education. Additionally, they have reported on implementing transformative initiatives in these areas.

Of note is that *all* responding Member States have undertaken actions towards **inclusion, equity and gender equality** – the heart of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development of leaving no one behind – providing special attention and support for girls and women as well as learners with different vulnerabilities, including disabilities, poverty and remote or rural residence. In the same vein – albeit to a lesser extent – more than half of the responding countries reported to have undertaken dedicated actions to support the learning and well-being of refugees and displaced persons, or cultural and linguistic minority groups. The systemic changes reported by several countries include inclusive, gender-transformative policies, plans and budgets, as well as efforts to adapt curricula and pedagogies, particularly for the most marginalized learners. Although it is heartening that all country respondents are acting towards inclusion, equity and gender, it is prudent for countries to remain vigilant as they strive to close existing gaps – especially for the most vulnerable learners.

Transforming education will entail the reshaping of the teaching profession and the prioritization of investment in **teachers** to ensure that they are qualified, professionally trained, motivated and well-supported. To reverse the global teacher shortage – estimated at 44 million – and ensure that teachers are well-prepared to support the diverse needs of learners amidst evolving educational demands, nine out of ten countries are undertaking transformative actions in teacher training and professional development in new pedagogical skills, digital tools and renewed curricula. Encouragingly, the survey highlighted a global recognition of the need to invest in teachers as key agents in the process of educational transformation. Despite the many policies and initiatives reported, only six out of ten countries took actions in this critical area. Moving forward, these actions must be accompanied by more concerted efforts to improve teachers' working conditions and professional autonomy, making the teaching profession more attractive and sustainable to gain much needed traction in urgent recruitment efforts.

Central to educational transformation is the holistic, lifelong and lifewide view of learning, development and well-being of the individual learner as well as of society. Unsurprisingly, nearly all countries reported on actions to renew and update **curricular contents** (95%) and **pedagogical approaches** (88%). In particular, eight out of ten countries are incorporating education for sustainable development, including greening education, as well as skills for work, including TVET, into their teaching and learning processes in response to the global climate crisis and to the evolving labour market demands driven by the green and digital transitions. Around three-quarters of country respondents report on transformative actions undertaken to foster learners' 21st-century skills, social and emotional learning as well as learners' physical and mental health and well-being. Having mainstreamed these transformative aspects into curricula, the challenge now remains for countries to develop the capacities, conditions and processes for their effective implementation – both inside and outside classroom settings.

As noted, **digital transformation and learning** is one of the most prominent and rapidly evolving areas that garnered particular attention at the TES. This culminated in a Call to Action to enhance access to quality public digital learning for all, which highlights three key elements – content, capacity and connectivity – to unlock the power of digital learning. Digital learning attracted near-universal country commitments and actions, with many countries prioritizing the expansion of internet connectivity for educational purposes, while promoting equity and inclusion as well as addressing security and privacy concerns. On the latter, as many as six out of ten responding countries reported actions towards digital regulation and governance – despite this being an area that garnered the least amount of national commitments. Equally concerning is the quality of digital learning content, which has been a relatively neglected yet emerging issue. With only a handful of countries providing examples of government-sanctioned digital learning platforms, looking ahead, this marks an area where countries will need to intensify their efforts and endeavours. In an era where digital technologies are rapidly

unlocking new capabilities, continuous monitoring and assessment of their impact on education are essential to fostering inclusive, equitable and sustainable digital futures of education for all.

The TES reaffirmed that a truly transformative education should promote the holistic development of all learners from the earliest stages of life. In the survey, integrated **early childhood care and education** (ECCE) emerged as one of the thematic areas with the highest level of country actions reported (92%). Among the countries that submitted both a national statement of commitment and a survey response, ECCE and youth engagement are the thematic areas with the largest differences between actions and commitment levels – 55 and 56 percentage points, respectively. Transformative actions include legislative and policy measures to make pre-primary education free and/or compulsory to increase the participation of children from vulnerable and disadvantaged groups and narrow the developmental gaps between these children and their more advantaged peers. Countries are consulting the latest scientific evidence to update their ECCE curricula and pedagogical approaches – for example, by incorporating the use of local knowledge and mother tongue, as well as child-centred, play-based learning approaches. Given the multidimensional nature of early childhood development, a multi-sectoral and whole-of-society approach is essential. Moving forward, strong political leadership is called for to instate good practices through policies and financial investments that bolster ECCE and help achieve effective inter-sectoral coordination.

