

RECOVERING BETTER, WITHOUT CUTTING OUR FUTURE!

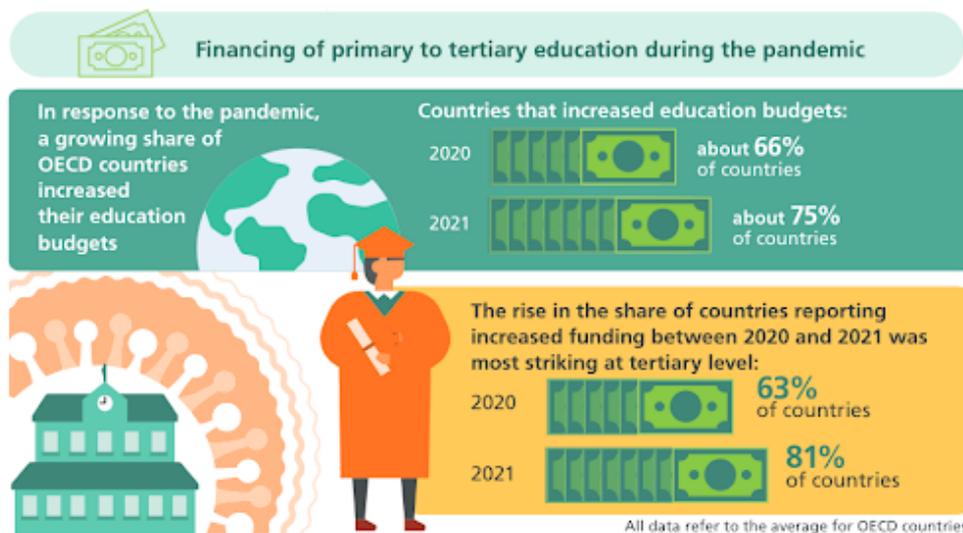
Our call for a global campaign for funding education
in the 2021 International Students' Day

Think globally, act ... globally!

November 17th, 2021, will be the second International Students' Day that students all around the world will celebrate in the 'era of the COVID-19 pandemic'. In these two years, the fragilities produced by the COVID-19 pandemic have to be added to the existing inequalities between national education systems and within the national contexts. **The Global Student Forum, the independent and democratic platform of school and university students globally, decided to celebrate this important day for the history of our movement with a transnational mobilisation on funding education.** This campaign builds on last year's campaign, focused on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on students all over the world, with a global online congress as well as a social media campaign: it was also the very first major initiative organised by the new-born Global Student Forum.

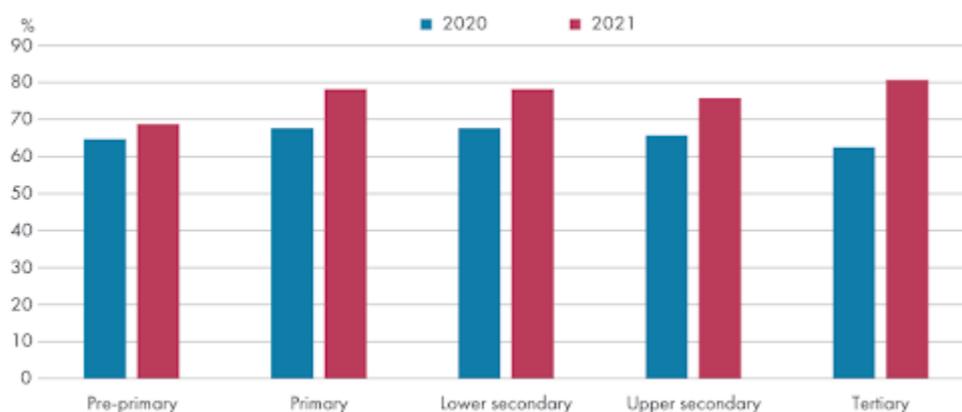
The pandemic exacerbated existing inequalities that disrupted education systems as we knew them. These common transnational trends have been underlined by evidence in the most recent OECD reports (such as [The state of global education. 18 months into the pandemic](#), 2021, or [Education at a Glance](#), 2021), in the Financial Times's special report [Invest in Education](#), in the [World Bank's Report on Education Crisis](#) in Latin America and the Caribbean, and in some findings of the Education International's research [The public versus austerity: Why public sector wage bill constraints must end.](#)

According to the OECD, "between 2012 and 2018, the proportion of government expenditure devoted to primary to tertiary education slightly decreased on average across OECD countries (1%)" and "increases in educational expenditure did not keep pace with the growth in government expenditure overall". In general, the international organisations noted a lack of long-term planning in funding education, even if, "during 2020, a large share of OECD countries have increased the budget devoted to education in order to respond to the impact of the pandemic". To answer the challenges of the pandemic, in fact, **some countries have prioritised higher education or funding highly-specialised research centers.**



For some lower-income countries **there was a disproportionate emphasis on the improvement of universal access to childhood education.** Furthermore, as noted by the ETUCE's reading of the OECD report, "despite public sources representing a share of 90% of education funding in OECD countries, private funding is steadily increasing." If the greater investments in education are leading to increased privatisation, they could have a disadvantageous effect on the universal access, in the tuition fees, in the idea of governing the educating communities.

