



ASPBAE 9th General Assembly and 60th Anniversary Regional Strategic Planning Workshop "ASPBAE@60: Transformative, Intergenerational Actions for Inclusive, Gender-Just and Climate Saving Lifelong Learning and Education." | 25-28 November 2024 | Da Nang, Vietnam

ASPBAE Statement for the 4th International Conference on Financing for Development (FfD4)

Just, People-Centred, and Sustainable International Financial Architecture for Transformative Education and Development

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ASPBAE extends its warm greetings and solidarity with Member States, representatives of multilateral and bilateral agencies, civil society, youth, development partners and other stakeholders participating in the 4th International Conference on Financing for Development (FfD4).

Amidst the current unprecedented geopolitical and development context, a volatile global economy, the rapid acceleration of technology, shifting demographics, worsening climate change and the ever-present threats to human rights and democratic systems, the FfD4 presents a key opportunity to push for a more just, inclusive, equitable and gender-transformative international financial architecture. The FfD4 should be fully optimised as an opportunity for governments and the international community to address persistent financing gaps towards the delivery of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), including SDG4 on education, with stronger attention to enhancing domestic resource mobilisation, promoting fair and progressive taxation and ultimately, protecting human rights.

The overall progress towards the SDGs and SDG 4 has been slow and constantly at risk of reversal. Where progress has been made, it has been uneven and inadequate. In the Asia-Pacific region, progress has stalled and even regressed in several countries and contexts. On its current trajectory, the region will not meet any of the 17 SDGs by 2030. The region also faces a financing crisis that impacts most especially on key public services, including education, healthcare and social protection.

For SDG 4, it is expected that only 17 per cent of education-related targets will be reached with significant regression noted in SDG 4.5 on eliminating gender disparities in education and ensuring equal access to all levels of education and vocational training for the vulnerable. Key social concerns in the region such as poverty, exclusion, and inequality have been exacerbated, compounded by an overheating economy, debt distress, rising political tensions and worsening impact of climate change.

Despite strong commitments towards fulfilling the right to education, including the achievement of SDG 4, education remains severely and chronically underfunded. The cumulative annual financing gap for low- and lower-middle income

countries to reach their national SDG 4 targets by 2030 amounts to USD 97 billion per year, as highlighted in the Policy Brief by the Interagency Task Force on Financing for Development (UNESCO, 2025).

Education budgets are not only inadequate, they also fail to address persistent challenges in equity and inclusion. Education financing leans towards prioritising a few components within the overall SDG 4 agenda, while other key components remain neglected and poorly funded, such as on functional literacy, early childhood care and education (ECCE), disability-inclusive education, youth and adult learning and education (ALE), including the most recent commitments made in the CONFITEA VII Marrakech Framework for Action, women and girls education, support for teachers, global citizenship education and education for sustainable development, amongst others.

International financing support for education is also declining. While the total education aid reached a record high of USD 16.6 billion in 2022, the share of total official development assistance (ODA) for education has dropped from 9.3 per cent in 2019 to 7.6 per cent in 2022 (GEM Report, UIS, and World Bank, 2024). By 2022, ODA accounted for 12.2 % of education funding in LICs (versus 13% in 2021) and just 0.29% of total education funding globally.

According to the UNESCO Global Education Monitoring Report (2023), about 41 per cent of low- and lower-middle-income countries have fallen short of meeting the international spending benchmarks of at least 4-6 per cent of the GDP or 15-20 per cent of public expenditure on education.

Only a handful of countries in the region have been able to meet the global spending benchmarks. The spending levels of most countries remain relatively small and the cumulative underinvestment has weakened the education systems and created wide gaps in key requirements for quality education.

Countries are losing USD 492 billion in tax a year due to global tax abuse both by multinational companies shifting their profits and by individuals hiding their wealth offshore, according to the most recent report by the Tax Justice Network (2024).