In recent decades, **higher education** systems have undergone dramatic changes, with growing enrolments, student mobility and new ways of learning and diversified providers emerging. Many countries have prioritized equitable access and inclusion in higher education and undertaken measures to remove cost barriers, including through student scholarship and loan mechanisms, while promoting parity and equality through incentives for female learners' enrolment in STEM areas. Considering the increasing internationalization of higher education, the inclusion agenda is also being

advanced at the global and regional levels through the recognition of higher education qualifications in accordance with the Global Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education and respective regional conventions. In times of multiple crises, strengthened cross-disciplinary and cross-border collaborations in research has never been more important. However, due to austerity measures among other reasons, a dearth of research funding has become an increasingly alarming issue. Unfortunately, the survey points to fewer country actions undertaken to boost research and development compared to higher education as a whole. As such, there is an urgent need for countries to allot adequate resources and investments in higher education and especially research as essential contributors to the sustainable development of countries and the planet.

Meaningful **youth engagement**, particularly in education, matters. It should be made a policy priority and, if possible, entrenched in legal frameworks. The survey indicates that youth engagement in education is rising, with over half of country respondents reporting varying degrees of actions undertaken to engage their young constituents. Inviting young leaders to sit at the decision making table is a natural and strategic step in developing informed, experienced adult leaders who will be around those same tables making the decisions that govern their nation. Moreover, having well-developed youth policies is essential and should be resourced and co-created with young people, so that these policies remain relevant and fit for purpose. Systematically allocating financial resources to youth engagement and investing in their capacity, while also involving them in policy- and decision-making processes, are crucial steps on the journey ahead to transforming education.

Education financing is vital to the transformation agenda. Credible funding strategies need to be devised and implemented at the country level and by the global community to increase the volume and sustainability of investments in education, as well as to increase efficiency of spending whilst ensuring equity in the allocation

and distribution of resources to the sector. Domestic resources account for the largest share of funding for education (approximately 97%), highlighting the urgent need for the effective and efficient use of domestic resources in addition to mobilizing other resources to close existing funding gaps, fulfil commitments and effectively attain national SDG 4 targets by 2030 – especially in low- and lower-middle-income countries. International aid to support countries in transforming education remains imperative to maintaining the trajectory to attain SDG 4 targets and assist countries in mobilizing more resources to fund education. Transforming education financing will require countries to surpass existing expenditure benchmarks (4-6% of GDP and/or 15-20% of government spending) and find universal, sustainable and systemic financing solutions. The survey report responses showcase the critical need for sustained financing, including the enhancement of budget allocations and the exploration of innovative funding mechanisms to ensure effective and equitable investments in education. Transforming education financing hinges on countries viewing education funding as an essential long-term investment rather than a budgetary line-item cost.

Scaling up innovative financing and developing sustainable funding strategies for education that are targeted towards positive impact generation can unlock more resources for the sector.

More education resources must be accompanied by greater equity and efficiency in existing education sector investments. Using a whole-of-government approach, ministries of education and ministries of finance in every country must be supported to identify and address inefficiencies and disparities in existing and new spending. Finally, evidence-based policy making requires sufficient, systematic and reliable data on education spending, its distribution and effectiveness. Moving forward, good education financing policies will require the coordinated generation of systematic and reliable data on education spending to deepen accountability.

