



GLOBAL CAMPAIGN FOR
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Africa's Feminist Networks Unite for Transformation on Learning to Leading: Africa National Education Coalitions Step Into Global Advocacy

The Africa Regional Action Workshop on Gender Transformative Education (GTE), held in Nairobi from 26-27 August 2025, marked a powerful milestone in the Africa's ongoing push to reshape education systems through feminist and inclusive lenses.

The two-day workshop, co-facilitated by the African Women's Development and Communication Network (FEMNET), the Global Campaign for Education (GCE), the Forum for African Women Educationalists (FAWE), the United Nations Girls' Education Initiative (UNGEI), and Oxfam in Africa, brought together over 80 participants from 21 African countries across government, civil society, youth groups, academia, and grassroots movements.

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GCE, the Africa Network Campaign on Education for All (ANCEFA), and National Education Coalition representatives from 11 countries in Africa were amongst the participants (DRC, Eswatini, the Gambia, Ghana, Ivory Coast, Kenya, Lesotho, Malawi, Mauritania, Rwanda and South Sudan).

Guided by the African Union's 2025 theme, Building a united front to advance justice and reparations for Africans, the workshop reaffirmed education as a vehicle for reparative justice. Participants highlighted how truly transformative education must redress historical inequalities and dismantle systemic barriers that continue to exclude women, girls, and marginalised learners from opportunity. As FAWE's Executive Director, Dr. Martha Muhwezi, (represented by Lydia Majira Panzi) noted, *"education is itself a form of reparation; it restores dignity and disrupts inequality."*

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GCE also worked with NECs to access global mechanisms such as the CSO VNR Task Force, supporting them in registering, contributing to civil society statements, and joining global consultations, another important “first” for many coalitions. EFANET The Gambia even took part in drafting its country’s CSO statement, marking a milestone for Gambian civil society engagement.

This momentum is spreading. Even countries not submittiThe workshop enabled a dynamic exchange of experience and strategies. Discussions explored important themes such as education financing, disability inclusion, feminist localisation, and youth-led advocacy. Barriers to disability inclusion, financing gaps, and digital exclusion emerged as major challenges, while the role of grassroots feminist movements was celebrated as central to sustaining transformational change.

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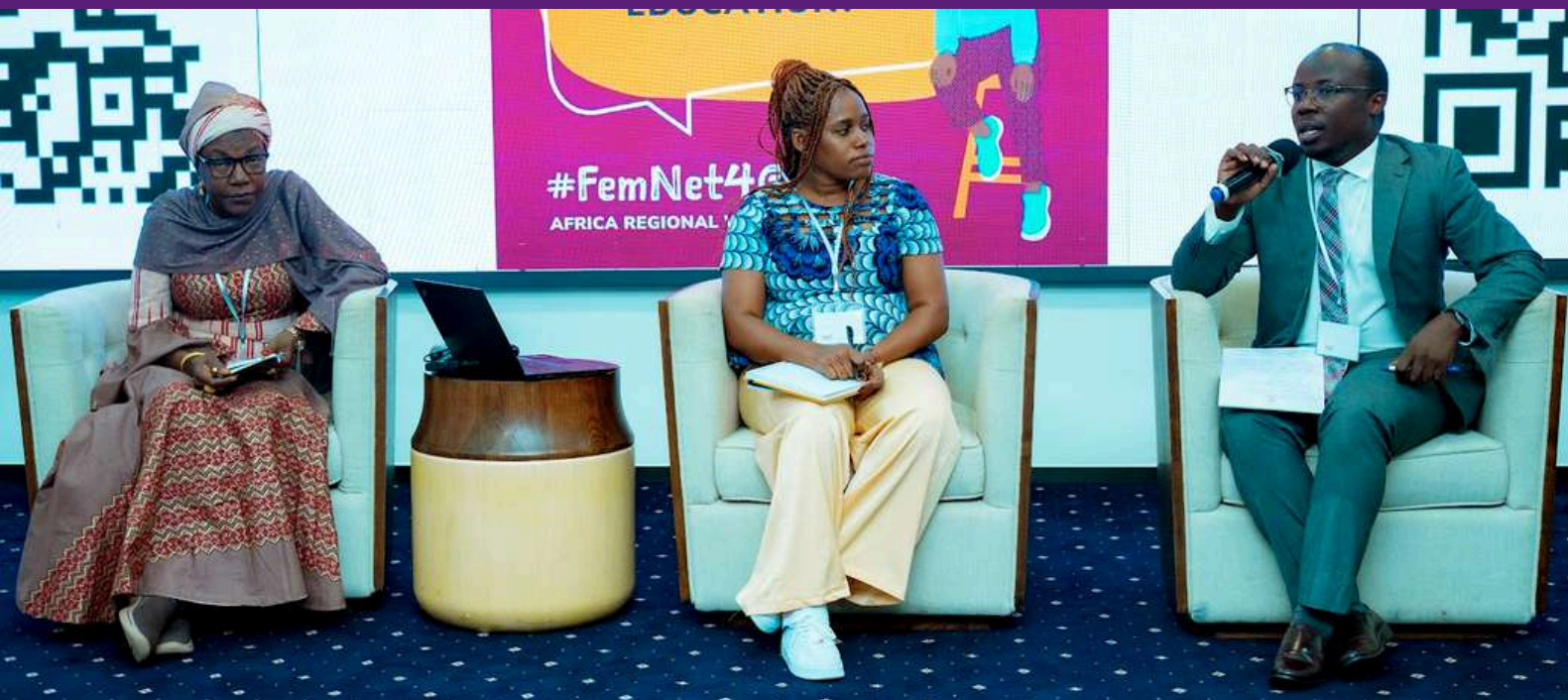


Participants co-developed a set of cross-cutting insights that will guide collective advocacy across the region:

- Gender Transformative Education should be viewed as a form of social and economic reparation, essential to justice and equality.
- Financing remains the backbone of progress; domestic resource mobilisation and scrutiny of budgets are vital to closing gaps.
- Civil society must balance accountability with partnership, using credible data to strengthen influence.
- Localisation of funding is necessary to ensure grassroots feminist groups are resourced as co-leaders, not subcontractors.
- Intergenerational and intersectional leadership is critical, placing young feminists at the forefront of reform.

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Panel discussions included regional actors such as the African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACERWC) and Regional Economic Communities (RECs), which offered frameworks for harmonising gender equality commitments across Africa. Contributors from FAWE, Plan International, ActionAid, and Oxfam showcased successful models of climate-responsive, disability-inclusive, and non-formal education that holistically address barriers to learning.

A highlight session led by GCE's Julie Juma and Ashina Mtsumi of ActionAid unpacked the 4S Framework - Share, Size, Sensitivity, Scrutiny - as a feminist tool for analysing education budgets. GCE highlighted that financing gender-transformative education is not only about resource mobilisation but also about justice, redistribution, and accountability. Complementarily, discussions on feminist localisation urged shifts in power to ensure that community-based organisations are equitably funded and acknowledged as expert practitioners.

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Building on the FEMNET4GTE regional declaration of 2024, participants proposed concrete actions to advance GTE across Africa, including:

- Creating systems to generate reliable, disaggregated data on GTE.
- Developing feminist research agendas on education financing.
- Addressing technology, climate, and disability challenges within education strategies.
- Integrating responses to anti-rights backlash threatening gender equality progress.

