

Global Action Week for Education 2026 (GAWE 2026)
20 – 25 April 2026
Revised Concept Note

Contexts

The Global Action Week for Education 2026 (GAWE 2026) marks the 24th annual global campaign being organised by the Global Campaign for Education (GCE) to advance the right to education. GAWE, started in 2003 with the theme “Girls Education: The Biggest Lesson.” has been urging governments to fulfil their responsibility for “Education for All.” Over the years, GCE, now with a membership of more than 240 organisations, has remained steadfast in its advocacy through GAWE and other engagements to champion education rights amidst the challenges faced by the education sector and civil society organisations.

The theme for GAWE 2026 is education financing, with a call to governments and decision-makers to “**Hold the Flame High**” for education. There is a compelling need for the education movements to forge a strong defence of education financing as countries disinvest in education due to the impact of global crises such as wars, conflicts and climate change, and in light of the radical cuts in education aid and rising threats of privatisation of education.

Education is fundamental to building lasting peace, realising sustainable development and driving innovations for the future. Yet, the global and national commitments to education have remained stagnant. The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2025 states that SDG 4: “Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities” by 2030 will be missed if urgent actions are not accelerated. The report notes that most countries are off track in their education targets for access, completion and learning outcomes.” The out-of-school population increased by 3 per cent since 2015; there are now 272 million children and youth out of school worldwide, and over half are in sub-Saharan Africa.

The Report recognises that SDG 4.5 on gender parity in education is on track. However, it argues that “parity ratios at the global and regional levels can mask inequalities within countries.” It reports that gender disparities remain widespread and that the “intersection of gender, geography and economic status creates multilayered barriers

requiring targeted interventions addressing both access and quality across education systems. On SDG 4.6, the Report says that although literacy has improved modestly, hundreds of millions of people remain illiterate, with women disproportionately affected.

A global overview of the SDG 4 targets is as follows:

- 4.1 Effective learning outcomes – stagnation
- 4.2 Early childhood education – stagnation
- 4.3 TVET and tertiary education – stagnation
- 4.4 Skills for employment – insufficient data
- 4.5 Equal access to education – on track or target met
- 4.6 Adult literacy and numeracy – insufficient data
- 4.7 Sustainable development education – insufficient data
- 4.a Education facilities – marginal progress and significant acceleration needed
- 4.b ODA for scholarships – moderate progress, but acceleration needed
- 4.c Qualified teachers - Regression

Alarmingly, Target 4.c on qualified teachers is regressing due to the massive teacher shortage, “affecting access to and the relevance of education. [Education International](#) emphasise that the “world needs 50 million more teachers by 2030 across early childhood, primary and secondary education, yet qualified educators are fleeing classrooms due to systemic government failures.”

The chronic underfunding continues to undermine SDG 4 and more broadly, the right to education. Reiterating the GCE analysis of education financing contexts raised during the 4th International Conference on Financing for Development (FfD4) in Seville, it is important to note that **a \$97 billion annual shortfall is preventing low- and lower-middle-income countries from meeting SDG 4**. As a result, 41% of countries do not meet international benchmarks of spending 4–6% of GDP and/or 15–20% of public budgets on education¹.

Structural injustices such as regressive taxation, debt distress, and austerity measures imposed by international financial institutions like the International Monetary Fund (IMF) have constrained developing countries' fiscal space and deepened inequalities. According to UNESCO, in low-income countries, government debt averages 72% of GDP—an 18-year high—and many spend more on debt repayments than on their education budgets. Debt, austerity, and underfunded public systems disproportionately affect women, girls, black and indigenous people, persons with disabilities and marginalised populations.²

Furthermore, the “Leave No One Behind” agenda in education will be derailed, given the decline in Official Development Assistance (ODA) for education. The June 2025 OECD policy brief

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

² Transforming Education Summit [Action Track 1 on inclusive, equitable, safe and healthy schools](#)

Cuts in official development assistance stated projections of a 9-17% drop in ODA from OECD in 2025 on top of a 9% drop in 2024. Humanitarian aid is projected to decline by 21-36%, the largest decline of all sectors from 2023 to 2025.