While many concrete actions are being reported by countries, there appears to be less focus on the mechanisms to evaluate the transformative impact and effectiveness of these changes. Monitoring and evaluation tools are necessary to ensure that transformation is indeed on track and achieving its intended outcomes. The survey responses also highlight a necessity to broaden stakeholder engagement, particularly among youth, students and teachers, reinforcing the need to include the voices of those most impacted by education policies and reforms. Acting to establish dialogue between ministries of education and ministries of finance – and other sectors and stakeholders, such as ministries of gender equality and women's affairs – on sector financing and prioritization will facilitate the development and implementation of feasible and sustainable strategies and actions to ensure that education systems are adequately financed.

At the heart of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is the imperative to leave no one behind. As countries unanimously report on actions toward inclusion, equity and gender equality, it is inspiring to see that the view toward inclusion and equity is at the heart of educational transformation. The initiatives and actions documented by countries underscore a shared dedication to fostering inclusive and equitable learning environments that cater to all learners. The efforts reported by countries through this survey drive the momentum needed to not only address the global education crisis but also to encourage meaningful cross-country, cross-sectoral, multi-stakeholder dialogues and collaboration. Transforming education is an ongoing endeavour that requires a forward-looking perspective and a unified effort. By continuing to work together and learn from one another, progress can be made toward reaching the 2030 Agenda and beyond – to ultimately realize a future where no learner is left behind.

Annexes

Annex 1

National statements of commitment themes and sub-themes

Theme	Sub-theme	Description
1. Inclusion, equity and gender equality	Inclusion and equity (general)	Commitments to ensure the right to education through inclusion and equity in access to quality education throughout life, to provide special attention to the most vulnerable groups at risk of exclusion, respecting diversity and eliminating all forms of discrimination in and through education. Also included are social protection and safety net measures.
	Gender equality, girls' education	Commitments to advance gender equality, as well as girls' and women's empowerment and their rights in and through education, addressing gender-based discrimination and stereotyping.
	Refugees, displaced persons and migrants	Commitments to uphold the right to education of refugees, stateless people, migrants and internally or internationally displaced learners, including them in the national education system and accommodating for special needs, such as language and accelerated education support.
	Poverty/low-income groups	Commitments to assist learners from poor and low-income families in overcoming the obstacles to accessing inclusive, equitable and quality education.
	Rural and remote residents	Commitments to: (i) ensure access to quality education to learners from rural and remote areas, as well as learners who reside far from schools; (ii) to reduce the education gap with their urban peers; and (iii) to tackle safety obstacles for those distant from schools.
	Disabilities and special needs	Commitments to improve educational environments to accommodate the specific requirements of students with disabilities and special needs, promoting the full and effective participation, accessibility, attendance and achievement of all students, without discrimination.
	Cultural and linguistic minorities	Commitments to uphold minorities' linguistic rights to learn in their own languages, have access to the national/official language of education as well as to international ones, at all levels of the schooling system. Also included are commitments to promote intercultural education, fostering understanding and respect among different social/cultural groups.
	Financial support and incentives	Commitments to make public education free of charge, or progressively so, and/or to reduce the indirect costs of education through measures, such as stipends to families, scholarships and other cash incentives.
	School meals and nutrition	Commitments to strengthen school feeding and nutrition education programmes so as to alleviate the triple burden of malnutrition: underweight, micronutrient deficiencies and overweight.