Closing the workshop, FAWE Malawi's Wesley Chabwera reaffirmed that the Feminist Network for GTE is not just a coalition but a growing intergenerational movement determined to transform education systems across Africa. He called on participants to translate commitments into action, ensuring the Regional Declaration and its priorities inform national and continental advocacy, including the upcoming UN General Assembly convening in New York.

The Nairobi workshop affirmed that feminist, inclusive, and transformative education remains the cornerstone of justice, equality, and liberation across Africa.

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GCE Youth Action Group Joins FEMNET4GTE Regional Workshop in Nairobi

In August 2025, young education advocates from across Africa gathered in Nairobi, Kenya, for the Feminist Network for Gender Transformative Education (FEMNET4GTE) African Regional Action Workshop, hosted by the Forum for African Women Educationalists (FAWE) in partnership with UNGEI, GCE, and regional partners.



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The two-day event brought together government officials, academics, student and teacher unions, disabled persons' organisations, youth leaders, feminist activists, and multilateral agencies to advance gender equality through education across the continent.

Representing GCE's Youth Action Group (YAG) were Ahmid C. Jalloh (YARDO-Sierra Leone), Olasupo Abideen (Brain Builders Youth Development Initiative, Nigeria), and Carelle Kaze (Cameroon).



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Their participation marked a strong affirmation of GCE's commitment to mainstreaming youth leadership within education advocacy, policy design, and implementation.

The Regional Workshop formed part of the wider FEMNET4GTE strategy to expand regional actions that influence education policies, strengthen solidarity, and drive accountability for gender-transformative education across Africa. This initiative connects national and regional work to global advocacy platforms.

The African Union's 2025 theme, 'Building a United Front to Advance the Cause of Justice and Reparations for Africans', served as a powerful backdrop for the discussions. Participants reflected on the intersection of justice, reparation, and education, as a means to redress historical inequities and advance the empowerment of girls and women. Workshop sessions also explored how gender-transformative education contributes to ending harmful practices such as child marriage, female genital mutilation, and gender-based violence. Speakers stressed that education must not only teach equality but live it - through inclusive curricula, equitable financing, and policy reforms.

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The workshop opened with a welcome from Dr. Martha Muhwezi, Executive Director of FAWE, and Alinafe Malonje, Community Coordinator at UNGEI. A keynote session on the African Union's 2025 Theme and Gender Transformative Education (GTE) by Chimwemwe Fabiano set the tone for reflection and action. The event was abuzz with energy as participants stood in solidarity circles sharing innovative gender-transformative initiatives, including local work led by Nashipai Maasai Project, presented by Selina Nkiole.

Key sessions featured contributions from feminist educators and global advocates, including:

- Solange Akpo (ANCEFA), on global, continental, and regional advocacy opportunities;
- Prof. Elvis Fokala (Centre for Human Rights, University of Pretoria and Hussienatou Manjang (ACERWC), on the General Comment on the Right to Education and the need for states to fulfil reporting obligations;
- Ashina Mitsumi (ActionAid's TaxEd Alliance) and Julie Juma (GCE), on financing gender-transformative education and addressing funding gaps.

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The most moving interventions came from youth leaders and grassroots activists. Grace Moraa Areba, of the Chanuka Deaf Women's Group, shared her personal journey on the intersection of gender and disability, calling for the inclusion of marginalised learners in all education reforms.

Across discussions, participants identified priority actions for strengthening education systems through feminist leadership, inclusive financing, and localised action planning. Group work culminated in an Outcome Document presented by Catherine Asego (FAWE, Kenya). It proposes frameworks to track progress on the World We Want Call to Action and to sustain collaboration through continuous regional learning exchanges.



For GCE's Youth Action Group, the workshop proved transformative. *"This event strengthened my understanding of gender-transformative education and expanded opportunities to contribute towards advancing SDG 4. I'm honoured to represent young people on the FEMNET4GTE Steering Group to continue advocating for inclusive, transformative education,"* said Ahmid C. Jalloh, Executive Director of YARDO, Sierra Leone.

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“Participating in this workshop deepened my understanding of gender-responsive education systems. It’s a privilege to serve on the Steering Group and champion young people’s leadership in transforming education,” noted Olasupo Abideen, Global Director of the Brain Builders Youth Development Initiative, Nigeria.

“This workshop was not just a learning experience, it was a call to action. I’m inspired to take part in shaping education systems that leave no one behind,” added Carelle Kaze, Cameroon.

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The Nairobi workshop highlighted a collective determination to reimagine education as a transformative force for equality, justice, and empowerment. By linking local activism with continental frameworks such as the Continental Education Strategy for Africa (CESA 2026–2035) and global movements for gender justice, FEMNET4GTE is enabling a unified platform for feminist education advocacy.

As GCE's Youth Action Group deepens its collaboration with FEMNET4GTE, one truth stands out - when young and feminist voices lead, education transcends being a right and becomes a powerful force for equality.

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Global Commitment to Gender-Transformative Education Strengthened at UNGEI Meeting

GCE, alongside members and partners, joined the 2025 #FemNet4GTE Global Meeting on the sidelines of the United Nations General Assembly to call for stronger government commitments to Gender-Transformative Education (GTE).

The high-level meeting convened Ministers of Education, UN agencies, civil society organisations, and young feminist leaders to shape a roadmap toward 2030 and beyond, placing education at the centre of gender equality efforts.



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Participants emphasised that education systems must promote equality, peace, and justice while dismantling harmful gender norms, ending discrimination, and combating child, early, and forced marriages and unions. They called for post-2030 gender targets, inclusive indicators, and gender-responsive budgets to ensure sustainable progress.

A key theme emerging from the meeting was the importance of decolonising education financing, ensuring that resource flows are equitable and responsive to the realities of learners in the Global South.



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The discussions also spotlighted the urgent need to support education for girls and young women in fragile contexts such as Gaza and Afghanistan, where school closures and social restrictions continue to undermine basic rights.

During the meeting, the United Nations Girls' Education Initiative (UNGEI) launched three new advocacy briefs that demonstrate why GTE is both a moral imperative and a strategic investment for prosperity and resilience. The briefs focus on:

1. The economic and multi-sector impacts of gender-transformative education.
2. Young women's transitions from schooling to decent work.
3. Measuring gender norm change across diverse education settings.

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These tools reinforce the evidence that gender-transformative education is essential for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals and building an equitable, peaceful future.

The year 2025 marked a major milestone for the Feminist Network for Gender-Transformative Education (FemNet4GTE) as it expanded advocacy through four regional action workshops co-led by civil society organisations and GCE members. These workshops produced policy recommendations and action plans to drive curriculum reform, teacher training, and broader inclusion efforts.

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The Asia South Pacific Association for Basic and Adult Education (ASPBAE) partnered with UNGEI, the Pratisandhi Foundation, and Aahung to convene the Asia-Pacific Regional Workshop in August 2025. The sessions focused on inclusive education, digital learning, and education in emergencies. Participants developed joint strategies for integrating comprehensive sexuality education, addressing LGBTQIA+ inclusion, supporting learners with disabilities, and embedding lifelong learning principles across school systems. Tools such as the GAPSED framework and gender-responsive education plans were also shared to strengthen policy coherence in the region.