The Institute for Economics and Peace published the article "How education cuts could impact children's education which posited cuts in foreign aid could jeopardise "access and quality for 68 million children in school systems most dependent on aid." The report said that globally, foreign aid to education is just a drop in total expenditure on education. But in more than two dozen countries, "there appears to be structural dependence on development aid in the education sector, with an estimated 15-82 per cent of the public provision relying on ODA.

While official development assistance (ODA) has been declining—particularly for education—global military spending continues to soar, reaching an all-time high of \$2.443 trillion in 2023, a 6.8%³ increase from the previous year. This stark imbalance is deeply unjust: even a fraction of these military resources could transform public education systems worldwide⁴.

Further, conflicts and wars such as the escalating war in the Middle East have exacerbated the education crisis with attacks on education institutions and deaths of students, with [UNESCO calling on all parties to fulfil their obligations](#) to protect schools, students and education personnel. While people are suffering due to the impacts of the war, oil companies, on the other hand, are expecting [profit windfalls](#) as company shares soar to an all-time high and with the surge in oil and gas prices.

The conflicts and climate crises worldwide underscore the urgent need to lobby governments, intergovernmental bodies and institutions to strategically prioritise financing quality public education as a foundation for peace, social cohesion, gender justice and sustainable development.

GAWE 2026 Theme: Education Financing

With the looming failure to reach SDG 4 targets, the Global Campaign for Education must advocate strongly for sustained and increased education financing. GAWE 2026 is a critical opportunity for education movements worldwide to unite, coordinate efforts and lobby governments and intergovernmental organisations to commit to financing inclusive and quality public education for all children, youth and adults.

³ Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), available at

<https://www.sipri.org/publications/2024/sipri-fact-sheets/trends-world-military-expenditure-2023>

⁴ GCE FfD4 Policy Position 2025

The GAWE 2026 campaign on education financing builds on the 2023 Decolonising Education Financing Campaign. It will reiterate GCE's policy demands in FfD4 to change the global financial architecture, dismantle systemic inequalities in financing, promote tax justice and challenge debt and austerity measures to generate domestic resources for public education and universal public services. GAWE 2026 will challenge false solutions to education financing, such as the debt-to-equity swaps and other innovative financing that promote education as an investment portfolio rather than a human right and public good for all.

The campaign's calls for **debt justice, progressive taxation, and reform of the global financial system** are especially critical as affected countries face limited fiscal space amid humanitarian and security demands.

Finally, the campaign will call on developed countries to deliver on their commitment to address inequalities across countries by allocating 0.7% of their GNI to Official Development Assistance (ODA), with education and Education in Emergencies as a priority sector. GCE will support and maximise opportunities for reiterating this call through the replenishment financing campaigns of the Global Partnership for Education (GPE) and the Education Cannot Wait (ECW) in 2026.

Campaign Objectives:

1. Call on governments and international donors on their commitment to SDG 4 financing

- Five years since Agenda 2030 and SDG 4, call for increased investment and government obligations to finance education as a pillar of sustainable development, and in addressing crises faced by people across the world.
- Follow up on the SDG 4 commitments and Transforming Education Summit (TES), specifically the commitments under the Financing Education track.
- Support the "Leave No One Behind" agenda towards equitable access and gender-transformative education and lifelong learning for all children, youth and adults. in education through multilateral cooperation of GPE and ECW
- Support people's participation in education governance and the role of CSOs in ensuring accountability, transparency and transformation of education systems

2. Advocate for financing quality public education for all:

- Reiterate the demands of the Future is public, specifically lobby for financing of quality public education for all within the broad framework of financing quality public services.
- Challenge innovative financing, such as debt for equity swaps, results-based education investment portfolios, and other financing schemes where the private sector profits from education and education as a public good is threatened.