Figure 9 • Share of countries reporting an increase to the education budget in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, by education level (2020 and 2021)



Source: OECD/UIS/UNESCO/UNICEF/WB (2021...).

Mobility restrictions and school closures due to the pandemic did not impact learners around the world evenly. The World Bank notes **the interruption in the education systems and economic challenges of lesser developed countries have led to an expansion of "learning poverty."**



In Latin America, “Learning poverty, defined as the percentage of 10-year-olds unable to read and understand a simple text, may have grown from 51% to 62.5%”: we’re talking about roughly 7.6 million additional ‘learning poor’ primary education school-age children.

In African situation, a survey conducted by EdTech and eLearning Africa in 2020 stated that “vocational sectors face added difficulties (as do some university students) of not having access to ‘practical’ work”, that “secondary school students may also have issues over access to laboratory work, but there is a more general issue of ‘completing the curriculum’, particularly for examination classes.” For this reason, **we must consider limited access to technology and to digital devices in regions.** “Survey results show that the large majority of educators have not received financial support for teaching and learning tools to help them continue teaching in the crisis, and do not feel there has been sufficient preparation to help them adapt”.

Even looking out to the plurality of the specific socio-economical, political, and institutional frame of reference, these common trends intertwine the tragical situation of the unequal distribution of vaccines: recalling the Declaration of Port-of-Spain issued after the global student summit ‘Vaccine Justice through Fairness, Trust, and Responsibility’, **“an unfair and uneven distribution of vaccines globally can worsen the immediate and long-term harms of the COVID-19 pandemic around the world”**. In fact, returns to school after the closing periods or the lockdowns have not been safe across the board: it is uneven in light of vaccine inequalities.

What’s the overarching aim of our campaign? We want students all around the world to use this opportunity to speak about *our* future during our International Students’ Day, advocating for free, inclusive and quality education for all. This purpose could be achieved not only by promoting students’ leading role in the public debate or in lobbying public authorities, but also by deepening intersectional campaigns with other social partners in the field of Education. **If the challenge for Education is transnational and if the goals could be common, then alliances must also be global!** For example, if UNESCO estimates that 69 million more teachers are needed over the next ten years to achieve the goal of universal access to primary and secondary education by 2030, advocating for this common goal could progress the global recovery after the pandemic.

What is the situation of fighting for better education funding?

But how are we fighting around the world for better education funding? In order to disseminate and make known the ongoing campaigns and the public positions of our umbrella organisations, we’ll try to offer a global stage to the most significant advocacy activities carried out.



The **All-Africa Students Union (AASU)** strongly bemoans the privatization and commercialization of education across the African Continent. The Union has always held that education must be and should remain a public good. AASU has also observed the consistent reduction of budgetary allocation to basic schools in African countries. Also, across Africa, there seems to be a certain interest by some governments to invest less in public education and delegate this very important and critical role to the private sector. If this dangerous phenomenon is not stopped, we will be widening the inequality gap because children from poorer families will be denied access to quality education. The Union has thus decided to strengthen its national campaigns to send strong signals to the law-makers in Africa that students of Africa are against the privatization and commercialization of education, and the continuous reduction of budgetary allocation to basic education.

On the 17 November, on the sidelines of the *#DontCutOurFuture* campaign, AASU will submit petitions to legislative organs in Africa and organize picketing events at key spaces to communicate our demands. In Ghana, AASU has partnered with the Coalition Against the Privatization and Commercialization of Education (CAPCOE), the National Union of Ghana Students, and Teachers and Workers Union to organize a picketing event at the Parliament House and some public schools, to communicate our displeasure with the current phenomenon of privatization of public basic schools and the under-funding of same. The Union will submit a petition to Parliament Select Committee on Education stating the Union's position on education privatization and a demand for the government to increase budgetary allocation to basic schools.