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In Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC), the regional process, coordinated by CLADE, Fòs Feminista, and the Mariposas Mirabal Group, connected GTE to broader feminist and care economy agendas. During the XVI Regional Conference on Women, members of FemNet4GTE-LAC held a side event titled *‘Education and Care: Gender-Transformative Education as a Political Strategy to Dismantle the Patriarchal System’*. This event brought together governments, feminist networks, and civil society movements to anchor education as a pillar of social transformation.

Going forward, FemNet4GTE-LAC will focus on expanding membership and innovative advocacy tools, including the GTE Mapping Initiative, a database that tracks political and educational progress, and *“Go! Voices for Gender-Based Education,”* an audiovisual campaign highlighting local stories of feminist education in action.

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In Africa, the Forum for African Women Educationalists (FAWE) and partner coalitions convened the regional workshop in Nairobi from 26-27th August 2025. The dialogue emphasised African feminist leadership in GTE, with calls for collective action to transform education systems into inclusive, equitable, and accountable spaces. Participants advocated for gender-transformative curricula and teacher support mechanisms that empower girls and reduce barriers in crisis and post-conflict contexts and financing for GTE.

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Across regions, the movement reaffirmed that gender-transformative education is not only a moral responsibility, but also a strategic lever to achieve justice, equality, and peace. Building on this momentum, GCE will continue global engagement grounded in the national and regional advocacy of its members. Future priorities include promoting feminist pedagogies, gender-responsive finance, and inclusive education policies that challenge discriminatory norms and power structures.

These collaborative efforts mark a shared commitment to the vision of education systems that empower, include, and transform, ensuring that every learner, regardless of gender, has access to safe, equitable, and transformative education.

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Global Education Leaders Unite in Santiago to Reimagine the Future of Teaching

From 28-29 August 2025, ministers, teacher unions, and education leaders from around the world gathered in Santiago, Chile, for the World Summit on Teachers, a landmark meeting addressing one of the most pressing challenges in education today - the global crisis in teacher recruitment, retention, and professional recognition.

The Summit culminated in the adoption of the Santiago Consensus, a call to action urging countries to develop comprehensive national teacher policies that are gender-responsive, inclusive, and equitable. The document emphasises the need for policies based on robust data and broad consultation with teachers, encompassing all stages of the teaching career, from training and recruitment to professional development and retirement.

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World Summit on Teachers

28-29 August 2025

Santiago de Chile

The Consensus also highlights the key priorities of teacher participation in policymaking, lifelong learning opportunities, sustainable financing, and recognition of teachers as central to achieving the Education 2030 Agenda and Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG4) - inclusive, equitable, quality education for all.

The event took place alongside the SDG4 High-Level Steering Committee (HLSC) Annual Leaders Meeting, guided by Chile's President Gabriel Boric and UNESCO Director-General Audrey Azoulay. The HLSC leads global efforts to accelerate education progress across countries.

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Global Education
Cooperation Mechanism
High-Level Steering Committee



Representing civil society, Dr. Refaat Sabbah, GCE President, and Nelsy Lizarazo, GCE Vice-President, joined leaders from Education International (EI), student networks, and youth advocates to emphasise the need for structural transformation in education systems.

In a powerful address, Mugwena Maluleke, President of Education International, reminded participants of the moral urgency behind global commitments: *“Children are watching. The future is watching. And history will judge, not by what we promised, but by what we prioritised. Not by what we said, but by what we funded. Let it be said that in Santiago, we chose courage over comfort, justice over silence, and education over excuses.”*

GCE BUZZ

June-July 2025



Speaking during the panel on improving teachers' working conditions, Dr. Refat Sabbah captured the deeper significance of the profession: *"We are at a crossroads in global education. The teacher is not simply a transmitter of knowledge but a creator of opportunities and an awakener of minds. Yet today, teachers face existential threats to their dignity, autonomy, and professional voice, precisely when the world needs them most to guide societies through uncertainty and transformation."*

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As part of the Summit's broader dialogue on the future of education, education leaders shared insights on reimagining lifelong learning and justice-driven education systems:

Refat Sabbah, GCE President: *“Education cannot be separated from broader goals of development and justice. It is inextricably linked to ending poverty and hunger, ensuring health and equality, combating climate change, preventing wars, and upholding human rights.”*



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Nelsy Lizarazo, GCE Vice-President: *“The journey toward achieving SDG4 has been marked by a shift in ambition, from a narrow focus on access to education toward transforming education systems themselves.”*

David Edwards, General Secretary of Education International: *“Many teachers leave the profession they once joined with hope because they feel the profession has left them. We must restore teachers’ trust, dignity, and conditions for them to stay and thrive.”*

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The World Summit on Teachers reaffirmed a shared vision that teachers are at the heart of rebuilding equitable, resilient, and justice-oriented education systems. The Santiago Consensus provides a roadmap for governments, international organisations, and civil society to work together to ensure that teaching remains a profession of dignity, innovation, and purpose.

As GCE President Dr. Sabbah affirmed, *“The teacher is the greatest agent of transformation, and the strength of our societies tomorrow depends on the support we give them today.”*

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Advancing a Common Agenda for Education in Emergencies at UNGA 2025

On the sidelines of the 2025 United Nations General Assembly (UNGA), a vibrant and high-level side event titled ‘Locally Led, Globally Backed: A Common Agenda for Education in Emergencies’ brought together key global stakeholders to discuss how to better support education in times of crisis.

Conceived and co-organised by the Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE), Street Child, and GCE, the roundtable featured government officials, multilateral and civil society leaders, teachers’ unions, and student representatives. Together, they explored strategies to strengthen local leadership, build sustainable financing systems, and create a unified, inclusive global advocacy agenda for Education in Emergencies (EiE).



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In his opening speech delivered via video, Dr. Refat Sabbah, GCE President, emphasised the need to go beyond short-term relief: *“Immediate action is essential,”* he said, *“but it must go hand in hand with long-term, sustainable solutions that build resilient public systems. Local civil society engagement is not simply a principle, it is the cornerstone of future education responses.”*

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Panellists included **Farah Sheikh Abdulkadir**, Minister of Education, Culture and Higher Education of Somalia; **Kuyok Abol Kuyok**, Minister of General Education and Instruction of South Sudan; **Jo Bourne**, Chief Technical Officer of the Global Partnership for Education (GPE); **Graham Lang**, Deputy Director of Education Cannot Wait (ECW); **Niranjali Amerasinghe**, Executive Director of ActionAid USA; **Emmanuel Kofi Abotsi** of the All-Africa Students Union (AASU); and GCE Board Members **Helen Dabu**, Secretary General of ASPBAE (Asia South Pacific Association for Basic and Adult Education), and **Antonia Wulff**, Director of Research, Policy and Advocacy at Education International.



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One urgent theme resounded throughout the discussions - the need for predictable and sustainable financing for education that aligns with national education plans.

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Participants highlighted that while education receives barely a fraction of humanitarian aid, many low-income nations spend more on debt repayment than on education. Calls were made for debt cancellation and the adoption of a binding UN Tax Convention treaty to expand fiscal space for education.