Theme	Sub-theme	Description
2. Teachers	Teacher supply and deployment	Commitments to ensure that a sufficient number of qualified teachers are available across all levels of education, and/or to define deployment strategies that strike a balance between the needs of schools and teachers' preferences.
	Teacher certification and qualification	Commitments to review or implement teacher qualifications (i.e. requirements to access the teaching profession) and certification (i.e. recognition of teachers' credentials) systems, ensuring that processes to access the profession are transparent and equitable and that qualified/certified teachers have met the established standards of competencies.
	Teacher working conditions	Commitments to improve teachers' working conditions in a way that best promotes their well-being and effective teaching, recognizing their importance in the success of education systems and engaging them in decision-making processes to transform education. Dimensions of improved working conditions include but are not limited to: salaries and financial incentives, workload, work-life balance, professional status, class size, teaching resources, autonomy, employment relationship, school violence and student behaviour governance measures.
	Teacher training and professional development	Commitments to design and improve pedagogical training and continuous professional development programmes; to make them accessible and affordable; to provide them without discrimination; and to align them to educational priorities, teachers' standards as well as to career development policies.
3. Content and methods	Curricular content – what to learn	Commitments to review and update curricular content (what students learn) to ensure learners achieve the skills that enable them to develop their full potential.
	Pedagogical approaches – how to teach & learn	Commitments to change how students learn and teachers teach, reviewing the values underlying pedagogy and the dynamics between teachers and students, and among students, as well as designing new pedagogical approaches and methods that are future oriented.
	Assessment methods	Commitments to review and update student assessment and evaluation methods to better align with national educational priorities. Included are assessments <i>for</i> learning (e.g. classroom and formative assessments) and assessments <i>of</i> learning (e.g. examinations and summative assessments); both at the school level, and at national, cross-national or regional levels.
	Education for sustainable development/greening education	Commitments to contribute to the advancement of education for sustainable development, fostering the acquisition of knowledge, skills, attitudes and values that will empower learners to acknowledge the interdependence of economic, social and environmental issues and to create a sustainable future. Strategies comprise greening education, to get every learner climate ready by including climate change and environmental education in school curricula, TVET, workplace skills development, teaching materials, pedagogy and assessments.

Theme	Sub-theme	Description
3. Content and methods	Socio-emotional learning and values education	Commitments to implement or improve (i) socio-emotional learning programmes to teach personal and interpersonal competencies (e.g. self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, empathy, relationship skills) and/or (ii) values education programmes, including on human rights and global citizenship, that prepare learners to engage with and resolve global challenges, contributing to a more just, peaceful, inclusive and sustainable world.
	21 st -century skills	Commitments to ensure students acquire knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes that are integral to life in the 21 st century. These include, but are not limited to: (i) ways of thinking (e.g. creativity, critical thinking, metacognition); (ii) ways of working (e.g. communication and collaboration); (iii) tools for working (e.g. Information and ICT literacy); and (iv) the ability to live in the world (i.e. citizenship, personal and social responsibility). These skills include some of the skills acquired through socio-emotional learning and values education. Socio-emotional learning focuses on understanding and managing emotions and relationships, while 21 st -century skills encompass a broader set of competencies necessary to thrive in the modern world.
	TVET and skills for work	Commitments to transform technical and vocational education and training systems, identifying new competencies and providing learners with the appropriate upskilling and reskilling required for employment, entrepreneurship, and to access green and digital economies.
	Physical/mental health and safety	Commitments to create health-promoting education systems through the shift towards health-promoting schools, where physical health, mental health and safety from school violence are supported.
	Comprehensive sexuality education	Commitments to implement or improve formal or informal comprehensive sexuality education programmes (i.e. curriculum-based process of teaching and learning about the cognitive, emotional, physical and social aspects of sexuality), through laws and policies, coverage, curriculum, delivery and enabling environments.
	STEM	Commitments to integrate and strengthen science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) capacity in the education system, defining approaches to STEM education, and reviewing curriculum frameworks to include it.
	Foundational learning	Commitments to increase the share of children that achieve minimum proficiency levels in literacy and numeracy by reducing the share of children out of school and increasing the quality of education they receive.

