

QUALITY EDUCATION FOR ALL: AN INVESTIGATION OF THE EUROPEAN UNION CONTEXT USING 2030 AGENDA INDICATORS

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Abstract: *In the literature of field education, it has always been presented as one of the most important factor to achieve both the economic growth and the employment growth. Supporting education and training is also one of the aims of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (Goal 4. Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all). The main objective of the article is to assess the level of education of the European Union Member States using variables indicated in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development strategy.*

Keywords: *education, training, Agenda 2030, indicators*

INTRODUCTION

Education and training are the key to achieve both economic and employment growth, which means that they play at the same time an important role of a sustainable improvement of the standard of living in the world [1, 10].

Education helps to reduce inequalities and to reach gender equality [15, 16]. Therefore, inequalities should not be understood only in relation to income and wealth. They interact across seven key dimensions: economic, political, social, cultural, environmental, spatial and knowledge (education) [7, 9].

Also, education contributes to more peaceful societies [15, 16]. But, in order to make peace education a resistant force, its key elements need to be articulate [6]:

- restore personal meaning in learning;
- centrality of critical enquiry in any process of institutionalized education;
- importance of justice for making peace sustainable.

In September 2015, the General Assembly of the UN (United Nations Organization) adopted a Resolution determining the sustainable development plan till the year 2030 [15]. One of the main goals of the 2030 Agenda includes (Table 1) *Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all* (Goal 4). The targets for SDG 4 (Sustainable Development Goal 4) mention expanding opportunities across all phases of education – pre-primary, primary, secondary, vocational, higher and adult education. The targets broaden the scope of education as a global project to encompass outcomes in literacy, numeracy, and wider learning including global citizenship, sustainability and gender equality [3, 4, 11].

Educational issues appear in a number of other SDG targets, including SDG3 on good health and wellbeing, SDG 5 on gender equality and women's empowerment, and SDG8 on decent work. While it is acknowledged that in some SDGs the education components and connections could be better articulated [8], the SDG framework has been read as offering something for everyone working on education [17].

Table 1

Goals of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

1. No poverty	2. Zero hunger	3. Good health and wellbeing	4. Quality education	5. Gender equality	6. Clean water and sanitation
7. Affordable and clean energy	8. Decent work and economic growth	9. Industry, innovation and infrastructure	10. Reduced inequalities	11. Sustainable cities and communities	12. Responsible consumption and production
13. Climate action	14. Life below water	15. Life on land	16. Peace, justice and strong institution	17. Partnership for the goals	SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Source: Author's elaboration on the basis of: <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/sustainable-development-goals/> [16]

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Education and Training 2020 (ET 2020) [12] is the strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training. It takes into consideration the entire range of education and training systems, covering all levels, from basic education to tertiary and adult education. In ET 2020 appears some indicators that guide this analysis, preseted in Table 2. The sources of data come from Eurostat Labour Force Survey, PISA study and UNESCO.

Table 2

Indicators regarding education and training (SDG 4)

INDICATORS
Basic education
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Early leavers from education and training. The indicator indicates the share of the population between 18 and 24 ages with at most lower secondary education who were not involved in any education or training during the four weeks preceding the survey. • Participation in early childhood education. The indicator measures the share of children between the age of 4 and the starting age of compulsory primary education who participated in early childhood education. • Underachievement in reading, maths and science. This indicator measures the share of 15-year-old students failing to reach level 2 (basic skills level) on the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) scale for the three core school subjects of reading, mathematics and science.
Tertiary education
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tertiary educational attainment. The indicator measures the share of the population between 30 and 34 ages who have finished with success tertiary studies (for example, at university or a higher technical institution). The indicator is based on the EU Labour Force Survey. • Employment rate of recent graduates. This indicator defines the percentage of the population between 20 and 34 ages with at least upper-secondary education (ISCED 2011 levels 3 to 8) who are in employment, not in any education and training, during the four weeks preceding the survey, and who completed their highest educational achievement one to three years before the survey.
Adult education
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adult participation in learning. It refers to people between 25 and 64 ages who benefited formal or non-formal education and training.