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Speakers also stressed the importance of inclusive decision-making, ensuring that students, youth, refugees, and persons with disabilities are treated as rights-holders and active participants, not just beneficiaries. Teachers were recognised as essential partners whose fair pay, professional autonomy, and protected working conditions are vital to maintaining continuity and quality in crisis settings.

Participants reinforced that in emergencies, classrooms become more than learning spaces, they are lifelines that provide safety, normalcy, and hope. Student voices were emphasised as essential to shaping EiE solutions that are responsive and equitable.

Helen Dabu, representing ASPBAE and GCE, stressed the need for stronger coordination among coalitions: “There must be institutionalised mechanisms for local voices to be reflected in global decision-making. Solutions must be rooted in the contexts where education advocacy is most urgently needed, within local and national organisations sustaining the fight for education rights.”

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This side event builds on GCE’s ongoing global advocacy to protect education in conflict and emergency contexts, a central priority under its Strategic Plan 2023–2027. The discussions echoed the spirit of the Global Action Week for Education (GAWE) 2025, held earlier in the year under the theme “Education Saves Lives: Protect Education in Emergencies!”

As next steps, GCE will deepen collaboration with partners and strengthen civil society leadership in EiE policy and financing spaces, particularly within the governance structures of Education Cannot Wait (ECW), ensuring that grassroots and national voices remain central to shaping a collective, globally-backed education agenda.

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The Intergovernmental Working Group Advances a New Protocol under the Convention on the Rights of the Child

From 1-3 September 2025, government representatives, experts, and civil society organisations convened at the United Nations in Geneva for the first session of the Intergovernmental Working Group (IGWG). The group's mandate is to explore a new Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), one that enshrines the explicit right to early childhood care and education and guarantees free public pre-primary and secondary education for all children, complementing existing commitments to free primary education.

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The initiative stems from Human Rights Council Resolution A/HRC/RES/56/5, adopted by consensus in July 2024 and co-sponsored by over 46 states. Currently, the CRC calls on governments to make secondary education progressively available, but it does not establish a clear legal entitlement to free schooling beyond the primary level. Advocates argue this new protocol will close that gap and create a unified, enforceable framework for free and inclusive education at every stage of a child's development.

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The Geneva session saw the participation of 92 states, with 58 declaring support for the new protocol. Countries voicing strong endorsement included Brazil, Luxembourg, Dominican Republic, Ghana, Finland, Uruguay, and Sierra Leone among many others. A few states raised questions about financial feasibility and implementation, stressing the importance of future consultation and cooperation.

The response of civil society was significant. The Global Campaign for Education (GCE), together with members such as the Latin American Campaign for the Right to Education (CLADE), World Organisation for Early Childhood Education (OMEP), the Brazilian Campaign for the Right to Education, Tax Justice Network, and Plan International, delivered a joint NGO statement signed by 15 partners. “While nearly every country now guarantees free primary education, roughly 70% of the world's children live in countries that do not guarantee free pre-primary or secondary education,” stated Giovanna Modé, GCE Policy Advisor, emphasizing the urgency of reform.

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Experts at the session reinforced the need for binding international standards. Mercedes Mayol Lassalle (OMEP) urged for legal clarity on early childhood education, noting that millions of young children remain without guaranteed rights or protection during their formative years.

Professor Klaus Beiter (North-West University, South Africa) argued that a new protocol could elevate early and secondary education to “minimum core obligations”, rights fundamental to human dignity, making it harder for states to justify underfunding.

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Regional coalitions echoed these sentiments. Speaking for Latin America, Andressa Pellanda (CLADE and the Brazilian Campaign for the Right to Education) emphasized that such an instrument would update state obligations, prompting governments to realign laws, policies, and budgets to realise free, equitable education for all.

Meanwhile, Olivier de Schutter, UN Special Rapporteur on Extreme Poverty, and David Archer from ActionAid International, drew attention to the global debt crisis, stressing that equitable tax reform and stronger domestic financing can make universal free education achievable.

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Adding a poignant perspective, five child delegates, from Mexico, Indonesia, Scotland, Croatia, and Liberia, spoke about their experiences and reaffirmed their belief in education as a universal right that must be free, inclusive, and well-funded.

Following the session, the newly elected Chair-Rapporteur, Samuel Saffa (Sierra Leone), recommended continued consultation among member states before the preparation of a draft Optional Protocol. The resulting proposals will inform a new Human Rights Council resolution in mid-2026, paving the way for the next IGWG session scheduled for 31 August - 4 September 2026.

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As global advocacy continues, the initiative represents a crucial opportunity to establish a long-awaited universal guarantee - the right to free, quality education from early childhood through secondary school.

Click [HERE](#) for more information on the Intergovernmental Working Group (IGWG).

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Advancing Inclusive, Just, and Sustainable Education in the Arab World

As the world advances toward 2030 and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the role of teachers in building just and sustainable societies has never been more vital.

The Arab Campaign for Education for All (ACEA) continues to join global voices in recognizing educators as the cornerstone of transformation, echoing themes from Refat Sabbah's recent article for UNESCO, [Crossing into 2030: Teachers are the Cornerstone of Just and Sustainable Transformation](#).

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Dr. Sabbah, GCE President and ACEA Secretary-General, emphasizes that investing in teachers is essential to achieving SDG4 and building fair, equitable futures for all. Teachers are more than facilitators of learning - they are architects of societal progress, shaping generations to overcome injustice and inequality through education.

Yet the teacher crisis persists worldwide, including across many Arab states, where shortages, burnout, and insufficient support continue to threaten the promise of quality education. ACEA's recent initiatives have sought to respond to these challenges directly.



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On 11 September, the Regional Teachers' Cooperative hosted *From Burnout to Recovery: Reaffirming Teacher Well-Being*, a dialogue bringing together educators and experts from Palestine, Syria, Yemen, Egypt, Lebanon, Somalia, Sudan, Tunisia, and Jordan. Participants stressed the importance of psychosocial support, empowerment, and professional recognition in motivating and retaining teaching talent. The discussions affirmed that quality education depends not only on resources and infrastructure, but on teacher well-being and professional fulfilment alike.

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ACEA's partnerships across the region continue to advance education reform and resilience. This includes participatory and inclusive education initiatives in Tunisia, advocacy for children with disabilities in Egypt, and collaborative learning exchanges across Jordan, Lebanon, and crisis-affected contexts. Workshops on education in emergencies and e-learning initiatives in Palestine have further strengthened community-based action and mutual support networks.

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A key milestone this year was ACEA's participation in the FemNet4GTE 2025 Regional Action Workshop for Southwest Asia and North Africa (SWANA), held on 28-29 August at in Cyprus. Organized by the Asfari Institute for Civil Society and Citizenship at the American University of Beirut, in partnership with Politics4Her and supported by UNGEI, the workshop convened feminist activists, educators, policymakers, and civil society leaders to co-develop a regional roadmap for advancing gender-transformative education.



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Discussions focussed on curriculum reform, school-related gender-based violence, education in emergencies, and policy inclusiveness, emphasizing feminist and intersectional approaches to tackling systemic barriers in education. Participants, including ACEA's regional coordinator Tasneem Alhamouzi and representatives from coalitions across Palestine, Lebanon, and Jordan, collaboratively defined commitments for integrating gender equality into education frameworks and governance. Through participatory and feminist methodologies, the workshop produced actionable strategies rooted in the Regional Declaration on Gender Transformative Education, aligning civil society networks across the SWANA region with global advocacy platforms.