3. Push for global financial reforms to generate sustainable financing for education

- Building on FfD4, advocate for international financial architecture reform to enable sustainable education financing, and call on Member States to support a binding and substantive UN Framework Convention on International Tax Cooperation.
- Lobby for debt cancellation through the convening of the proposed UN Framework Convention on Sovereign Debt.

4. Continue to build the awareness of the general public on the power of education and information to transform lives and mobilise diverse civil society organisations to demand the right to education from decision-makers.

Campaign Call: “Hold the Flame High”

The tagline for GAWE 2026, “Hold the Flame High”, calls for governments and international partners’ unwavering leadership and commitment in guaranteeing the right to education for all. Faced with economic crisis, conflicts and the limited fiscal space, the campaign reiterates the power of education to address the crises besetting the world and the planet.

The tagline also calls on all education advocates – children, youth and adults, as well as organised civil society groups to persist in holding their governments to account to education.

Calls to Action addressed to governments and international donors⁵

Education is fundamental in overcoming the multiple crises and the foundation in fostering inclusion, justice, gender equality, social cohesion and peace.

The following are the calls from the GCE FfD4 Policy Position that we will reiterate in GAWE 2026.

Public Investment to Strengthen Public Education Systems

Allocate at least 4–6% of GDP and/or 15–20% of national budgets to education, guaranteeing adequate financing per learner from ECCD to adult education, securing fair wages and working conditions to education professionals and developing and implementing long-term financing plans to ensure sustainable public investment for public education and ring-fence education budgets, especially during crises.

⁵ GCE Position Paper for FfD4 2025

Enact robust public regulation of private actors involved in essential services such as education, ensuring strong, transparent and accountable States lead financing and delivery to overcome inequalities and ensure universal access to quality education within a human rights framework.

Invest in teachers and address the global teacher shortage by acting on the root causes of the shortage: low salaries, lack of benefits and training, work overload and lack of professional autonomy.

Equity and Inclusion

Ensure education financing is gender transformative and prioritises historically marginalised and underserved learners in budget allocations, including girls, black and indigenous people, people with disabilities, crisis-affected and displaced populations, and rural communities. Ensure public funds are consciously directed toward overcoming inequalities, fulfilling the right to education and shaping a sustainable, just and democratic future.

Domestic Resource Mobilisation

Expand the tax-to-GDP ratio through progressive reforms and support the adoption of the UN Framework Convention on International Tax Cooperation to build a more transparent, just, equitable, and accountable global tax system that will enable countries to sustainably finance quality public education and other services.

Debt Justice

Eliminate harmful loan conditionalities such as education budget cuts or public sector wage caps. Remove employment and salary ceilings that restrict the recruitment and retention of qualified education personnel and teachers.

Support the convening of a UN Framework Convention on Sovereign Debt, based on fair global agreements on lending and borrowing, shifting power away from the IMF to a representative UN body.

Aid Effectiveness

Donors should meet the 0.7% GNI target for official development assistance, dedicating at least 20% to education while aligning aid with national plans and adhering to aid effectiveness principles rather than donor priorities. Education aid must be protected and increased, with recent cuts reversed and education reaffirmed as a priority sector. As a matter of global justice, ODA for education should ensure that all children, youth, and adults can realize their right to education and lifelong learning.

Ensure increased and predictable funding for multilateral cooperation such as GPE and ECW to support public education systems and guarantee the right to education during climate crises, conflicts and other emergencies.

GAWE 2026: Building a Coordinated Global Campaign

The power of GAWE 2026 rests on the impactful and coordinated campaigns launched by GCE members within the week of April 20-25. To achieve this impact the following are the strategies based on the lesson learnt of GCE members :

