



BRUSSELS

YOUTH. DIPLOMACY. UNITED NATIONS.



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WHAT ?

- 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development Goals
- 17 Sustainable Development Goals
- Unanimously adopted in 2015

WHAT ?

SDG 4



**Ensure inclusive and
equitable quality education
and promote lifelong
learning opportunities for all**

SDG 4: Quality education

10 targets, mostly by 2030

Outcome targets

4.1 Primary and secondary

Free, equitable, quality

4.2 Early childhood

Care and pre-primary access

4.3 Technical, vocational, tertiary

Affordable access for all

4.4 Skills for employment

Technical and entrepreneurial skills

4.5 Equity and inclusion

End gender and group disparities

4.6 Youth and adult literacy

Universal literacy and numeracy

4.7 Education for sustainability

Global citizenship, human rights

Means of implementation

4.a Education facilities

Safe, inclusive schools

4.b Scholarships

For developing countries

4.c Qualified teachers

More trained teachers

Source: <https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal4>

WHY?

- Education as a cornerstone for sustainable societies ;
→ shaping values that are supportive of sustainable development
- Not independent from other SDG's; it is actually a **driver** to achieve all the other goals

SDG's Intertwined

Economic Growth & Innovation (Eurostat, 2026)

Gender Equality (Vladimirova & Le Blanc, 2015)

Driving people out of poverty ; employment, decent jobs and entrepreneurship (Eurostat, 2026)

Sharing values leading to peace, prosperity and democracy (GPE Secretariat, 2015)

BUT...

SDG Report 2026 - Improvements, but not quite yet there...

More children are completing school, but access and learning outcomes lag behind. Global completion rates have risen across all levels of education since 2015, yet 273 million children and young people remain out of school and proficiency levels in reading and mathematics are alarmingly low.

- Global completion rates increased between 2015 and 2024:
 - Primary: 85% → 88%
 - Lower secondary: 75% → 78%
 - Upper secondary: 53% → 61%
- Yet 273 million children and young people remain out of school (16.8% globally).

BUT...

SDG Report 2026 - Improvements, but not quite yet there...

Technological advancement is outpacing the digital skills needed to navigate it. Internet access is expanding rapidly, but many people still lack essential competencies in areas like online safety and digital content creation, limiting their ability to participate fully in an increasingly digital world.

- **Key priority**: strengthen digital literacy and critical thinking to promote safe, inclusive participation in the digital economy, especially as AI transforms education and work.

BUT...

SDG Report 2026 - Improvements, but not quite yet there...

School infrastructure is improving, but disparities by gender, wealth and location remain wide. Poorer, rural and marginalized populations face persistent disadvantages, and many schools – particularly in LDCs – still lack electricity, sanitation, Internet access and disability-adapted infrastructure.

- Poorer children are increasingly left behind at higher education levels
- School infrastructure is improving, but one in five primary schools still lacks electricity or clean water

SDG Report 2026 - Improvements, but not quite yet there...

Teacher Qualifications remain a challenge

- In 2024, around 1 in 5 teachers worldwide lacked the minimum required qualifications.
- Qualified primary teachers increased from 80% (2015) to 82% (2024), while secondary teacher qualification levels declined slightly.
- In sub-Saharan Africa, 30–40% of teachers lack minimum qualifications.
- Key barriers include insufficient training capacity, growing student populations, difficult working conditions and limited public investment.
- **Key priority**: invest in teacher training, professional development and retention to improve learning outcomes.

SDG Report 2026 - Improvements, but not quite yet there...

Learning outcomes are low and have declined in richer countries

The global learning crisis

- Low learning outcomes: In 2019, only 58% of primary-school children achieved minimum reading proficiency and 44% achieved minimum mathematics proficiency.
- Declining proficiency (2012–2022): Across 57 mostly middle- and high-income countries:
 - Reading: 59% → 47%
 - Mathematics: 41% → 36%
- The learning crisis predates COVID-19 and reflects systemic weaknesses in education quality.
- **Key priority**: invest in teaching quality and provide targeted support for struggling learners.

SDG Report 2026 - Improvements, but not quite yet there...

**Ensuring every child has access to quality education
will require stronger investments in equitable,
resilient and inclusive education systems**

“The direction we choose now will determine whether the progress of the past decade holds – or unravels.”

