

Global Campaign for Education (GCE) Position Paper for FFD4

A Call to Member States to Commit to Structural Reforms in the Global Financial Architecture and Financing Human Rights in Seville and Beyond

The 4th International Conference on Financing for Development (FfD4), hosted by the Spanish government in Seville from 30 June to 3 July 2025, is a critical opportunity for States to commit to structural reforms in the global financial architecture, agreeing on an ambitious and transformative document that lays the foundation for the realisation of human rights for all and accelerates the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

As governments debate and build consensus on a renewed global financing framework for sustainable development, the Global Campaign for Education (GCE) urges world leaders to recognize that adequate, sustainable, inclusive, and equitable financing of public education is essential to achieving all Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), advancing human rights, as well as to ensure gender equality and global peace.

The FfD4 is taking place in a context of mounting global crises. Climate change, geopolitical instability, increased conflicts, weakening of democratic institutions, rising authoritarian populism and militarisation, and worsening inequalities are threatening social cohesion and human rights. In this context, we need to ensure that the main global policy framework for development finance tackles economic inequalities and injustice.

It is undeniable that education is a powerful equaliser. Yet, in the outcome document that is currently being negotiated and will be adopted in FFD4, the reference to education is negligible. Education is mentioned as one of the essential public services without further commitment for education financing. The chronic underfunding continues to undermine the right to education. Structural injustices such as regressive taxation, debt distress, and the imposition of austerity imposed by institutions like the IMF have restricted developing countries' fiscal space and deepened inequalities.

- **A \$97 billion annual shortfall is preventing low- and lower-middle-income countries from meeting SDG 4.** As a result, 41% of countries do not meet international benchmarks of spending 4–6% of GDP and/or 15–20% of public budgets on education¹.
- **Inequalities are a key barrier to overcome.** In 2022, governments in low-income countries spent just \$55 per learner annually, compared to \$8,543 in high-income countries². Household

¹ UNESCO GEMR Policy [Policy Paper 49](#) 2023

² UNESCO-World Bank [Education Finance Watch 2024](#)

spending accounts for over one-third of education expenditure in many low-income countries, deepening exclusion.

- **Tax injustice:** Regressive tax systems, tax evasion, and illicit financial flows continue to deplete national revenues. Progressive reforms are often blocked by global tax rules dominated by wealthy countries. Governments are equally culpable for harmful tax policies such as lowering tax rates (“race to the bottom”) to attract investments to the detriment of the country’s long-term revenues and the lack of mechanisms for tax transparency.
- **Debt distress:** Over 54 countries face debt crises³. Government debt in low-income countries averages 72% of GDP. Many of these countries spend more on debt servicing annually than on education. IMF-imposed austerity and wage bill constraints restrict investment in education and recruitment of qualified teachers. These crises have deep historical roots in colonial-era economic structures, unfair global policies, and persistent power imbalances in the international financial system.
- **Privatisation:** Underfunded public services leave governments vulnerable to pressures for commercialisation, privatisation, and asymmetrical public-private partnerships (PPPs) that prioritise profit over people. PPPs and private providers undermine equity, shift costs to families, and weaken public accountability⁴. Household spending accounts for over one-third of total education expenditure in many low-income countries. Early childhood care and education (ECCE), nonformal education, alternative education for children not in education, employment and training (NEET), and adult learning and education (ALE) are especially affected, exacerbating inequalities.
- **Debt, austerity, and underfunded public systems disproportionately affect women, girls, black and indigenous people, persons with disabilities and marginalized populations.** Despite commitments to protect rights, promote equity and inclusion, prevent and address all forms of stigma, discrimination and exclusion in education⁵, Member States have been slow in legislation and financing inclusive and transformative education. Social norms require girls and women to fill service gaps through unpaid labour and care, worsening gender inequalities. Gender-responsive budgeting and investment in inclusive education systems are key to breaking cycles of exclusion and achieving gender justice.
- **While official development assistance (ODA) has been declining—particularly for education—global military spending continues to soar**, reaching an all-time high of \$2.443 trillion in 2023, a 6.8%⁶ increase from the previous year. This stark imbalance is deeply unjust: even a fraction of these military resources could transform public education systems worldwide.

³ UNCTAD [A world of debt](#) Report 2024

⁴ PEHRC Position Paper 2025 [Demystifying Education Public-Private Partnerships](#)

⁵ Transforming Education Summit [Action Track 1 on inclusive, equitable, safe and healthy schools](#)

⁶ Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), available at <https://www.sipri.org/publications/2024/sipri-fact-sheets/trends-world-military-expenditure-2023>

Our Call to Action

The FfD4 is a significant political moment for governments to reiterate their obligations to mobilise maximum available resources to realise human rights and in particular, the right to education, as enshrined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the UNESCO Convention Against Discrimination in Education, and other treaties.