Source: Author's elaboration on the basis of: <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/documents/3217494/9237449/KS-01-18-656-EN-N.pdf/2b2a096b-3bd6-4939-8ef3-11cfc14b9329> [13]

RESEARCH RESULTS

Presentation of the main indicators

Basic education

Basic education refers to the earliest stages in educational pathway of childrens. It covers all steps from early childhood education to primary and secondary education. This step is very important and essential element of sustainable development because an inclusive and quality education for all removes school segregation.

The analysis of indicators selected for monitoring basic education, show an improvement of the participation rates in basic education across the EU in the last period, but, unfortunately learning outcomes have developed less favourably.

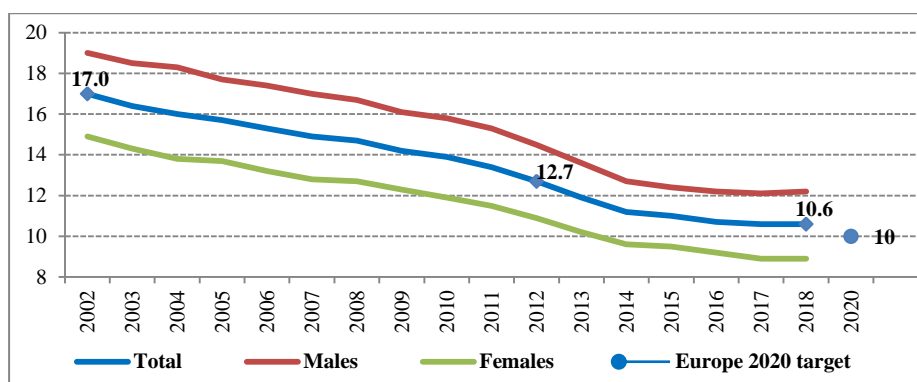


Figure 1. Early leavers from education and training in EU-28, (by sex, 2002-2018) (% of the population aged between 18 and 24 years)

Source: Author's elaboration on the basis of Eurostat (online data code: sdg_04_10)

We can observe in Figure 1 that the phenomenon of early school leaving is becoming less prevalent in the EU. The share of early leavers from education and training declined by an average of 3.1% per year between 2002 and 2018. In the short-term period, the average annual decrease was even stronger, at 3.6%, which represents considerable progress towards the ET 2020 benchmark of 10%. The gender gap has also narrowed, by an average of 1.6% per year between 2002 and 2018 and 2.3% between 2012 and 2018.

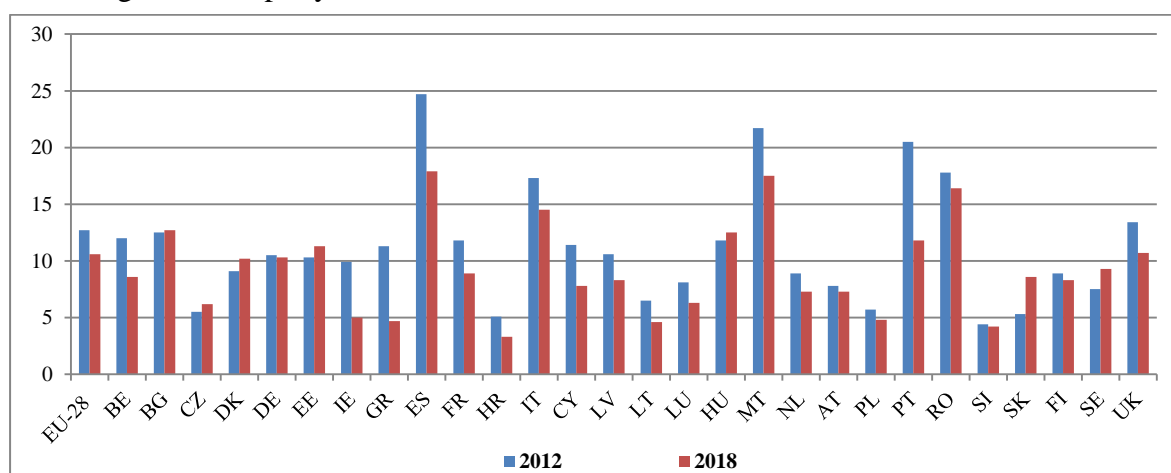


Figure 2. Early leavers from education and training, by EU countries (2012 and 2018) (% of the population aged between 18 and 24 years)