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ACEA's leadership in international education policy also reached new heights. The election of Refat Sabbah and Tasnim Alhamouzi to represent ACEA and regional NGOs within UNESCO's CCNGO-Education 2030 Coordination Group ensures a continued and robust civil society voice in shaping global education governance. Meanwhile, events such as the 10th Arab Education Forum reinforced the enduring role of education as an engine for community empowerment and a foundation for sustainable development.

Looking forward, ACEA remains steadfast in its commitment to bold, sustainable progress in education, anchored in teacher empowerment, inclusive learning environments, and psychosocial well-being. Continued investment in teacher training, gender equality, and participatory reform is vital to building resilient education systems that leave no learner behind.

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Building on the Santiago Declaration: GCE Calls for Renewed Commitment to Quality Education

The Global Campaign for Education (GCE) participated in a high-level regional dialogue organized by the Arab Bureau of Education for the Gulf States (ABEGS) and the Regional Centre for Educational Quality and Excellence, in collaboration with UNESCO, the Islamic World Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (ICESCO), and the Arab League Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organization (ALECSO).

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The event, convened on the occasion of World Teachers' Day, explored the theme 'From Commitment to Implementation: The Role of Organizations in Supporting Education Systems after the Santiago Declaration 2025', reaffirming global efforts to advance the right to education and protect the teaching profession.

The panel brought together representatives from key international and regional bodies, including United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (UN-ESCWA), UNESCO Headquarters in Paris, UNESCO Doha and Beirut Offices, UNICEF, the Islamic Development Bank (IsDB), and the Queen Rania Teacher Academy (QRTA). Participants shared strategies to accelerate progress toward Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG4) and ensure that the principles of the Santiago Declaration translate into tangible action.

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During the dialogue, Dr. Refat Sabbah, President of GCE and Secretary-General of the Arab Campaign for Education for All (ACEA), emphasized that the Santiago Declaration marks an important turning point for the global education movement. He highlighted that no meaningful reform can succeed unless teachers are respected, supported, and empowered as key agents of change. “Education,” he noted, “must be recognized as a shared global responsibility that transcends national borders, requiring real solidarity, particularly from wealthier nations toward marginalized learners in the Global South.”

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Dr. Sabbah also highlighted critical challenges confronting education today, including persistent teacher shortages, chronic underfunding, and the erosion of teachers' status worldwide. He outlined five areas in which GCE continues to contribute to post-Santiago implementation:

- Strengthening multi-stakeholder partnerships among governments, civil society, and education actors to deliver on the declaration's goals.
- Providing training and resources to empower local organizations and enhance their role in sustainable education initiatives.
- Promoting understanding of the Santiago Declaration's priorities while contextualizing them within regional educational needs.
- Supporting evidence-based policymaking and monitoring through reliable data and analytical tools.
- Ensuring accountability by tracking progress and refining strategies to achieve measurable educational outcomes.

Through these ongoing efforts, GCE and ACEA reaffirm their shared commitment to advancing quality education for all, ensuring that the vision of the Santiago Declaration transforms from pledges into practice across the Arab region and beyond.

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CLADE Calls for Action to Protect the Human Right to Education in the Face of Climate Change

Environmental disasters driven by human-induced climate change are reshaping lives globally, and their impact in Latin America and the Caribbean is particularly severe. According to UNICEF, an estimated 169 million children in the region live in areas exposed to multiple environmental hazards, with one in four affected by at least four extreme weather events. Each year, 40 million children lose access to education due to school closures, infrastructure damage, or forced dropout, a devastating ripple effect that magnifies inequalities and deepens poverty.

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Amid this crisis, the Latin American Campaign for the Right to Education (CLADE) is reaffirming its call for climate justice and the urgent integration of socio-environmental perspectives into education systems. For CLADE, education is not only a right but also a transformative tool to confront the climate emergency and safeguard the future of the planet.

CLADE advocates for transformative education that places equity, dignity, and sustainability at its centre. Climate justice education emphasizes that the burdens and benefits of the global ecological transition must be distributed fairly, with those most responsible for emissions aiding the nations and communities bearing the heaviest consequences. CLADE stresses that real solutions will only emerge when marginalized communities, particularly youth, women, and Indigenous peoples, can participate meaningfully in environmental decision-making.

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CLADE's framework urges governments to design education policies that strengthen resilience, ensure continuity during climate crises, and make schools safe, sustainable, and inclusive. Key pillars of this approach include:

- Programmes that teach environmental awareness, social justice, and sustainable living, fostering critical thinking and innovation.
- Training educators as community leaders in human rights and climate justice.
- Creating platforms where students, families, and local actors contribute to shaping environmental priorities.
- Recognizing Indigenous and ancestral environmental practices that promote balance and sustainability.
- Preparing students to cope with climate anxiety and build resilience in uncertain times.

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At the heart of CLADE's message is the need to rethink dominant models of development and consumption. Sustainable alternatives must prioritize equity, care for nature, and preservation of the planet for future generations. This vision demands stronger international solidarity, holding wealthier nations accountable to provide financing, technology, and support to countries on the frontlines of the climate crisis.

Through its advocacy, research, and educational partnerships, CLADE continues to champion climate justice as integral to achieving the human right to education, ensuring that education remains both a shield against inequality and a catalyst for environmental transformation.

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CLADE Advances Feminist Education at the Regional Conference on Women in Latin America and the Caribbean

From 12-15 August 2025, the Latin American Campaign for the Right to Education (CLADE) participated in the XVI Regional Conference on Women in Latin America and the Caribbean, held in Mexico City and organized by the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) and UN Women.

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This year's session marked the 30th anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and cantered on building a “society of care”, a model for social transformation rooted in gender equality, justice, and sustainability.

CLADE, alongside organizations such as the Latin American and Caribbean Network of Popular Education Among Women (REPEM-LAC) and the Latin American and Caribbean Committee for the Defense of Women's Rights (CLADEM), placed the human right to education at the forefront of the care agenda. Education, defined as a public and transformative human right, was reaffirmed as a central pillar for a just and inclusive society. CLADE called for greater state investment in teacher training from a gender perspective and for education systems to integrate care as a social and ethical value.

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The conference provided a critical platform to strengthen alliances and expand dialogue across feminist, educational, and social movements. Nelsy Lizarazo, CLADE's General Coordinator, emphasized that the event continued the regional agenda developed since the Assembly of Tegucigalpa, anchored in Gender Transformative Education (GTE) and the recognition of care as a political and pedagogical axis.

"This space opens new paths for placing the right to education within broader feminist and social movement agendas," said Lizarazo. "Education must be seen as a collective responsibility and a transformative force."

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At the parallel side event ‘Education and Care: Gender Transformative Education as a Political Strategy to Dismantle Patriarchy in Latin America and the Caribbean’, CLADE joined government representatives, feminist networks, and international organizations to explore how education can help dismantle patriarchal systems and challenge gender inequalities through equity-based and inclusive pedagogy.

The conference also included the Feminist Forum held on 11 August, where CLADE joined 31 regional networks, 10 international organizations, and dozens of feminist collectives to influence the regional agenda on women’s rights and equality. In this space, speakers such as CLADE programme coordinator Laura Giannecchini highlighted how feminist movements continue to push back against anti-rights narratives and democratic backsliding through coordinated political advocacy.

