

## Open Letter to Co-Facilitators, Summit of the Future

30 May 2024

**Dear Ambassador Antje Leendertse & Ambassador Neville M. Gertze,**

We write to you, the co-facilitators of the upcoming Summit of the Future, with an urgent message.

We, the leaders of today, have failed our children. The world we have created for them is one of rising hate and division; escalating conflicts; deepening inequalities; and catastrophic climate emergencies.

In the Secretary-General's proposal for the Summit in 2021, he issued a rallying call: "Increasingly, people are turning their backs on the values of trust and solidarity in one another... Humanity's welfare – and indeed, humanity's very future – depend on solidarity and working together as a global family to achieve common goals."

Today's children live in a world in which: half of all children have experienced violence in the past twelve months, 122 million girls are out of school, 12 million girls each year are victims of early, forced, child marriage or unions and 1 in 10 children are in child labor, including 63 million girls. 224 million children are affected by war and humanitarian emergencies, and in the majority of countries in sub-Saharan Africa, less than 5% of children with disabilities are enrolled in primary school.

Meanwhile, the devastating effects of climate change and environmental degradation are not impacting boys and girls equally. Drought-affected areas in the Horn of Africa have witnessed stark increases in school dropout for girls and early, forced, child marriage or unions rates surged by 119% in 2022 compared to 2021. In Pakistan, the destructive floods in 2022 exposed approximately 640,000 adolescent girls to higher risks of school dropout, gender-based violence, and early, forced, child marriage or unions.

Meanwhile, Anti-Rights movements are growing stronger on our watch. Afghan girls are shut out of education. LGBTIQ+ persons are facing further criminalization in Uganda, Ghana, and other countries. Gambian girls are facing a repeal of the ban on female genital mutilation. Half the women in the United States risk losing access to abortion. Nigerian girls continue to be abducted by insurgents, and in the Kivus, DRC, rape remains a weapon of war used against girls and women alike.

These inequities, and the backslide in the human rights we fought so hard to secure, is the fundamental denominator of all the threats to our future. It is enabling war, locking countries into never-ending debt, entrenching borders, fueling racist, misogynist movements, and stalling progress towards an equitable and green future.

The future depends on our resistance against this backslide. The future depends on equipping coming generations with the understanding, knowledge (including indigenous knowledge) and empathy they need to deal with the world that we have created for them. The future depends on safe, inclusive gender-transformative education.

When invested in well, education can transform societies. It is the catalyst of women's movements, anti-apartheid movements, labor movements and other collective journeys towards equality and peace. Through education, children can learn the "values of trust and solidarity" that the Secretary-General called for, and imagine a new kind of citizenship and leadership that does not see neighbors or the planet as competitors in a zero-sum game. Now more than ever, we need world leaders to redouble their efforts toward the achievement of SDG 4.7, which promotes education for sustainable development, human rights, gender equality, and peace and non-violence. This kind of education will have the greatest impact on girls, the single largest vulnerable demographic in the world. We strongly support the Girls' Pact for the Future in calling for specific provisions for girls in all their diversity.

We must raise our ambitions for the next generation and commit to safe, inclusive, gender-transformative education for all, that challenges entrenched and harmful norms and gender binaries, teaches the values of non-discrimination, respect and equality and raises critical consciousness about the root causes of injustice and systems of oppression.

We must take a stand together to realize this future. We therefore call for two items to be included in the Summit of the Future Agenda:

- Dedicated session on the protection of fundamental human rights for all, enshrining renewed commitments made at the highest level to protect future generations
- Dedicated sessions on a gender-transformative, safe, inclusive and climate just education, to help equip present and future generations with the understanding, knowledge and empathy they need to continue the fight for justice, peace and security for all

The UNGEI Partnership humbly offers our collective expertise, energy and global networks to support these vital agenda items.

