

The Time is Now: Importance of Global Education

Universal access to education is a human right, and should be set at a high priority. Yet, millions of children and adults remain deprived of educational opportunities as a result of social, cultural, and economic factors. Prolonged lack of access to quality education can have profound implications for the ability of children and their communities to develop and prosper. Implementation of strong educational programs help to ensure all individuals have the ability to not just survive, but thrive in their communities.

The Current State of Access to Global Education

Globally, children are facing a massive learning crisis, where millions of children and youth do not have access to quality education. As a result, the lack of education and related employment opportunities in many countries presents national, regional, and global security risks.ⁱ

- About **258 million children** and youth were out of school for the school year ending in 2018.ⁱⁱ
- This total includes **59 million children** of primary school age, **62 million** of lower secondary school age and **138 million** of upper secondary age.ⁱⁱⁱ
- An estimated **617 million children** and adolescents around the world are **unable to reach minimum proficiency levels** in reading and mathematics – even though **two thirds of them are in school**.^{iv}

Early Childhood Education

Millions of children under the age of five living in low- and middle-income countries are at risk of not achieving their full potential. Health, nutrition, security and safety, responsive caregiving, and early learning opportunities all influence this risk. Quality early childhood development (ECD) can help mitigate these risks and create a pathway for the most marginalized to reach their full potential.^v

- About **175 million**, nearly **half of the worlds pre-primary-age children**, are not enrolled in pre-primary education.^{vi}
- In high-income countries **83% of children** are enrolled in pre-primary education compared to **22% from low-income countries**.^{vii}
- Early developmental opportunities **provide foundations for lifelong success**, and allows children to develop functional skills related to **information processing, comprehension, language, emotion regulation, and motor skills**. Preschool aged children who receive ECD experience brain development and achieve **90% of their adult brain volume by age 6**.^{viii}

Girls' Education

Education is the key to improving the future for young girls across the globe. Educating girls not only empowers women, but improves the lives of future generations, reduces infant and maternal mortality, prevents child marriages, and reduces rates of HIV/AIDS. When we invest in improving girls' education, we are investing in the success of society.



- Worldwide, **132 million girls** are out of school and do not have access to education.^{ix}
- A child whose mother is able to read is **50% more likely to live past the age of five**.^x
- If every girl around the world received **12 years of quality education**, lifetime earnings by women could increase by **\$15 trillion to \$30 trillion** globally.^{xi}

Inclusive Education

Disability is one of the largest barriers to education across the globe. Children with disabilities face discrimination, stigma, and are often overlooked by policy makers, limiting their access to quality education. Inclusive education systems give students of all backgrounds the opportunity to learn and grow within the classroom, and gives all children a fair chance to go to school.

- Nearly **50% of children** with disabilities are **not in school**, and are denied the opportunity to take part in their communities and workforce.^{xii}
- In low- and lower middle-income countries, around **40% of children** with disabilities are out of school **at primary level** and **55% at secondary level**.^{xiii}
- Children with disabilities are at a significantly **higher risk of violence** compared to children without disabilities. Girls with disabilities are **more likely to face emotional and sexual violence** than girls without disabilities.^{xiv}

Education in Emergencies

Children’s access to education is at an increased risk during emergencies and protracted crises. Wars, epidemics, and natural disasters disrupt education, delay access, and contribute to higher drop-out and lower completion rates. Emergencies can result in destruction of infrastructure, increased economic pressure, displacement, and a lack of safe spaces for children to learn and play.

- **75 million children and youth**, who are affected by **conflict and war, natural disaster, and forced displacement** are in desperate need of educational support.^{xv}
- Between 2014 and 2018, **attacks on education in 87 countries** were reported.^{xvi}
- When children are in school during crisis they are **better protected, healthier, and have greater access to life-saving services**.^{xvii}
- **Children who receive quality education** go on to help create **more stable and peaceful societies** in the longer-term, as they are less exposed to groups resorting to violence.^{xviii}

COVID-19 & Impacts on Access to Education

The COVID-19 pandemic is having unprecedented impacts on global education, as more children are out of school than ever. It disrupts education, increases gender-based violence, and causes enormous long-term risks in terms of children’s safety, food security, and their overall physical and mental health. With the impacts of COVID-19 we can expect to see long-term loss of education, increased school drop-out rates, increased domestic violence against children and fewer modes protection for children in the midst of this pandemic.