Source: Author's elaboration on the basis of Eurostat (online data code: sdg_04_10)

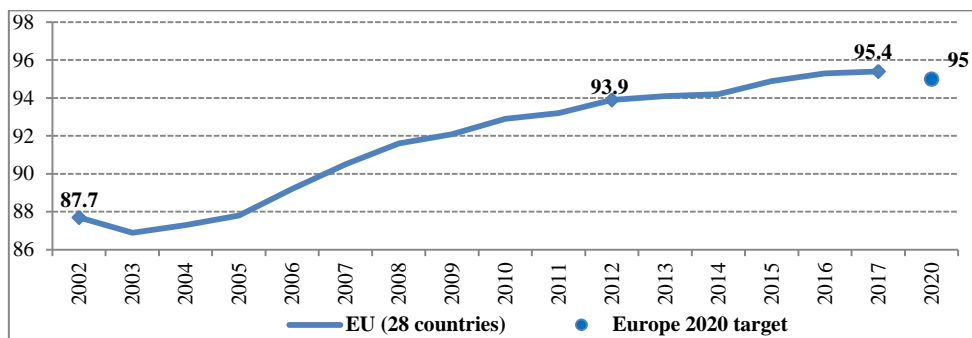


Figure 3. Participation in early childhood education in EU-28 (2002-2017) (% of the age group between 4 years old and the starting age of compulsory education)

Source: Author's elaboration on the basis of Eurostat (online data code: sdg_04_30)

Figure 3 shows that participation in early childhood education has grown in the EU between 2002 and 2017, by 0.5% per year on average. The increase has been less pronounced in the last period, but nonetheless participation in early childhood education has already reached its target of 95% in advance.

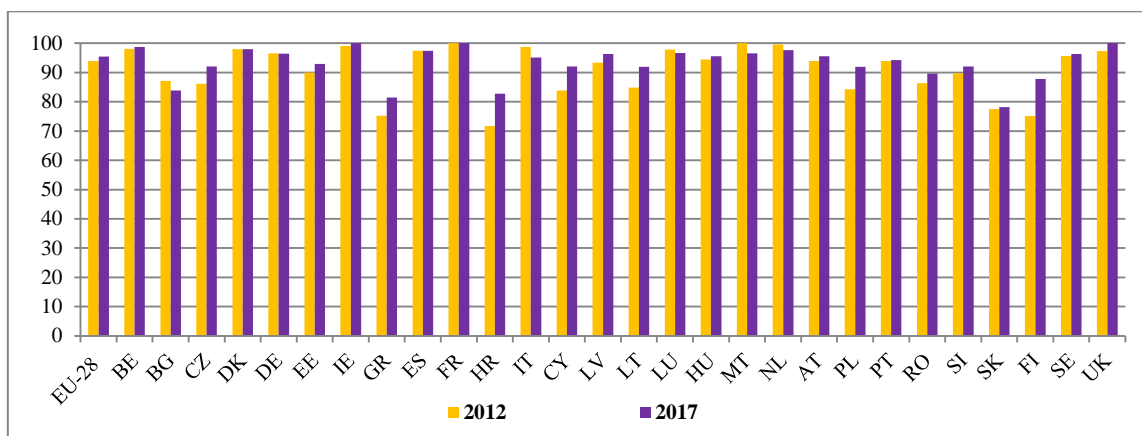


Figure 4. Participation in early childhood education, by EU countries (2002 and 2017) (% of the age group between 4 years old and the starting age of compulsory education)

Source: Author's elaboration on the basis of Eurostat (online data code: sdg_04_30)