1. Strategic focus on advocacy and political impact, moving beyond awareness raising towards securing concrete political and financing commitments.
 - Political and Parliamentary Engagement: GCE should strengthen political and parliamentary engagement to drive change, including establishing legislative initiatives to increase education financing and aligning the campaign with national and global fiscal cycles.
 - Focus on Financing and Debt Justice: Measures should center on clear policy demands for education financing, including budget protection, equitable allocation, and lobbying donors and governments to increase assistance to the sector. Strategic alliances with movements on debt justice are also suggested, such as converting "odious debts" into education investments.
 - Sustained Advocacy: GAWE 2026 should be positioned as the start of a sustained advocacy effort on education financing rather than a one-off campaign.
2. Localisation and inclusive participation that enables GCE members to contextualise the campaign to their specific realities and education issues, ensuring broad stakeholder participation. The global key messages can be adapted to country contexts so national coalitions can respond to their specific educational, political, and cultural realities.
3. Inclusion of Networks: GCE members must ensure the active participation of youth and feminist networks, teacher unions, and communities, not just as implementers, but as political actors in driving the campaign.
4. Multi-level Partnerships: Engage governments, civil society organizations, teachers' unions, and international partners and agencies to ensure collective commitment.
5. Document and monitor the outcomes of GAWE 2026, taking note of how the campaign builds on the organisation's strategic advocacy on the right to education.

GCE members are enjoined to launch coordinated actions during GAWE 2026 as indicated below:

DATE	ACTIVITY	REMARKS
April 7 or April 9	Webinar: Capacity Building for GAWE 2026	
April 6 - 18	Social Media Countdown to GAWE 2026	

April 20 -25	Social media plan: daily posters and messages for GAWE 2026	Courtesy meetings to MOE, UNESCO National Commission and Embassy of Nigeria and Italy (for GPE replenishment) to invite them to GAWE 2026
Day 1 - April 20	<p>Global launch: Webinar Country launch: “Hold the Flame High” mobilisations</p> <p>Courtesy calls to the Ministry of Education, UNESCO National Commission and the Embassies of Nigeria and Italy (for GPE replenishment)</p>	<p>Use the LOGO prominently to launch GAWE 2026</p> <p>Courtesy meetings can also be part of GAWE 2026</p>
Day 2 – April 21	<p>Country Pledge for Education Financing: Forum on Education Financing and Signing of Pledge for GCE</p> <p>Dissemination of the paper on Monitoring Commitments to Transforming Education Summit: Education Financing Track</p>	<p>Forum on education financing issues</p> <p>Symbolic signing of country pledge for GCE</p> <p>Calls for ODA for education</p>
Day 3 – April 22	Education We Want Now and the Future: Children and Youth mobilisation for GAWE 2026: “Hold the Flame High” – addressed to Parliamentarians, MOE, local governments and schools	<p>Children and youth forums with governments</p> <p>Children and youth mobilisations showing “Hold the Flame High” for intergeneration demands and</p>

		leadership in education
Day 4 – April 23	Leave No One Behind in Education: Women, adults and communities mobilisations for education financing: local governments	Community mobilisations – discussions on financing equity
Day 5 – April 24	Change the system: Tax and Debt Justice Forums and Social Media	Webinars or forums on impact of debt on teachers, impact of tax injustice to education Advocacy during ECOSOC Financing for Development 2026
Day 6 – April 25	Our collective work: Sharing and uploading photos, videos, stories, statements, documents and reflections	Celebration of one-week of GAWE How to monitor impact of the campaign

The regional coalitions will hold webinars for GAWE 2026 focused on education financing issues based on their regional contexts and advocacy.

GCE members will identify ways of monitoring the impact of the campaign, follow-up on the discussions and pledges committed during the campaign and how to continue the advocacy on education financing.

GAWE 2026 Key Messages and Posters

HOLD THE FLAME HIGH
Invest in Education, Transform Lives

HOLD THE FLAME HIGH
Fund Education, not War

HOLD THE FLAME HIGH
Finance Education, Build Lasting Peace

HOLD THE FLAME HIGH

Invest in Teachers, Transform Education Systems

HOLD THE FLAME HIGH

Fund Early Childhood Education, Learn for Life

HOLD THE FLAME HIGH

Tax Justice Funds the Future, Fair Taxes Ensure Quality Public Education for All.

HOLD THE FLAME HIGH

Solve the Debt Crisis, Finance Education

HOLD THE FLAME HIGH

Secure ODA for Education, Support the Global Partnership for Education (GPE)