This highlights the need to support the UN Framework Convention on International Tax Cooperation, which aims to effectively eliminate tax abuse and illicit financial flows to deliver sustainable public finance for social services and address inequalities. Further, ambitious and progressive tax reforms are urgently required at the global, national and local levels. Meanwhile, the debt burden of developing countries reached historic high levels, with over half of the poorest countries assessed to be at risk of debt distress. Recent data shows that 58 per cent of low- and lower-middle-income countries are now either in debt distress or at risk of debt distress. More than 3 billion people live in countries where governments spend more on debt servicing than on essential public services like education or health (UNCTAD, 2024). All these interlinked issues highlight the urgency of filling the education financing gap.

It is also troubling to note that the privatisation of education in the Asia-Pacific region has accelerated over the past two decades, driven by insufficient public investment in education, the aggressive push of the private sector, and the support of international financial institutions and donor countries. This raises significant concerns, especially in protecting and upholding education as a human right and a state responsibility. Experiences in Asia Pacific show that privatisation exacerbates inequality in education, widens gender disparities, and results in segregation in education and society. The corporate capture of education technologies and the indiscriminate push for artificial intelligence (AI) in education have further worsened the privatisation and commercialisation of education with disastrous impact on equity, inclusion, and the cost of education.

With five years left until the 2030 deadline for the SDGs, there is an urgent need for governments to seriously address the financing gap in education and other public services, with the 4th International Conference on Financing for Development in Sevilla, Spain coming at pivotal time in history and providing a platform to reconfigure the international financial architecture into one that is informed by a more just, inclusive, transformative and sustainable vision of development.

Building on the recommendations emerging from key intergovernmental processes, such as the 2022 Transforming Education Summit (TES), the 7th International Conference on Adult Education (CONFINTEA VII), the 6th Asia Pacific Meeting on Education 2030 (APMED6) and the 2024 Global Education Meeting (GEM), ASPBAE puts forward the following recommendations for FfD4:

- **Invest more and more equitably in public education and other social services through greater domestic resources** supported by tax justice mechanisms, while ensuring accountability and transparency in public finance. This should include a commitment to developing integrated, long-term policy and sustainable financing strategies aimed at boosting investment in public education systems. Specific targets must be set for the most marginalised and excluded groups, including those living in rural and remote contexts, as well as conflict-affected areas.
- **Ensure increased allocations for neglected components in the education sector**, specifically for early childhood care and education (ECCE), girls and women's education, for youth not in education, employment or training (NEET), adult learning and education (ALE) and for climate change education (CCE).
- **Promote transparent, inclusive and gender-responsive public sector budgeting**, and integrate youth perspectives into the design, financing, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes.
- **Pursue the commitments made by governments in the CONFINTEA VII Marrakech Framework for Action on Adult Learning and Education (ALE)**, ensuring that ALE policies are concretised into costed and fully financed plans.
- **Address the digital divide by investing in appropriate and context-based digital infrastructure, technology and capacity development.** Adopt, implement, and enforce effective regulatory framework and monitoring of private providers of digital learning platforms, in accordance with international human rights law.
- **Secure adequate financing for the salaries, benefits and capacity development of teachers and social service workers**, among others. This includes urging International Financial Institutions to eliminate harmful policies and conditionalities on public sector wages that prevent increased spending on education, and champion policies that will allow recruitment of teachers to meet service delivery standards.
- **Critically examine innovative financing schemes in education and other social services.** Such schemes should serve to strengthen the public sector, uphold human rights, and attend to the needs of marginalised and vulnerable groups. Governments must enforce regulatory frameworks and prevent privatization and the corporate capture of education, including in digital learning.
- **Allocate at least 0.7 per cent of GNI for ODA**, and ensure aid effectiveness in terms of scale, predictability, and allocation priorities as determined by recipient countries. Adequate share of ODA should go to human development and climate action priorities, including education, health, and social and environmental protection.
- **Promote international tax justice with actions on taxation of the wealthy and multinational companies**, combating tax evasion and illicit financial flows, taxation of harmful activities and products, address unfair trade taxation, acting on tax havens and fair global tax rules.
- **Provide immediate and effective debt relief**, including debt cancellation, for countries facing debt distress. This should also include promoting transparency, participatory debt audits and compliance with responsible lending and borrowing principles.*