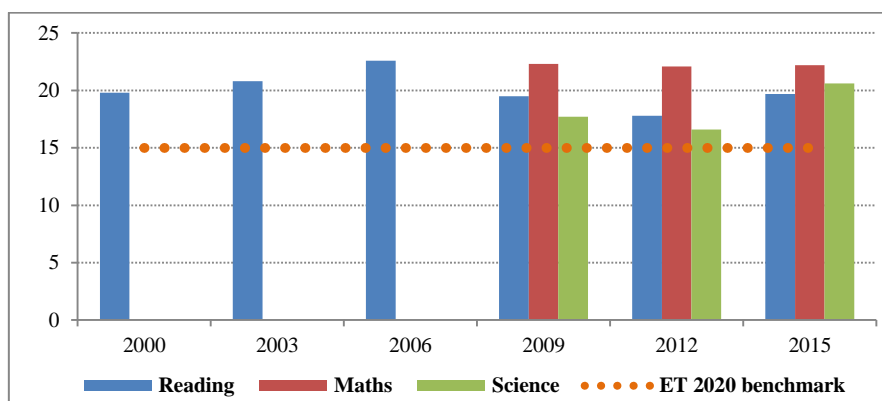


Figure 5. Underachievement in reading, maths and science, EU, 2000–2015 (% of 15 year old students)

Source: Author's elaboration on the basis of OECD/PISA (online data code: sdg_04_40)

The indicator "Underachievement in reading, maths and science" measures the share of 15-year-old students failing to reach level 2 ('basic skills level') on the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) scale for the three core school subjects of reading, mathematics and science. We can observe (Figure 5) the rate of underachievement in reading has more or less stagnated around 20% since 2000. Since 2009 all three domains show a stagnation or a decline, meaning that the EU is unable to meet its 2020 target of 15%.

Tertiary education

Tertiary education is a form in which basic education continues and it is important because people with higher qualifications have more possibilities to be employed or starting an own business causing prosperity. The two indicators nominated for this sub-theme, namely Tertiary educational attainment and Employment rate of recent graduates, show that while the EU is almost reaching its target for tertiary education, it is an important issue to bring recent graduates to the labour market.

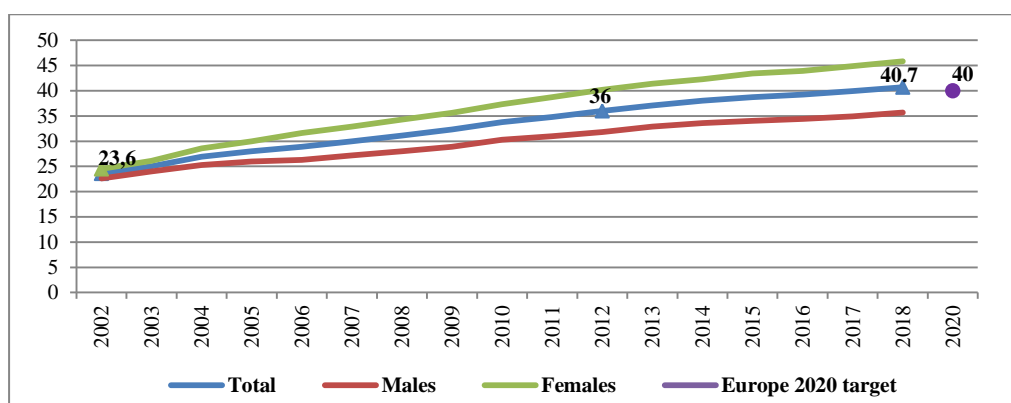


Figure 6. Tertiary educational attainment in EU-28 (by sex, 2002-2018)
 (% of the population aged 30 to 34)

Source: Author's elaboration on the basis of Eurostat (online data code: sdg_04_20)