Theme	Sub-theme	Description
4. Governance and financing	Domestic financing	Commitments to increase financing for education by (i) expanding education budgets through measures such as improved tax systems, innovative financing measures and public-private cooperation; (ii) allocating spending more equitably and efficiently; and (iii) tracking and reporting on spending. Also included are commitments to invest more in education infrastructure.
	International aid	Commitments by donor countries to increase the volume, predictability and effectiveness of international aid to education, and ensure that it is aligned with national education plans and consistent with aid effectiveness principles.
	Governance	Commitments to improve education governance through an integrated approach for the system-wide administration of the formal and informal processes for policy making, resource allocation and accountability channels in education. Also included are commitments to coordinate across ministries and across central and sub-national authorities through a whole-of-government approach, as well as to adopt a whole-of-system approach by involving multiple stakeholders, including families, students, communities and the private sector in the governance process. Finally, commitments also cover specific measures to decentralize authority to regional or local governing bodies, and those redefining and enhancing school autonomy.
	Data management	Commitments to implement or improve an educational management information systems (EMIS), defined as ‘a system for the collection, integration, processing, maintenance and dissemination of data and information to support decision-making, policy-analysis and formulation, planning, monitoring and management at all levels of an education system.’
5. Digital transformation and learning	Connectivity	Commitments to establish and sustain connectivity, and to progress towards universal access to the internet for all learners. Also included is the provision of devices to access digital contents through the internet.
	Digital learning	Commitments to support and improve digital learning in the education system, both in terms of contents and resources provided on open public platforms and in terms of capacity (i.e. enhancing digital skills and competences of learners, teachers and other stakeholders).
	Digital regulation	Commitments to introduce and update specific legal frameworks on learners’ data protection, privacy, ownership, governance and security to reduce the vulnerabilities inherent to the increasing digitization and ‘datafication’ of education.
6. Early childhood care and education	Early childhood care and education	General commitments to improve early childhood care and pre-primary education, which include expanding access to as well as improving inclusion, equity and the quality of services; strengthening monitoring and evaluation for accountability; and policy, governance, financing and advocacy.

Theme	Sub-theme	Description
7. Higher education and research	Higher education access and inclusion	Commitments to make higher education more accessible, according to the dimensions of non-discrimination, physical accessibility and economic accessibility through measures that facilitate enrolment and completion by reducing direct and indirect fees, such as scholarships and subsidized services (i.e. meals, public transportation, housing).
	International mobility in higher education	Commitments to promote inbound international mobility for the internationalization of higher education as well as forms of hybrid or virtual mobility programmes by simplifying the recognition of qualifications and reducing barriers to equal access to higher education institutions.
	Research and development (R&D)	Commitments to support and improve research capacity through investments in R&D activities and personnel; better policies for research training; and strategies to retain people in R&D. Also included are the promotion of international collaborations, knowledge sharing and partnerships to further research and innovation.
8. COVID-19 recovery	COVID-19 recovery	Commitments to support COVID-19 recovery and to tackle the issues exacerbated by the pandemic, accelerating the transformation towards more resilient and effective education systems. This can be achieved through better assessment of students' learning levels, adjustments of curricula, increased efficiency of instruction, and a focus on psycho-social health and well-being.
9. Youth engagement	Youth engagement	Commitments to include youth and student leadership, especially from vulnerable and marginalized communities, in decision-making bodies and national delegations, and to involve them at all stages of the process to transform education.

Annex 2

List of countries that submitted national statements of commitment and survey responses

Countries	Statement of commitment	Survey response
Africa		
Angola	√	√
Benin	√	√
Botswana	√	
Burkina Faso	√	
Burundi		
Cabo Verde	√	
Cameroon	√	
Central African Republic	√	
Chad		
Comoros	√	
Congo	√	
Côte d'Ivoire	√	√
Democratic Republic of the Congo		
Djibouti	√	
Equatorial Guinea	√	
Eritrea		
Eswatini	√	
Ethiopia		√
Gabon	√	
Gambia	√	√
Ghana	√	
Guinea	√	
Guinea-Bissau	√	
Kenya	√	√
Lesotho	√	
Liberia	√	
Madagascar	√	√
Malawi	√	√
Mali	√	√
Mauritius		√
Mozambique	√	
Namibia	√	√
Niger	√	

Countries	Statement of commitment	Survey response
Nigeria	√	√
Rwanda	√	
São Tomé and Príncipe		
Senegal	√	√
Seychelles		
Sierra Leone	√	√
Somalia		
South Africa	√	
South Sudan	√	√
Togo		√
Uganda	√	
United Republic of Tanzania	√	√
Zambia		√
Zimbabwe	√	
Arab States		
Algeria	√	
Bahrain	√	√
Egypt	√	
Iraq	√	√
Jordan	√	√
Kuwait	√	√
Lebanon		√
Libya	√	√
Mauritania	√	√
Morocco	√	√
Oman	√	√
Qatar	√	
Saudi Arabia	√	√
State of Palestine	√	√
Sudan		
Syrian Arab Republic	√	√
Tunisia		√
United Arab Emirates	√	√
Yemen	√	√