Equally, the FfD4 Action Areas should make reference to the commitments made by Member States in SDG 4, the agreements to take action under the [Financing Call to Action](#) of the Transforming Education Summit (2022) which were reiterated in the [Fortaleza Declaration](#) (2024), urging governments towards investing more, more equitably and more efficiently in education.

GCE calls for a decolonised and just global financial architecture, where mechanisms are established under the UN wherein the Global South countries would have greater voting rights and would be in control in deciding financial policies. By shifting the power imbalance and challenging the extractive and exploitative economic and financial policies perpetuated by powerful countries, developing countries will be empowered to fulfill their human rights obligations such as the right to education and the right to development.

We demand accountability from both governments and donors to uphold the right to education, adequately fund universal, inclusive, and gender-transformative free quality public education and institute equitable financing strategies that prioritize public good over profit.

This includes the urgent expansion of progressive domestic financing and the mobilization of international aid in line with states' extraterritorial obligations and long-standing international commitments. Below is a set of demands directed at governments, donors, and all education stakeholders.

Domestic Resource Mobilisation

- ❑ **Expand tax-to GDP ratio through progressive reforms**, equitable taxation of wealthy individuals and multinational companies, and taxation of harmful goods and activities, while combating tax evasion and illicit financial flows.
- ❑ **Support the adoption of the UN Framework Convention on International Tax Cooperation** to build a more transparent, just, equitable, and accountable global tax system that will enable countries to sustainably finance quality public education and other services.
- ❑ **Support the G20's proposal for a globally coordinated billionaire tax**, with revenues directed toward public investments, including education.

Public Investment to Strengthen Public Education Systems

- ❑ **Allocate at least 4–6% of GDP and/or 15–20% of national budgets to education**, guaranteeing adequate financing per student, securing fair wages and working conditions to education professionals and developing and assuring the implementation of long-term

financing plans to ensure sustainable public investment for public education and ring-fence education budgets, especially during crises.

- **Enact robust public regulation of private actors involved in essential services such as education**, ensuring strong, transparent and accountable States lead financing and delivery to overcome inequalities and ensure universal access to quality education within a human rights framework.
- **Guarantee that any innovative financing models or instruments align with human rights**, universality, and the strengthening of public education systems, and are explicitly geared toward overcoming inequalities.
- **Ensure that revenues from natural resources are sustainably and transparently invested in education and all public services.**

Equity and Inclusion

- **Prioritise historically marginalised and underserved learners in budget allocations**, including girls, black and indigenous people, people with disabilities, crisis-affected and displaced populations, and rural communities. Ensure public funds are consciously directed toward overcoming inequalities, fulfilling the right to education and shaping a sustainable, just and democratic future.
- **Ensure education financing is gender-transformative**, supporting inclusive curricula, teacher training, safe learning environments, and targeted investments that advance gender equality at all levels of education.
-

Debt Justice

- **Implement debt cancellation to expand fiscal space.**
- **Support civil society's demand for establishing a UN Framework Convention on Sovereign Debt**, based on fair global agreements on lending and borrowing, shifting power away from the IMF to a representative UN body.
- **Eliminate harmful loan conditionalities such as education budget cuts or public sector wage caps.** Remove employment and salary ceilings that restrict the recruitment and retention of qualified education personnel and teachers.

Aid Effectiveness

- **Meet the 0.7% GNI target for ODA, with at least 20% allocated to education and align aid with national education plans**, applying aid effectiveness principles and avoiding donor-driven agendas.
- **Protect and increase aid to education, reverse recent cuts, and reaffirm education as a priority sector.** International aid must be safeguarded as a matter of global justice to ensure that every child, youth, and adult can exercise their right to education and lifelong learning. The narrative of aid must be shifted from a perspective of charity to one of reparations.

- **Ensure increased and predictable funding for multilateral cooperation (such as the Global Partnership for Education and Education Cannot Wait) that supports public education systems** and guarantees the right to education during climate crises, conflicts and other emergencies.

GCE urges Member States, government delegates to FFD4, parliamentarians, multilateral organisations and other political authorities to transform the global financing systems towards addressing inequalities within and across countries and ensuring that States deliver on their human rights obligations. We call on decision makers to integrate the urgent calls of education coalitions, teachers' movements, youth and student movements in the FFD4 outcome document and deliberations. Education is fundamental in overcoming the multiple crises and the foundation in fostering inclusion, justice, gender equality, social cohesion and peace.