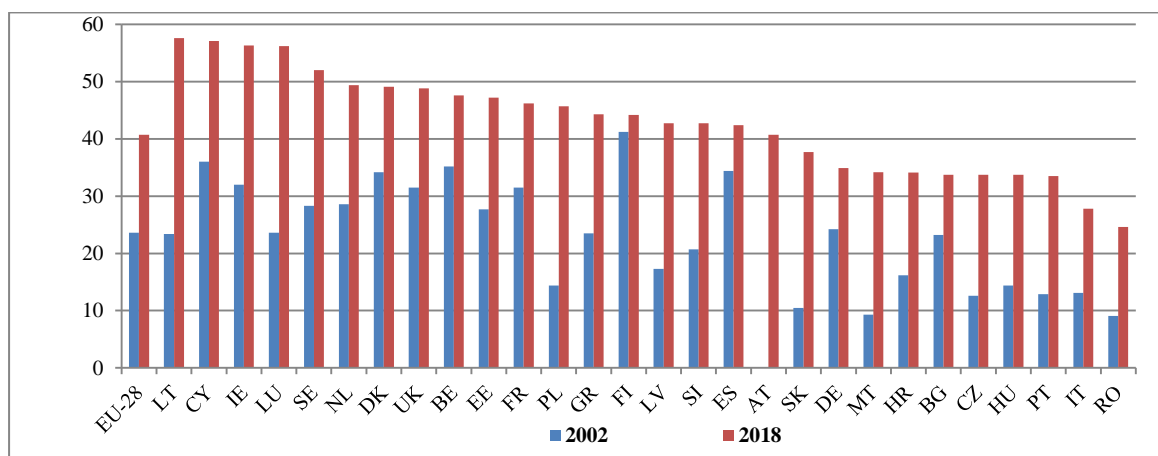


Figure 7. Tertiary educational attainment, by EU countries (2012 and 2018)
 (% of the population aged 30 to 34)

Source: Author's elaboration on the basis of Eurostat (online data code: sdg_04_20)

The indicator of tertiary educational attainment measures the share of the population aged 30 to 34 who have successfully completed tertiary studies (for example, at university or a higher technical institution). We can observe (Figure 6) that the tertiary educational attainment rate has increased consistently between 2002 and 2018. The

increase has been less pronounced in the period since 2012, but the 40% target for the 2020 horizon was exceeded in 2018.

Regarding the indicator of tertiary education attainment note that 18 countries have exceeded the target of 40%. Unfortunately, Romania ranks last in the top of the EU countries, only 24.6% % of the population aged 30 to 34 attended a course, with negative implications on finding a suitable job and living standards.

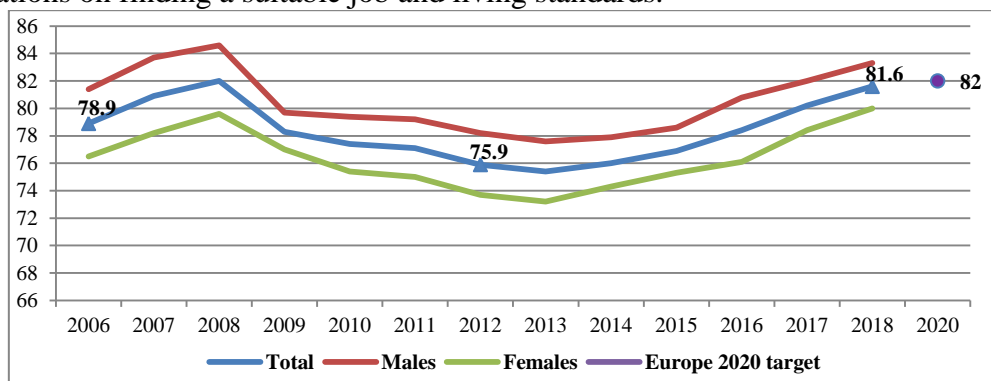


Figure 8. Employment rate of recent graduates IN EU-28 (, by sex, 2006–2018)
 (% of population aged 20 to 34)

Source: Author's elaboration on the basis of Eurostat (online data code: sdg_04_50)

Tertiary education plays a crucial role in raising employability in all EU countries, and the ET 2020 framework acknowledges the importance of education and training. The Europe 2020 target in field of employment rate of recent graduates is that at least 82% of recent graduates (20 to 34 year olds) should have found employment no more than three years after leaving education and training. In the EU, this indicator has increased since 2013, reaching 81.6% in 2018. The highest value of indicator was recorded in 2008 (82.1%). After the economic crisis the employment rate of recent graduates has declined, but nowadays it is possible to reach the 2020 target of 82% if the pace of growth recorded since 2013 continues.

Adult education

Adult education and training covers the longest time in a person's lifelong learning process. Adult education refers to people aged 25 to 65. It is essential for maintaining health, remaining active in the community and fully integrated into all aspects of society. At the same time, adult education determines improvement and development of skills, adaptability to innovation and novelty, and thus helps peoples to advance a career or return to the labour market.