Signed,

***Members of UN Girls' Education Initiative Partnership, Feminist Network for Gender Transformative Education, Gender at the Centre Initiative Alliance, Partner Coalition for Ending Gender Stereotypes in Schools, School Related Gender Based Violence Working Group and Transform Education***

## **SIGNATORIES**

**Aahung**  
**Accelerate Hub**  
**Access Planet**  
**AGEE-UCL**  
**AMFE Senegal**  
**Amplify Girls**  
**ANCEFA**  
**ASPBAE**  
**ATHENA Network**  
**BeWithYou**  
**Brave Movement**  
**Breakthrough**  
**CAMFED**  
**Caribbean Feminist**  
**Center for Health Education and Vulnerable Support (CHEVS)**  
**CLADE**  
**Commonwealth Children and Youth Disability Network**  
**Commonwealth of Learning**  
**Dreams**  
**DO Grassroot Forum and Citizens Empowerment Foundation (DO)**  
**Dr Catherine Vanner, University of Windsor**  
**Educate Girls**  
**Education Cannot Wait**  
**Education International**  
**Elimu Care**  
**EmpoderaClima**  
**Equal Measures 2030**  
**FAWE**  
**Feminitt Caribbean**  
**FHI360**  
**FRIDA**  
**Girls First Initiative**  
**Girls Congress**  
**Global Campaign for Education**  
**Global School Leaders**  
**Gufasha Girls Foundation**  
**Humanity and Inclusion**  
**International Planned Parenthood Federation**  
**Mocha Celis**  
**Nashipai Kenya**  
**Plan International**  
**Politics4Her**  
**Population Council**  
**Por Ser Niña**  
**Protsahan India Foundation**  
**Red Nacional de Líderes y Líderesas juveniles Tu Decides**  
**Restless Development**  
**Rising Child Foundation**  
**Salimatou Foundation for Education**  
**She Educates**  
**Shenovate Initiative**  
**Sightsavers**  
**Sky is the Limit- Ashimit Udaan Org**  
**Teenage Network**  
**The Breadfruit Collective**  
**Thinking Classroom Foundation**  
**Together For Girls**  
**UN Girls' Education Initiative**  
**Usawa Agenda**  
**Voluntary Services Overseas**  
**VVOB**  
**Women Deliver**  
**YAPD4Africa**  
**Youth Coalition for Sexual and Reproductive Rights**  
**Youth Interfaith Forum on Sexuality Indonesia**  
**Youth LEAD Mongolia**  
**Youth Voices and Action Initiative**

# Annex: Statistics on the State of the World's Children & Youth in Education and the Rollback of Human Rights

May 2024

## Alarming and deepening inequalities in education and beyond

- 16% of children and youth are not attending school, including 122 million girls. At primary level, 1 out of 10 children worldwide are not in school. 1 out of 5 children in Africa are not attending school (19.7%). ([UNESCO, 2023](#))
- One billion children – over half of all children aged 2-17 years – have experienced physical, sexual or emotional violence in the past 12 months alone ([WHO, 2020](#)). Between 46% and 78% of adolescent girls in schools in Africa have experienced some form of School-Related Gender-Based Violence ([AUDA-NEPAD, 2023](#)), while nearly half girls in Western and Central Africa believe that a husband is justified in beating his wife ([World Bank, 2023](#))
- Children with disabilities are 49% more likely to have never attended school than their peers without disabilities and 42% less likely to have foundational reading and numeracy skills than learners without disabilities ([UNICEF, 2021](#)). Girls with disabilities complete schooling at lower rates than boys with disabilities ([World Bank, 2019](#)). In the majority of countries in sub-Saharan Africa, less than 5% of children with disabilities are enrolled in primary school ([GPE, 2018](#))
- LGBTIQ+ students suffer from high levels of discrimination and multiple forms of bullying across countries. In a study conducted in Latin America in 2019, 74% of Chilean students, 82% of Mexican students and 86% of Colombian students reported that they had sometimes, often or frequently heard homophobic comments in the previous year. A 2015 study conducted with teachers and students on bullying in Lithuania found that over 30% of LGBT students felt partially or totally unsafe ([OECD, 2022](#))
- 1 in 10 children are in child labor, including 63 million girls ([ILO, UNICEF, 2020](#)), an impediment to access to education
- 12 million girls each year are victims of early, forced, child marriage or unions. Unicef estimates that at the current rate of progress, it will take over 300 years to eliminate the practice ([UNICEF, 2023](#).) In South Asia, around one in four young women were first married or in union before their 18th birthday, and 3 in 4 of these will give birth while still in adolescence ([UNICEF, 2023](#))
- UNFPA estimated that nearly 4.3 million girls were at risk of female genital mutilation in 2023, up from 4.1 million girls in 2019 ([UNFPA, 2023](#).) This practice is most prevalent in Africa. For example, in Guinea, 97% of girls and women have undergone FGM, while nearly 90% of the girls in the east-central regions of Burkina Faso have also been victims ([OHCHR, 2016](#))
- In general, education systems are not supporting indigenous education and as a result, many indigenous communities are not able to access relevant education opportunities. This disproportionately impacts girls and young women. For instance, indigenous women in Guatemala receive only 1.8 years of schooling on average ([American University, 2019](#)) while in Peru, the illiteracy rate amongst indigenous girls and young women is 21.2% compared to 5.5% of non-indigenous girls ([USAID, 2019](#))