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One of the major conference outcomes - the Tlatelolco Commitment - outlined a ten-year framework (2025–2035) to achieve substantive gender equality and institutionalize the “society of care.” The document acknowledged the right to care as a public good and human right, calling for comprehensive care systems and reaffirming education as a key driver of gender and social justice.

In conclusion, CLADE presented a powerful vision for the future - an education that nurtures, includes, and transforms. Drawing inspiration from Paulo Freire’s emancipatory pedagogy, CLADE’s statement “For an Education that Cares and Transforms Gender Relations” invites societies to imagine a system where education and care are inseparable forces for equality, dignity, and sustainability.

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This workshop inspired cross-border solidarity and long-term advocacy. As the Call to Action moves to regional and international policy platforms, youth voices from South and Southeast Asia are ensuring that future education systems will be more just, resilient, and inclusive. Young people are leading the way forward, and it is time for institutions to partner with them as co-creators of tomorrow's learning environments.

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CONAMEPT Welcomes Delegation from GPE Madagascar and UNESCO

On 24 September 2025, the National Coalition for the Education of All in Madagascar (CONAMEPT) received a high-level delegation at its headquarters in Antananarivo. The delegation included representatives from GPE Madagascar, the GPE Madagascar Focal Point, and UNESCO as the coordinating agency.

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The courtesy visit created a lively forum for reflection, dialogue and exchange on ways to strengthen collaboration in advancing quality education across Madagascar. Discussions centred on key priorities for the education sector, with participants reaffirming their shared vision of inclusive and equitable learning opportunities for all children.

During the meeting, CONAMEPT highlighted ongoing efforts to mobilise civil society engagement and policy contributions in line with the country's education goals. The visiting partners commended the coalition's role in sustaining momentum around national education reforms and ensuring that local voices continue to shape national education strategies.

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Speaking at the close of the visit, CONAMEPT reaffirmed its commitment to work closely with all partners to achieve transformative progress in education. The delegation members expressed optimism that this spirit of collaboration will continue to drive innovation and tangible results for Madagascar's learners in the years ahead.



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COSYDEP Calls for Sustained Global Commitment to Education in Senegal

In a recent interview produced by Coalition Éducation, Cheikh Mbow, Executive Director of the Coalition of Organizations in Synergy for the Defense of Public Education in Senegal (COSYDEP), highlighted the profound impact of international budget cuts on the country's education system. The three-minute video emphasized how the suspension of externally funded educational projects has directly affected learners, particularly those in vulnerable and rural communities.

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Mbow explained that while the budget cuts have had severe negative consequences, they have also encouraged governments and stakeholders to recognise the pressing need to strengthen domestic, sustainable, and transparent financing for education. Many of the affected projects had focused on inclusive education, national language programmes, and initiatives for children with special educational needs. Their loss, he noted, has been deeply felt by both communities and civil society organizations.

“Our message to donors is that education is not a cost, it is an investment,” Mbow stated. He stressed that education builds the foundations for social cohesion, peace, and inclusive development. He called on international partners to remain steadfast in their support for education financing, reminding them that the Education 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) represent a collective global commitment to ensuring quality education for all.

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**nous dépassons les standards internationaux,
plus de 6 % du PIB.**

He further underlined the principle of shared responsibility between national governments and international partners, urging solidarity in confronting challenges such as terrorism, forced migration, and intercultural divisions.

Senegal remains one of Africa's leading nations in domestic education spending, allocating approximately 6% of its GDP to the sector, meeting international benchmarks. However, Mbow cautioned that traditional sources of funding are no longer sufficient. *"We must explore new financing avenues," he said, "but ensure that funding remains transparent, accountable, and aligned with national education goals."*

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He emphasised that education should continue to serve as a driver for equality and development, particularly for marginalized children and youth. *“Public education is the ladder of social mobility for millions of Senegalese families,”* Mbow affirmed, *“and must remain a top national priority.”*

In his closing remarks, Mbow reiterated that education must never be treated as a commodity. *“Education is a right. It is not for sale,”* he asserted. He urged governments to safeguard budgetary sovereignty by prioritizing domestic financing while calling on the international community to uphold its shared responsibility.

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CSEC Urges Political Parties to Put Education at the Heart of Malawi's Vision 2063

In a call that resonated across Malawi's education community, the Civil Society Education Coalition (CSEC) challenged political parties to honour their promises on education, saying the sector holds the key to realising the nation's Vision 2063.

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The message came during the launch of CSEC's 2025–2030 Citizen Education Agenda in Lilongwe, a framework designed to empower citizens to demand action and accountability from leaders. The event brought together civil society representatives, political party officials, and education advocates united by a shared goal: building an equitable and quality education system that leaves no one behind.

Dr. Limbani Nsapato, CSEC's Executive Committee Chairperson, spoke passionately about the need to keep education at the heart of every political manifesto. "When parties sign the Declaration, they are not just endorsing a document - they are renewing a promise to the nation. They are saying that education is a priority, not an afterthought," he explained in an interview with MIJ FM.

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Dr. Nsapato noted that Malawi cannot advance towards Vision 2063 without bold political will to strengthen education policies, funding, and implementation. The Citizen Education Agenda, he added, provides a roadmap for citizens and civil society to hold leaders accountable while pushing for long-term reforms.

Adding his voice to the discussion, Willet Karonga, Secretary General of the United Transformation Movement (UTM), expressed his party's readiness to work hand in hand with CSEC and other stakeholders to improve Malawi's education system. "Once entrusted with leadership, we are committed to transforming our classrooms, supporting teachers, and ensuring every child has access to quality learning," he said.

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As the country looks ahead to 2063, CSEC's initiative serves as a reminder that the journey toward Malawi's future begins in its classrooms. And for that journey to succeed, political parties must turn their promises into tangible action, making education the foundation upon which every other national ambition stands.

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Empowering Youth and Defending Education: Armenian and Artsakh Coalitions Take Action

During August and September 2025, the Armenian and Artsakh Coalitions intensified their commitment to upholding the right to education in Armenia and Artsakh.



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This period saw the launch of the Youth Wing of the Armenian and Artsakh Coalitions, a dynamic platform initiated during the 2025 Global Action Week for Education (GAWE) roundtables.

The Youth Wing provides space for young activists dedicated to human rights, with a focus on supporting the rights of displaced people from Artsakh and raising awareness on the ongoing cultural genocide in the now-occupied territory of the Artsakh Republic. By showcasing youth voices, the initiative ensures greater participation in shaping both national and international debates on education, peace, and justice.

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The Armenian Coalition also made substantial contributions by providing input to the Europe and North America Campaign for Education (ENACE) regional chapter for the Global SDG 4 Spotlight Report 2025. This involved gathering critical evidence about the persistent challenges faced in guaranteeing the right to education in conflict-affected areas, especially for displaced Artsakh children.

Through these strategic actions, Armenia and Artsakh continue to champion the right to education on the global stage, emphasising that education is not only a fundamental right, but a source of hope and resilience for communities living through crisis situations.

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GCE-US: Young Advocates Lead the Charge for Global Education Equity

On a brisk morning in Washington, D.C., eight passionate young advocates stepped into the halls of Congress for the GCE-US 2025 Youth Advocacy Day.