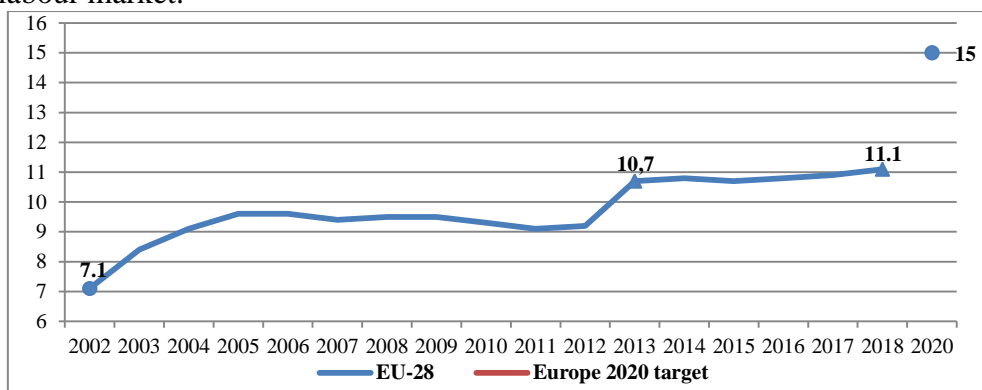


Figure 9. Adult participation in learning in EU-28 (2002–2018_
 (% of population aged 25 to 64)

Source: Author's elaboration on the basis of Eurostat (online data code: sdg_04_60)

Figure 9 shows adult participation in learning over the past few years has stagnated. The average annual growth rate between 2002 and 2018 amounts to 2.9%. The short-term growth between 2013 and 2017 amounts to just 0.5% per year on average, which is not fast enough to reach the target of 15% by 2020.

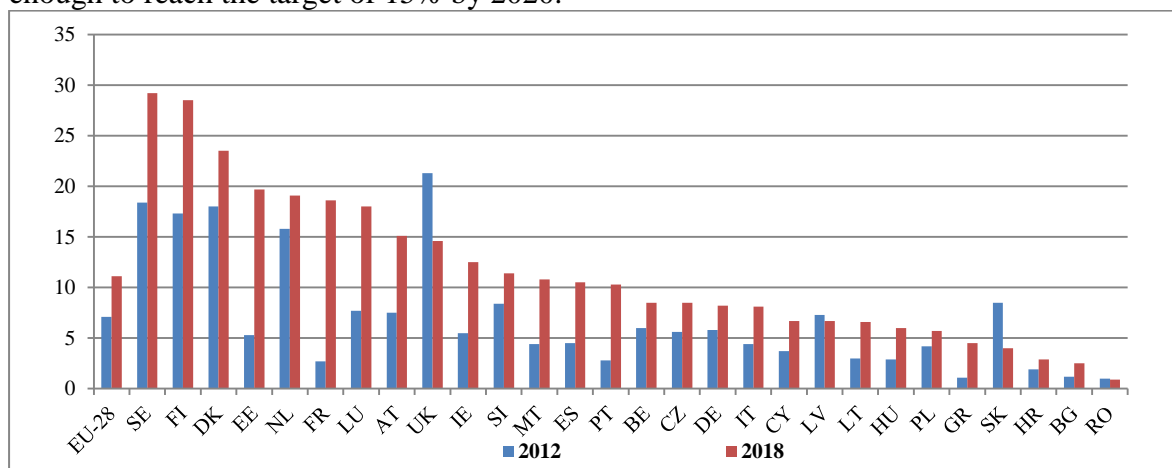


Figure 10. Adult participation in learning, by EU countries, 2012 and 2018 (% of population aged 25 to 64)

Source: Author's elaboration on the basis of Eurostat (online data code: *sdg_04_60*)

There are significant differences between countries in terms of adult participation in learning. In the first part there are the northern and the developed countries in the EU, and in the second part the central and eastern European countries, with Romania in the last position. The value of the indicator also reflects the degree of poverty [2] in those countries.

CONCLUSIONS

The literature enumerates many indicators applicable in the measurements of education and training and used for the purposes of identifying their impact on other areas, such as for instance the sustainable development.

Recent years have seen a deepening of reflection and debate on the universal right to a quality education that gives priority to children. To achieve this goal, education systems must improve in terms of access, resources, the quality of education processes, and, subsequently, of learning outcomes. In addition, it is necessary for education to be relevant and suited to the needs of receivers.

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