Countries	Statement of commitment	Survey response
Asia and the Pacific		
Afghanistan		
Australia	√	
Bangladesh	√	√
Bhutan	√	√
Brunei Darussalam	√	
Cambodia	√	√
China	√	√
Cook Islands		
Democratic People's Republic of Korea		
Fiji		
India		
Indonesia	√	√
Iran (Islamic Republic of)	√	
Japan	√	√
Kazakhstan	√	√
Kiribati	√	
Kyrgyzstan	√	√
Lao PDR	√	√
Malaysia	√	√
Maldives		
Marshall Islands		
Micronesia (Federated States of)	√	
Mongolia	√	
Myanmar		
Nauru	√	
Nepal	√	√
New Zealand		
Niue		
Pakistan		√
Palau		
Papua New Guinea		
Philippines	√	
Republic of Korea	√	√
Samoa	√	
Singapore	√	√
Solomon Islands	√	

Countries	Statement of commitment	Survey response
Sri Lanka	√	
Tajikistan	√	
Thailand	√	√
Timor-Leste	√	√
Tonga		
Turkmenistan	√	
Tuvalu		
Uzbekistan	√	√
Vanuatu		
Viet Nam	√	
Europe and North America		
Albania	√	√
Andorra	√	√
Armenia	√	√
Austria		
Azerbaijan	√	√
Belarus	√	
Belgium		√
Bosnia and Herzegovina	√	√
Bulgaria	√	
Canada	√	
Croatia	√	
Cyprus	√	√
Czechia (Czech Republic)	√	
Denmark	√	
Estonia	√	√
Finland	√	
France	√	√
Georgia	√	
Germany	√	√
Greece		
Holy See**	√	
Hungary		√
Iceland	√	√
Ireland		
Israel	√	
Italy	√	
Latvia	√	√

Countries	Statement of commitment	Survey response
Liechtenstein	√	
Lithuania	√	√
Luxembourg		
Malta		
Monaco		√
Montenegro	√	√
Netherlands (Kingdom of the)		√
North Macedonia	√	
Norway	√	√
Poland		
Portugal	√	√
Republic of Moldova	√	√
Romania	√	
Russian Federation		
San Marino	√	
Serbia	√	
Slovak Republic	√	
Slovenia		
Spain	√	√
Sweden	√	
Switzerland	√	√
Türkiye	√	√
Ukraine	√	√
United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	√	
United States of America		
Latin America and the Caribbean		
Antigua and Barbuda	√	
Argentina	√	√
Aruba*		√
Bahamas		√
Barbados		
Belize	√	
Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	√	
Brazil	√	√
Chile	√	√
Colombia	√	√

Countries	Statement of commitment	Survey response
Costa Rica		√
Cuba	√	√
Dominica	√	
Dominican Republic	√	√
Ecuador	√	√
El Salvador	√	√
Grenada	√	
Guatemala	√	
Guyana	√	
Haiti		
Honduras	√	√
Jamaica	√	
Mexico		
Nicaragua		√
Panama	√	
Paraguay		
Peru	√	
Saint Kitts and Nevis	√	
Saint Lucia	√	
Saint Vincent and the Grenadines	√	√
Suriname		√
Trinidad and Tobago		
Uruguay		√
Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of)	√	√