António Guterres, Secretary-General, United Nations



The Brussels Times

Women dominate EU university graduations, but ICT sees striking gender divide

Wednesday, 12 August 2026

By The Brussels Times Newsroom

Forbes

LEADERSHIP > EDUCATION

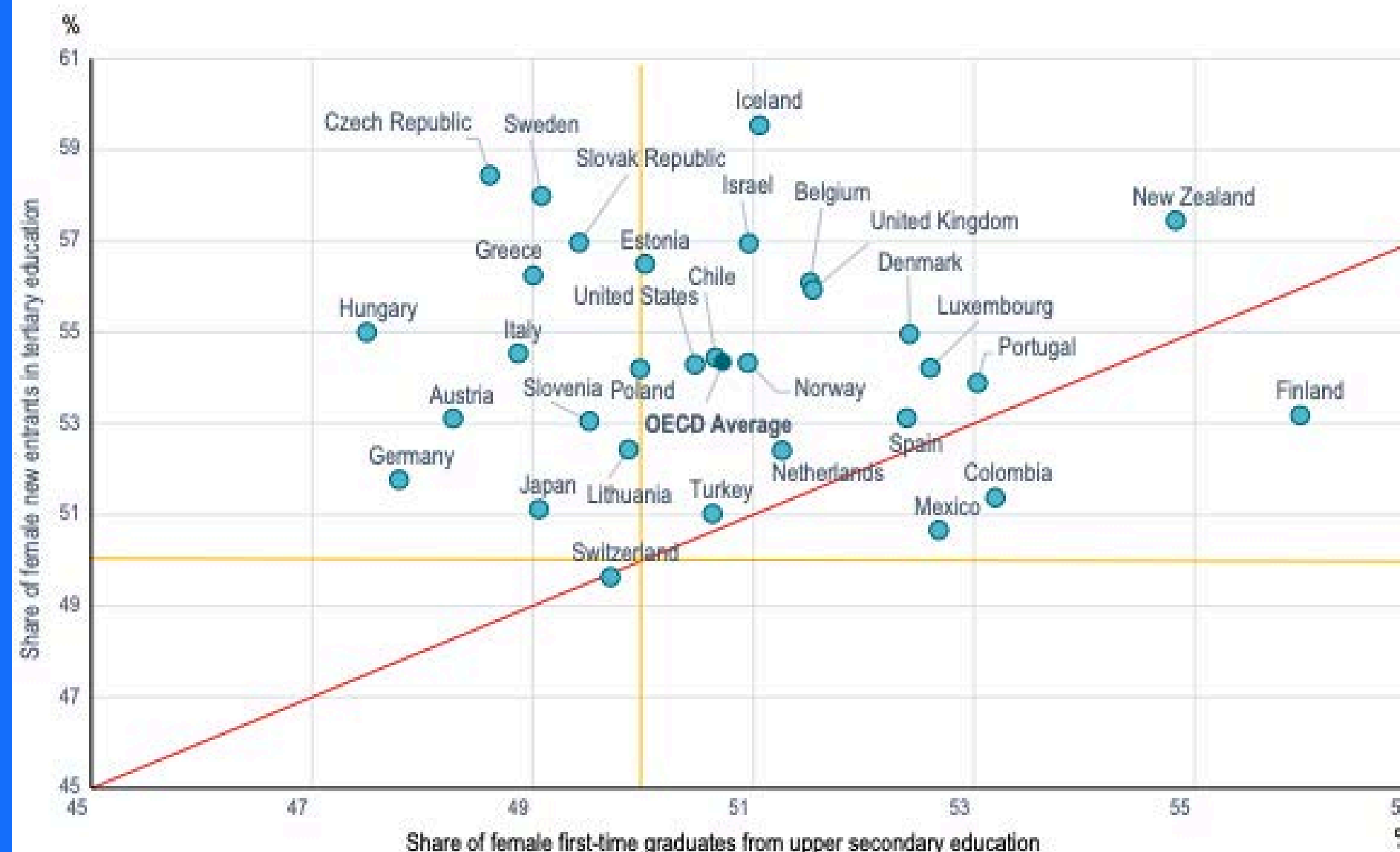
Women Continue To Outpace Men In College Enrollment And Graduation

By Michael T. Nietzel, Senior Contributor. © Michael Nietzel, former college pr...