Quality education cannot happen without student representation at the highest levels of decision making and education planning. Representatives throughout the **Commonwealth Students Association (CSA)** have advocated for meaningful inclusion of students in decision-making. To do this, student governance structures, especially National Student Organisations, need to be recognised as the legitimate voice of students nationally. Even as we campaign for global and regional decisions on the sustainable funding of education, cuts happen at the national level. Therefore, the CSA is committed to enhancing the power of NSOs nationally. In November 2020, we hosted the Student Governance and Networking Forum of the Caribbean & Americas region to strengthen student activism during COVID-19 and defend quality education.

The **European Students' Union (ESU)** is advocating for an expenditure of 10% of the National Recovery and Resilience Plans (NRRPs) under the Next Generation EU to education; for an equitable access to physical mobility, especially for students from a disadvantaged background; for a development of the European Education Area and of the Bologna Process that puts students, the social dimension of Higher Education and robust public funding at the centre. Furthermore, ESU is working on highlighting the link between changes in the sources of funding of Higher Education (especially rising tuition fees and private funds) and increasing inequalities and commodification, and is going to work for better working conditions within university for teachers, students and staff.



The Organising Bureau of European School Student Unions (OBESSU) is monitoring the NRRPs within the framework of Next Generation EU at the level of funding policies on education, also trying to understand the centrality of the '*European Education Area by 2025*' in the EU Commission agenda. In alliance with ESU and other youth-led platforms, OBESSU is advocating for an expenditure of 10% of the Recovery and Resilience Facilities to education. OBESSU is also working with youth-led and other European Civil Society Organisations involved in the education sector on getting school students more involved in the monitoring of the implementation of the NRRPs. At the same time, after having published the research '*Through the School Students' Eyes*' on the impact and the challenges of Covid-19 on education systems in Europe, we have opened with the Lifelong Learning Platform and Mental Health Europe a joint commitment to material care and funding support for mental wellbeing in school settings.

The **Organización Continental Latinoamericana y Caribeña de Estudiantes (OCLAE)** is advocating for the expansion of public investment in education in the different countries of Latin America. The scenario in the region is uneven: while some countries invest 12% of their Gross Domestic Product in the sector, in others the investment reaches only 3%. This affects the quality of public education, opening space for private corporations that work in education, and depriving a large part of the youth of having access to quality education and better prospects. The continental campaign "Educación No Es Mercancía" is a way of action by student federations on the issue that has been extended over recent years and culminated in large street manifestations in defense of more investment.

With house prices averaging above \$900,000 (NZD), increased living costs, and the 2021 Government Budget providing minimal funding to the tertiary sector, the **New Zealand Union of Students' Associations (NZUSA)** in partnership with Te Mana Ākonga, Tauria Pasifika, and the National Disabled Students' Association, are campaigning for a Universal Education Income (UEI). A UEI aims to remove Student Allowance means-testing, minimise debt, and ensure students do not endure transient periods of poverty. This campaign follows the COVID-19 Action Plan 2021, where 48 students' associations signed for increased financial aid for the tertiary sector. It coincides with several national campaigns to minimise financial impacts on students: cancelling transportation fees; eliminating precarious academic labour for postgraduates; and increasing funding for doctoral stipends (which are often below minimum wage). This is occurring alongside increased student consultation on tertiary provider contracts with third parties, and the national Reform of Vocational Education for industry training.



Nothing about us, without us!

The Global Student Forum and its regional partners will launch a transnational campaign on International Students Day, a day marked by the heroic but also tragic history of the students' struggles. **We hope the COVID-19 pandemic has taught governments, public decision-makers, major private actors and social stakeholders a valuable lesson: from the crisis we come out together, with massive investments in the social agenda, in equality, in education.**

We advocate for investment and consistent political responsibilities, all around of the world, with a common global platform:

- **long-term economic planning with meaningful investments in Education;**
- **schools financing including basic needs infrastructure, particularly around sanitation and hygiene, in eco-sustainable buildings;**
- **developing of educational settings to accommodate face-to-face learning while the COVID-19 pandemic persists, improving at the same time sustainable, equitable, and ethical digital platforms;**
- **addressing the unequal gendered power relations as a result of the COVID-related school closures;**
- **investing in ensuring students' mental health, providing concrete tools on wellbeing;**
- **setting a real involvement of students' unions in decision-making process for education planning at local, national and global levels, in order to ensure participation, transparency and accountability;**
- **stopping pursuing austerity policies, rather setting ambitious targets for progressive tax reforms, using progressive taxes, especially on wealth and corporations, in order to ensure major public investments on Education, implementing alternative macroeconomic policies.**

#DontCutOurFuture ✂