* Associate Member of UNESCO

** Permanent Observer to UNESCO

Annex 3

Indicative strategies and initiatives by path to transformation

Paths	Strategies and initiatives	Actions
Creating wider and deeper ownership of the commitment to transformation	Stakeholder mapping	Map the wider stakeholder network
	Public communication of messages	Communicate the TES messages and national commitments to the public
	Creation of accessible platform/ website	Create and provide a platform/website accessible to all, listing successful initiatives, narratives and other resources related to educational transformation
	Post-TES stakeholder consultations	Organize post-TES consultations, forums, dialogues, etc., with stakeholders
	Whole-of-government dialogue on education	Organize a whole-of-government and inter-ministerial dialogue on the role of education in social and economic transformation
	Social dialogue with education personnel	Organize social dialogue with teachers and other education personnel to discuss their roles in education transformation
	Capacity building for investment advocacy	Build capacities of relevant ministry staff to argue for increased investment in education
From commitment to policy and plan	Review of national consultations	Review the pre-Summit national consultations and the national statement of commitment to unpack key elements of transformation
	Integration into education plans	Integrate the TES messages and commitments and post-TES implementation strategies into existing or new education plans, policies, programmes and initiatives
	Revision of plans through participatory approach	Revise, adapt or prepare education plans through a participatory approach that brings together stakeholders, including youth groups
	Integration into national development plans	Review the national socio-economic development plan and discuss how to integrate education transformation through inter-ministerial collaboration
	Annual reviews for alignment	Conduct annual reviews to examine if plans or policies are aligned with the transformation agenda
	Integration into programming documents	Integrate the national commitments into relevant programming documents, such as the UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework and the GPE Partnership Compact

Paths	Strategies and initiatives	Actions
From policy and plan to action	Sharing transformation agenda	Share transformation agenda with administration and school staff to identify actions and support needed
	Identifying enablers and bottlenecks	With stakeholders, identify major enablers and bottlenecks to the implementation of education policies and plans, and discuss strategies to address them
	Engaging teachers in policy dialogues	Engage teachers in policy dialogues on education and other relevant sectors (e.g. health, labour, social protection and welfare)
	Strengthening school supervisors	Guide and strengthen school supervisors and local administrators to effectively support schools
	Supporting principals and teachers	Support principals and teachers to share their experiences and insights, and contribute to designing innovative transformation strategies
	Scaling-up local initiatives	Explore the potential of successful local initiatives for system-wide scaling-up by reflecting on their enablers and conditions
Accounting for commitments, actions and results	Development/adjustment of monitoring matrix	Develop or adjust a monitoring matrix that identifies responsibilities and resources for action implementation
	Use of existing monitoring mechanisms	Use existing mechanisms at (sub-)national level to monitor the implementation of commitments
	Review and adaptation of monitoring and evaluation (M&E) frameworks	Review and adapt the existing M&E frameworks and EMIS to integrate the indicators for national education transformation
	Dissemination of monitoring findings	Discuss and disseminate the M&E findings

Source: UNESCO Survey (2023) based on HLSC's Guidance Note (2022).

Annex 4

Percentage of countries implementing each strategy and initiative by income group

	High income	Upper middle income	Lower middle income	Low income
Creating wider and deeper ownership of the commitment				
Stakeholder mapping	54%	52%	56%	50%
Public communication of messages	39%	52%	72%	60%
Creation of accessible platform/website	39%	37%	40%	40%
Post-TES stakeholder consultations	43%	52%	60%	40%
Whole-of-government dialogue on education	54%	59%	64%	40%
Social dialogue with education personnel	57%	70%	68%	50%
Capacity building for investment advocacy	25%	44%	48%	70%
From commitment to policy and plan				
Review of national consultations	18%	52%	48%	60%
Integration into education plans	57%	81%	76%	70%
Revision of plans through a participatory approach	61%	78%	60%	80%
Integration into national development plans	32%	59%	56%	40%
Annual reviews for alignment	39%	48%	56%	40%
Integration into programming documents	25%	52%	72%	80%
From policy and plan to action				
Sharing transformation agenda	54%	59%	64%	50%
Identifying enablers and bottlenecks	54%	70%	72%	90%
Engaging teachers in policy dialogues	43%	70%	60%	70%
Strengthening school supervisors	50%	70%	76%	70%
Supporting principals and teachers	57%	63%	64%	40%
Scaling-up local initiatives	43%	48%	60%	70%
Accounting for commitments, actions and results				
Development/adjustment of monitoring matrix	50%	41%	68%	30%
Use of existing monitoring mechanisms	64%	85%	76%	30%
Review and adaptation of monitoring and evaluation (M&E) frameworks	39%	52%	76%	60%
Dissemination of monitoring findings	50%	41%	56%	40%

Source: UNESCO Survey 2023.