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Representing diverse states from Texas to Virginia, the students brought research, lived experiences, and policy recommendations to advance global education equity, a cause they argue is vital not only for human rights but also for America's national security and prosperity.

Globally, 272 million children remain out of school, a crisis intensified by conflict and climate-related disruptions. The student advocates highlighted that doubling secondary school completion rates can reduce conflict risk by half and lower the likelihood of political violence by 48%, a powerful reminder that education investment is also an investment in peace.



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The advocates met with congressional offices spanning the political spectrum, presenting evidence-based appeals for sustained international education funding. They also discussed how learning disparities and exclusion experienced within their communities connect to global education challenges.

An impromptu encounter with Representative Lois Frankel (D-FL) affirmed the power of informed youth advocacy. Her openness to engage with the students highlighted how youth voices can meaningfully shape policy conversations.



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Weeks later, the group reconvened virtually to plan next steps, transitioning from individual advocates to community organisers. Helena discussed forming new partnerships with national education networks, Lara outlined a social media initiative highlighting youth voices, and Ahaana launched plans for school-based advocacy programmes. Each is now hosting events, engaging local representatives, and inspiring peers to act. What began as eight young changemakers has become a growing movement, proof that one day on Capitol Hill can spark community transformation across the country.

The GCE-US Youth Engagement Programme continues to show that with the right training, mentorship, and civic opportunities, young people do not just participate in democracy, they lead it. Their dedication demonstrates a powerful truth: advancing global education equity strengthens not only the world's classrooms but America's long-term leadership, security, and prosperity.

When youth understand that access to education worldwide contributes to peace and stability at home, they become catalysts for lasting change, proof that informed, empowered young citizens are the best investment for a just and equitable future.

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Youth Across Asia-Pacific Rise for Justice and Accountability

Across the Asia-Pacific, young people are reclaiming civic space and demanding justice, equality, and accountability. In 2025 alone, youth-led movements have erupted in several countries, from the streets of Mongolia and Indonesia to Nepal, Timor-Leste, and the Philippines.



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These collective actions reflect a deep regional tradition of student and youth activism, one that continues to fuel social transformation.

Young people have long been a moral and political force within the region's history. They have spoken truth to power, challenged oppression, and redefined the boundaries of democracy and civic participation. From overthrowing dictatorships and opposing wars to calling out corruption, inequality, and environmental destruction, youth movements in the Asia-Pacific remain at the heart of the struggle for justice and peace.

On 21 September 2025 - the 53rd anniversary of Martial Law - tens of thousands of Filipinos filled the streets in what became known as the Trillion Peso March Against Corruption. Civil society leaders, church groups, and ordinary citizens marched to condemn the massive misuse of public funds in so-called "ghost flood control projects."

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Wearing white and carrying placards, protesters demanded justice and transparency, calling for the arrest of those responsible and the full return of stolen funds. “Every peso stolen is a life denied,” noted one participant. The march transformed into a collective cry for dignity and accountability, uniting individuals from all walks of life under the common call: Enough is enough.

Reflecting on the experience, Lae Santiago, Advocacy and Youth Engagement Officer of the Asia South Pacific Association for Basic and Adult Education (ASPBAE), observed: *“It is one thing to learn history from books, but to live it is an entirely different experience. We marched because we knew the stakes, not only for ourselves but for future generations.”* Lae stressed that education is key to transforming systems of corruption and inequality, arguing that schools must nurture critical thinking, civic engagement, and a commitment to human rights.

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In Indonesia, 2025 saw a wave of massive demonstrations against government corruption, economic hardship, and political repression. Sparked by local uprisings in Pati, Central Java, the movement swelled into a nationwide protest led by youth and Gen Z activists. Protesters' demands addressed long-standing grievances, from unfair tax policies and corruption scandals to environmental exploitation. When a young online driver, Affan Kurniawan, was killed after being run over by a police vehicle during the protests, outrage spread across the country. The incident symbolised the deep disillusionment among young Indonesians facing inadequate governance and shrinking civic freedoms.

According to Anna Bella Sabilah, Youth Coordinator of the Network for Education Watch (NEW) Indonesia: *"The people's anger was born out of exhaustion, from the endless cycle of corruption and injustice. Yet the strength of this movement lies in our solidarity - farmers, traders, drivers, and ordinary citizens standing as one."*

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Despite state repression, activists continued organising through digital platforms, using social media to mobilise support, raise funds, and spread information. Movements such as #WargaBantuWarga (Citizens Help Citizens) and #SalingJaga (Mutual Protection) became crucial symbols of horizontal solidarity across communities. Young Indonesians adopted creative resistance symbols - “brave pink,” “hero green,” and “blue resistance” - infusing their struggle with culture, humour, and resilience.

From 15-17 September, the streets of Dili filled with thousands of protesters, primarily university students who mobilised against the Timorese Parliament’s Lifetime Monthly Pension Law and its plan to purchase new luxury cars for lawmakers. The demonstrations, led by student coalitions and supported by civil society organisations such as the Civil Society Education Partnership (CSEP) and the Marginalised Youth Forum (MYF), demanded that public funds be redirected toward health, education, agriculture, and tourism.

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Following three days of determined protest, and despite clashes with police, students secured a historic victory. On 5 September, all 63 Members of Parliament voted unanimously to repeal the Lifetime Monthly Pension Law, marking a milestone for youth-led advocacy in the country. As Feliciano Soares, Research and Advocacy Officer at CSEP, wrote: *“This victory proves that when youth unite with purpose, courage, and clarity, even the most entrenched systems of privilege can be dismantled.”*

Across the Asia-Pacific, young people are not merely reacting, they are constructing visions for more just and participatory societies. Through grassroots organising, online mobilisation, and creative expression, they continue to confront corruption, inequality, and authoritarianism. Their resilience shows that movements for change can thrive even under repressive systems. As Sabilah noted, *“The true power of young people lies in resilience and creativity. Resistance will never run out of ways to live on and multiply.”*

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Whether on the streets of Manila, Dili, or Jakarta, the message is that today's youth will not be silenced. United by shared struggles and collective hope, they are pushing the Asia-Pacific closer to a democratic, inclusive, and accountable future.

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Nepal's Gen Z Protests and the Future of Youth Activism

In early September 2025, Nepal witnessed an extraordinary expression of civic outrage as thousands of young people, many in school uniforms, took to the streets in what has come to be known as the Gen Z Protests. The immediate spark was the government's decision to restrict unregistered social media platforms, a move widely viewed as an attempt to silence dissent. Yet beneath this digital crackdown lay years of anger over corruption, unemployment and inequality.



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For a generation that has grown up online, the social media restrictions symbolised more than bureaucratic regulation, they represented the suppression of youth expression and engagement. Platforms such as TikTok became the breeding ground for activism as young Nepalis shared videos exposing the gulf between the privileges of political elites and the hardships faced by ordinary citizens. Hashtags such as #NoMoreCorruption and #WakeUpChallenge trended nationwide, galvanising solidarity across urban and rural youth.



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Initially, the protests were calm and disciplined. Participants distributed pamphlets, chanted “Enough is Enough!”, and committed to non-violence. That calm shattered when demonstrators entered restricted zones near the federal parliament. Security forces responded with disproportionate force, deploying tear gas and live ammunition. Dozens of young protestors were killed, hundreds injured, and many more arrested.

