

How the UN Transforming Education Summit must deliver for girls

The U.N. Transforming Education Summit (TES) offers world leaders an unprecedented opportunity to address the current global education crisis, put the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) on track and set an agenda to prepare for future education challenges.

In order to meet the objectives of TES and achieve the SDGs, **world leaders need to listen to girls and take effective action to address their challenges, needs and ambitions.** While some progress had been made for girls' education prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, nearly 130 million girls were out of school and girls were still twice as likely than boys to never attend school. In some countries and regions, girls continue to fall far behind boys in most education measures.

Despite leaders' commitment to "leave no one behind" through the SDGs, the most vulnerable girls continue to be excluded from both education and data. After decades of promises, **leaders have failed to deliver adequate funding or progress for girls' education — and the global education crisis is only getting worse.**

The pandemic, climate change, conflict and rising inequality are magnifying barriers to girls' education and making girls more vulnerable to abuse and exclusion. Securing girls' access to safe and quality education — including climate education — and sexual and reproductive health and rights is fundamental for their success, for meeting the SDGs and for our shared future.

The most pressing violation is in Afghanistan, where almost a year ago the Taliban imposed a de facto ban on secondary school for girls. Failing to take action for Afghan girls at TES would mark a fundamental failure of the SDG promises due to the universal nature

of the SDGs and the commitment to leave no one behind as well as decades of international promises. **Afghan girls and women do not need more statements of concern; they need urgent action.**

At TES this year, world leaders can deliver on their promises to girls and put the SDGs back on track ahead of the 2030 deadline. Specifically, TES organisers and world leaders must:

1) Value girls' voices. ✦

Ensure girls' meaningful engagement in TES preparatory processes, the summit, follow-up and accountability mechanisms.

- Ahead of and at the summit in September, support and work with girls and other youth leaders to ensure that **plans for TES, TES outcomes, implementation of outcomes and accountability processes** recognise their leadership, reflect their priorities and are clear and accessible.
- Ensure that girls are **meaningfully included at TES.** This includes providing advanced visa support, advanced briefing and preparation time, contact with official U.N. safeguarding focal points, reserved seats and speaking slots for youth representatives, safe spaces for youth representatives to meet, share learning and network.
- Provide a clear, specific and resourced **youth engagement strategy** for TES follow-up and accountability at national, regional and global levels. This should include the 2023 SDG High Level Political Forum and the 2023 U.N. Summit of the Future.
- Support and resource **SDG4Youth** to work with a diverse network of girl-led organisations, extending beyond the summit to include implementation and accountability processes at national, regional and global levels.
- Work with **member states** to ensure young women leaders are included as civil society representatives in official government delegations to the U.N. General Assembly.



2) Establish a fair global compact on education.

Bring together commitments made by lower-income and higher-income countries – reflecting their differing contexts and abilities – to ensure that education has funding and policy frameworks needed to reach SDG 4.

Leaders of lower-income countries should use their national statements of commitment at TES to:

- Recommit to spending 20% of budgets and 6% of gross national income (GNI) to education, as well as expanding the revenue base for public services through progressive taxation and redistributive spending; and
- Redouble efforts to reach low-income and marginalised girls, pledging to make education plans and budgets gender-responsive, and to eliminate cost barriers to education such as school fees and uniform charges.

Leaders of higher-income countries should use their national statements of commitment to:

- Announce their intention to increase lower-income countries' fiscal space for education through the reallocation of Special Drawing Rights and cancellation of unpayable debt; and
- Renew – and set out a timeline to reach – the global commitment to spend 0.7% GNI on aid, allocate at least 10% to education and ensure that all aid is gender-responsive.

Leaders of all countries should use their national statements of commitment to pledge to:

- Recognise upper secondary education within national and global protections for the right to education;
- Ensure education is a force for gender equality, by, for example:
 1. Removing discriminatory policies that prevent girls from going to school;
 2. Addressing gender stereotypes in textbooks;
 3. Equipping teachers to examine, challenge, and change harmful gender norms; and
 4. Teaching about non-discrimination and gender equality;
- Revise curricula so that girls gain the knowledge and skills to thrive in the context of 21st century challenges like climate change and digitalisation;
- Make education systems resilient to the impacts of shocks such as extreme weather events, pandemics and conflict;
- Align education policy initiatives with other national priority plans, such as UNFCCC Nationally Determined Contributions and

- National Adaptation Plans, national digital strategies and national disaster preparedness plans; and
- Reiterate and build on previous pledges in international summits since 2015 such as the Kenyatta Declaration, G7 Declaration on Girls' Education, Incheon Declaration and the Safe Schools Declaration.

3) Hold leaders accountable.

Commit to mechanisms that hold leaders of all countries accountable for turning their promises into concrete national and international actions.

- **Agree to issue a periodic report** consolidating and mapping progress against all collective political commitments aimed at transforming education since 2015.
- **Require heads of state to provide an initial progress report** against their national statements of commitment at the Summit of the Future in 2023 and at least twice thereafter before the SDG deadline of 2030.
- **Leverage the National SDG 4 Benchmark process**, urging countries to adopt further benchmark values on gender targets as well as committing to monitor progress against agreed benchmarks and common standards.

4) Act on Afghanistan – the world's worst violation of girls' education rights.

Include a spotlight on Afghanistan at the TES Summit and use the Secretary General's statement to urge the international community to:

- **Fund globally-agreed plans** – the Afghanistan Education Sector Transitional Framework and Humanitarian Response Plan – to sustain the education system over the next 18 months;
- **Provide targeted funding** to Afghan women's rights organisations and civil society groups working to defend women's rights and provide alternative education opportunities for out-of-school girls;
- **Identify and implement longer-term solutions** to the financing challenges facing Afghanistan's education sector, including a "humanitarian-plus" approach to aid to ensure that teachers' salaries and other recurrent education costs can be paid; and
- Agree additional concrete steps to **hold de facto authorities accountable for realising Afghan women's and girls' rights.**