## Climate injustice affects children and disrupts their education

- The education of around 38 million children is disrupted each year by the climate crisis ([Save the Children, 2024](#))

- In Pakistan, the destructive floods in 2022 exposed approximately 640,000 adolescent girls to higher risks of school dropout, gender-based violence, and child, early & forced marriage or unions ([Global Protection Cluster, 2022](#))
- Drought-affected areas in the Horn of Africa have witnessed stark increases in school dropout for girls, and [early, forced, child marriage or unions rates surged by 119% in 2022 compared to 2021](#) ([UNICEF, 2022](#))
- Nearly 710 million children are currently living in countries at the highest risk of suffering the impact of climate change. By 2040, it is estimated that one in four children will be living early, forced and child marriage or unions rates surged by 119% in 2022 compared to 2021 in areas with extreme water shortages. By 2050, a further 24 million children are projected to be undernourished as a result of the climate crisis ([Save the Children, 2024](#))
- Almost 160 million children are exposed to increasingly severe and prolonged droughts ([Save the Children, 2024](#))

### **More children are becoming displaced due to conflicts, girls are under threat of sexual violence**

- One quarter of the world's population is currently living in a conflict zone ([United Nations, 2023](#))
- Out of the 224 million crisis-affected children and adolescents of school age, about 72 million (32%) are out of school. Of these, 53% are girls, 17% have functional difficulties, and 21% (about 15 million) have been forcibly displaced ([ECW Global Estimates Study, 2023](#))
- All schools in Gaza have been closed for 625,000 students for 6 months. According to the Ministry of Education, as of 2 April, more than 5,479 students and 261 teachers have been killed in the Gaza Strip since 7 October ([ReliefWeb, 2024](#))
- An estimated 1.4 million school-aged children have been internally displaced in Sudan and a reported 171 schools are serving as emergency shelters by the displaced population ([Education Cluster Data 2023](#))
- In the Democratic Republic of Congo, over 900,000 children are out of school, and more than 1,000 schools are closed. The country is facing a lost generation of children without an education, and is also home to girls who are at a high risk for violence and child marriage ([UNICEF, 2024](#))
- 5.3 million children in Ukraine have faced school disruption as a result of war, with 2600 schools damaged, and 400 destroyed ([UNICEF, 2023](#))

### **Anti-Rights Movements: Reversal of human rights gains**

- 2.5 million Afghan girls have been shut out of education since the Taliban takeover in 2021. Nearly 30% of girls in Afghanistan have never entered primary education ([UNESCO, 2023](#))
- Laws criminalizing same-sex relationships exist in one third of countries around the world ([ILGA, 2023](#).) In 2024, Uganda voted to uphold the 2023 Anti-Homosexuality Act which enshrines punishments including the death penalty for those found guilty ([Reuters, 2024](#)), while parliamentary debates in Ghana surround the passing of a new, stricter law on homosexuality ([Al Jazeera, 2024](#))
- Gambian girls are facing a repeal of the ban on female genital mutilation ([UNICEF, 2024](#))
- Half the women in the United States risk losing access to abortion ([New York Times, 2022](#))
- Thousands of Nigerian girls have been abducted by insurgents, with schools frequently targeted for attacks, with 200 children abducted as recently as March 2024 ([Voice of America, 2024](#))
- Over 5000 cases of rape have been recorded during the conflict in South Kivu, DRC ([Women's International Peace Centre, 2023](#))
- In 2021, Turkey withdrew from the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (the Istanbul Convention), weakening protections for women and girl's safety and well-being ([OHCHR, 2021](#))