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Images of teenagers shot in their school uniforms shocked the nation and drew international condemnation. The violence marked one of the darkest moments of Nepal's post-democratic era. Public outrage deepened when state violence continued the following day, leading to a nationwide explosion of protests, the burning of government buildings, and ultimately the resignation of the Prime Minister. Former Chief Justice Sushila Karki became Nepal's first female interim prime minister, a historical but sobering milestone born of tragedy.

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The Gen Z movement revealed both the transformative potential and limitations of youth-led activism. On one hand, it demonstrated that Nepali youth are no longer willing to accept corruption and exclusion as political norms. On the other, it exposed weaknesses in coordination, constitutional literacy and leadership. Without coherent strategy or understanding of institutional mechanisms, the movement struggled to convert its momentum into policy reform.

The protests underscored the urgent need for civic and political education among young activists - knowledge that bridges activism and governance and empowers youth to navigate formal democratic processes.

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The aftermath of the protests has left deep scars on Nepalese society, particularly on children and students. Reports indicate that 75 lives were lost, nearly 70% of them aged 17-30, and over 2,100 people injured. Autopsy evidence confirmed that many fatalities resulted from gunfire targeted at the head and chest, an alarming violation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and other international human rights instruments.

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Schools across affected regions remain damaged or closed, disrupting education for thousands. Students face emotional trauma, barriers to learning, and uncertainty about their futures. Online classes have resumed where possible, but many children still lack safe spaces to study. Civil society organisations have called for psychosocial support, remedial education, and legal aid for the victims.

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Education advocates warn that the protests have also jeopardised policy implementation. With the School Education Bill rendered void and attention diverted to reconstruction, programmes such as the School Education Sector Plan (SESP) risk delay or withdrawal of funding. The need for vigilance and accountability in education financing has never been greater.

Although the appointment of an interim government has brought temporary calm, Nepal faces an uncertain path. The protests have forced a reckoning with corruption and unaccountability but also revealed deep fractures in political governance.

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Civil society leaders argue that true democratic healing demands institutionalised youth participation through youth councils, participatory budgeting, and digital civic platforms where young citizens can shape decisions that affect their future.

Ultimately, the Gen Z Protests were more than a burst of frustration; they were a generational declaration, a refusal to accept silence or complicity in the face of injustice. These demonstrations dismantled political complacency and demanded a fairer, more transparent democracy.

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For Nepal and the wider South Asian region, the message is that young people are not merely the future, they are the conscience of the present. If channelled through constructive civic engagement and inclusive policymaking, the energy of this new generation could forge the foundations of a more just, accountable, and participatory democracy for years to come.

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Youth Shaping Sri Lanka's Future and Inspiring Southeast Asia: Reflections from Sri Lanka

By Lahiru Wijesinghe, Undergraduate, Youth Leader

Historically, youth engagement in policymaking in Sri Lanka has been limited. Still, there have been important moments where young people influenced national policy, politics, or reform movements either directly or indirectly. In my adult life, I was able to witness one such movement that positively aligned with Sri Lanka's future.

In 2022, Sri Lanka faced one of the most challenging periods in its history. Living expenses were high, fuel was scarce, and power cuts lasted for hours every day. As a university student, I saw my friends and family struggle. During that period, I remember some of my lectures were held online, and we faced many challenges in our education.

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Many young people began to feel hopeless about their future. Even if someone had a good education and a good job, they couldn't live a quality life. Day by day, our fear about the future increased. Despite that, instability and pain gave birth to a powerful movement that showed how strong and united Sri Lankan youth could be.

The causes we identified for these problems came from the corrupted socio-political system. People said all politicians should resign, rejecting the old, traditional political class. The “Aragalaya” protest was led by employees, both blue and white collar, university students and teachers, government officers, and the urban middle class. Then, it spread across Sri Lanka to the village level.

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I still remember the first time I joined a protest with my villagers against the rising prices of goods and the lack of gas, fuel, and electricity. Thousands of us, mostly young people, gathered peacefully demanding change. They sang, drew posters, shared food, and used social media to spread our message. For the first time, I felt that our voices mattered. It emphasised the need to change the system and was a call for a better country. The protests showed how creative and brave young people can be. Social media became the main tool to share the truth and connect with others. Even when some traditional media tried to ignore what was happening, online platforms helped us stay strong and united. Every post, every video, and every story gave courage to someone else. Through these efforts, youth proved that participation is not just about politics or elections, it is about caring for the country and standing up for what is right. We realized that being active citizens begins with awareness and unity.

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After months of youth-led protests, real changes began to happen. One of the most important outcomes was the introduction of a 25% youth quota in local governance under the Local Authorities Elections (Amendment) Act No. 30 of 2023. This decision gave young people more opportunities to enter politics and decision-making at both local and national levels. Even the President, in his speech to the 9th Parliament, highlighted the importance of hearing youth voices. Today, we can see more young people in parliamentary sectoral committees and community leadership roles. These are clear signs that the message of the youth is finally being heard.

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With that background, it created a pathway to form new policies that reflect the expectations of the youth. For many years, politics in Sri Lanka was seen as something only for the rich or powerful. The same families and names appeared in every election. Young people had ideas but no space to share them. This change is meaningful because it marks the beginning of a more inclusive system. Before the protest in 2022, many youth hesitated to enter politics because of corruption, vote-buying, and a lack of trust. Some believed that without money or family connections, it was impossible to succeed. These mindsets were challenged through the protest, and citizens began to understand the corrupt system that controlled us.

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I believe that education has a big role in this. Schools and universities should teach civic responsibility, leadership, and critical thinking. Students must learn that their voices can shape the country's future. Youth participation should not be limited to protests after situations have worsened. It should continue through discussions, volunteering, and actively engaging with policymaking.

Now, we are benefiting from a new socio-political environment, and we must use the same energy we had in the “Aragalaya” movement to rebuild our country. We must create systems that are fair, transparent, and sustainable. When I look back at those days, I feel proud of what we achieved. We may not have solved every problem, but we changed the mindset of generations. If we continue to believe in youth power and work together, I am sure that we can build the country we dream of.

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When we consider the Sri Lankan population, the female population is higher than the male population. Although females are more engaged in government jobs, in politics, we still see a lack of female participation. This has been influenced by religious and cultural factors, similar to other Southeast Asian countries. Youth engagement in policymaking and development is essential not only within Sri Lanka but also across the broader Southeast Asian region. In that process, we must focus more on increasing female participation in policymaking and enhancing their capacities.

Young people in many Southeast Asian countries face similar challenges, such as economic struggles, a lack of opportunities, and limited representation in decision-making. Strengthening regional cooperation and creating spaces for youth voices to be heard can lead to more inclusive and sustainable policies.

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Our generation has the courage and creativity to shape this future. If governments and institutions trust and empower us, youth across Asia can become the driving force for positive change, justice, and equality within this region and beyond.

About the Author: Lahiru Wijesinghe is a 24-year-old undergraduate and Youth Projects Manager at the Organization of Environment & Children Rights Preservation (OECRP), Sri Lanka, and a member of the Coalition of Educational Development (CED), Sri Lanka.
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