- Over **90% of the world’s students**—that is **1.5 billion learners**—have been affected by school closures.^{xxix}
- COVID-19 will likely impact **75 million school-aged children and youth**, of whom **39 million** are girls, and their families who are already marginalized by **armed conflict, forced displacement and natural disaster**.^{xx}
- **Children with disabilities are extremely vulnerable** and will likely be impacted the most from the COVID-19 pandemic.^{xxi}

Role of US Government

Past investments in educational progress are in jeopardy as more children are out of school than ever. The global community – including the U.S. – must take action and seize an historic opportunity to grow, and leverage, the political will to address the lack of access to education.

Currently, the U.S. Government:

- Has included **\$875 million for international basic education** in the **FY2020 State and Foreign Operations appropriations bill**.
- In the FY2020 funding bill included **\$100 million for the Global Partnership for Education (GPE)**, which strengthens education systems in developing countries.^{xxii}
- In the FY2020 funding bill included **\$25 million for Education Cannot Wait (ECW)**, which links governments, humanitarian actors, and development efforts to deliver a more collaborative and rapid response to the educational needs of children and youth affected by crises.^{xxiii}

The U.S. Government Should:

- **Increase funding** for global education and focus on calculating the real funding gaps at a country level.
- **Improve coordination** across countries to create mechanisms to collect and compare information about educational programming and results, including disability-inclusive education, education in emergencies, girls’ education, and early childhood education.
- Ensure an **effective transition** from humanitarian response programming to long-term education development, including the impacts from the COVID-19 pandemic.

Return on Investment

Increasing access to global education requires governments to take greater efforts in low-income countries. As of 2019, only 0.05% of the United States spending on education is spent in low-income countries.^{xxiv} In order to improve access to global education, the U.S. government must fill the finance gaps for the most marginalized groups in society.

- Even after an increase in domestic resources is taken into account, the annual **financing gap over 2015-2030** for reaching universal pre-primary, primary and secondary education of good quality in low and lower middle-income countries is **\$39 billion**.^{xxv}

- If every child in low-income countries completed secondary school by 2030, income per capita would increase by **75%** by 2050 and **poverty elimination would be brought forward by 10 years.**^{xxvi}
- The return for each dollar invested in education is **more than \$5 in additional gross earnings** in low-income countries and **\$2.50 in lower middle-income countries.**^{xxvii}

Effective Programming

Programs that increase access to global education offer creative ways to provide more children around the globe access to a quality education. Here are a few examples:

USAID – The primary purpose of programming in education by USAID is to achieve sustained, measurable improvements in learning outcomes and skills development. With the increased use of smartphones and internet access, USAID has designed toolkits to assist education officers and partners with assessing, designing, managing, and evaluating information and communications technology (ICT) for education activities, and is intended as a living set of tools that are regularly updated based upon feedback from the field. As one of the largest bilateral supporters of ICT for education, USAID has been committed to promoting evidence-based practices and has invested in research and innovation to grow the knowledge base for ICT for education.

Global Partnership for Education – Created in 2010, the Global Partnership for Education has implemented the Global and Regional Activities (GRA) program which focuses on learning outcomes, education financing, and out-of-school children. GRA has invested \$31 million in 15 projects across their topic areas which have produced an immense amount of knowledge products. These include over 100 guidelines and methodological tools and over 230 other types of reference documents and reports. In addition, knowledge exchange activities took place at the global and regional level, with over 50 regional level seminars/workshops and more than 160 country level seminars/workshops having taken place to resolve education challenges.

Education Cannot Wait – Education Cannot Wait (ECW) was created in 2016 to put education on the humanitarian agenda to ensure that every crisis-affected child is in school and learning. ECW's mission is focused around five core functions including inspire political commitment, generate additional funding, plan and respond collaboratively, strengthen capacity to respond to crises, and to improve accountability. To date, ECW has reached 2.3 million children and youth and has provided training for more than 41,000 teachers. ECW offers governments, multilateral institutions and the private sector the chance to finance comprehensive education programs for children affected by conflicts, natural disasters and displacement, right from the onset of crisis through recovery phases.

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