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- 215 "Rung 1 Manipulation: Adult-led activities, in which youth do as directed without understanding of the process for the activities; Rung 2 Decoration: Adult-led activities, in which youth understand purpose, but have no input in how they are planned; Rung 3 Tokenism: Adult-led activities, in which youth may be consulted with minimal opportunities for feedback; Rung 4 Assigned, but informed: Adult-led activities, in which youth understand the purpose, decision-making process, and have a role; Rung 5 Consulted and informed: Adult-led activities, in which youth are consulted and informed about how their input will be used and the outcomes of adult decisions; Rung 6 Adult initiated shared decisions with youth: Adult-led activities, in which decision making is shared with youth; Rung 7 Youth initiated and directed: Youth-led activities with little input from adults; Rung 8 Youth initiated shared decisions with adults: Youth-led activities, in which decision making is shared between youth and adults working as equal partners." YouthPower 2: Learning and Evaluation. Roger Hart's Ladder of Participation. <https://www.youthpower.org/youth-drg-toolkit-3-models-roger-hart-ladder>, as cited in, adapted from Hart, R. 1992. *Children's Participation from Tokenism to Citizenship*. Florence, UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre.
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- 218 "It was not until 2014 that governments finally realized that adequate legislation and policies are needed to respond to young people's needs, aspirations and demands. As of April 2014, 122 countries had a national youth policy, up from 99 countries in 2013; 37 countries were either developing a new youth policy or revising their existing one and only 32 countries had no such policy" (UNESCO, 2024).
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- 227 Global Education Meeting. 2021. Paris Declaration: a Global Call for Investing in the Futures of Education. Programme and meeting document, Paris, 2021. <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000380116>.
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- 229 The TES Call-to-Action on Educational Investment features 24 actions addressed at country governments and the international (donor) community.
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- 231 UNESCO. 2024. Can African countries afford their national SDG 4 benchmarks? GEM report policy paper. Paris, February 2024. <https://doi.org/10.54676/QSFJ8148>.
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- 233 World Bank and UNESCO. 2024. *Education Finance Watch 2023: Special Edition for the African Union Year of Education 2024*. Washington D.C., Paris: The World Bank and UNESCO.
- 234 DAC members include: Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, Czechia (Czech Republic), Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Netherlands (Kingdom of the), New Zealand, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Republic of Korea, Slovak Republic, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, United Kingdom, United States of America.
- 235 Some countries submitted the survey, but did not provide a response to specific questions on international aid to education. This limited response may be the result of a lack of consultations with other ministries – such as ministry of finance or ministry of foreign affairs, which typically have more information on this topic – before answering the survey question.
- 236 OECD. 2024. *Data Explorer – Official Development Assistance*. Paris, OECD. <https://data-explorer.oecd.org> (Accessed 19 June 2024)
- 237 See also OECD: <https://www.oecd.org/tax/beps/>

Transforming Education Towards SDG 4

Report of a global survey on country actions to transform education

In 2022, the United Nations Transforming Education Summit responded decisively to mobilize action, ambition and solidarity as well as to elevate education to the top of the political agenda. This powerful mobilization led to 143 countries presenting national statements of commitment, demonstrating their political resolve to reimagine and transform their education systems.

On the Summit's first anniversary, UNESCO invited its Member States to participate in the Survey on Country Actions to Transform Education and report on how they have translated their commitments into actions.

This report showcases transformative actions that countries have undertaken to accelerate progress towards SDG 4. It emphasizes that education must adopt a holistic, lifelong and comprehensive approach that addresses the development and well-being of individual learners and society. Transforming education requires placing inclusion, equity and gender equality at the core of policies and interventions. It also requires more and better education financing, and investments in the teaching profession.