Follow Author

Published Aug 07, 2024, 06:00am EDT

Figure 1. Share of women among first-time upper secondary graduates and new tertiary entrants (2018)



Source: OECD (2020_[1]), *Education at a Glance 2020: OECD Indicators*, <https://doi.org/10.1787/69096873-en>.

Theory Applied

Gender equality: who is being left behind?

In many Western countries, women now outnumber men among graduates, so the gender gap in education is increasingly running the other way. Where does this leave gender equality in education: should the goal shift from access for girls to equal outcomes for both boys and girls?

'We are terrified but we want to get an education', say Yemeni schoolgirls

For many children in Yemen, their education is taking place in the shadow of a vicious civil war between forces supporting Yemen's internationally recognised government, which is backed by Saudi Arabia, and the Iran-backed Houthis.

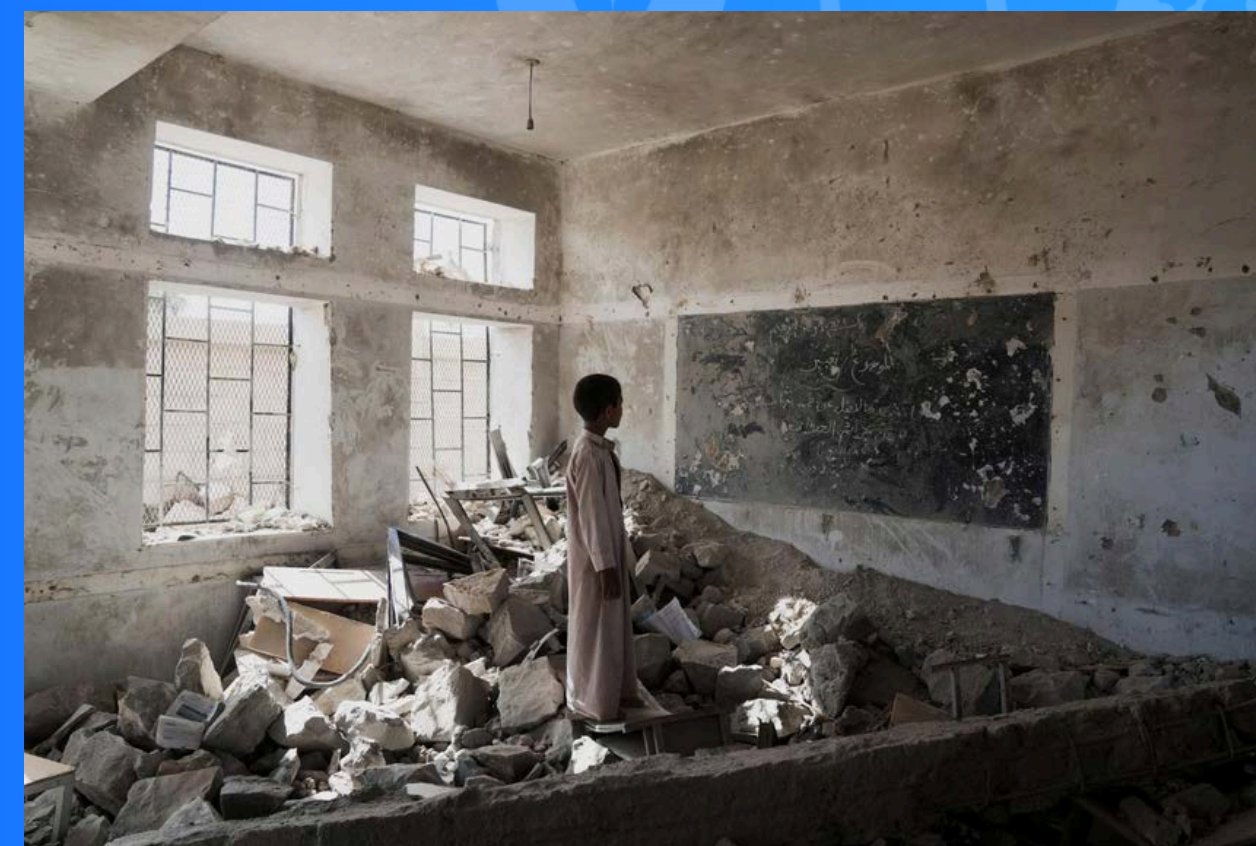
The conflict has made attending school a challenge for many, and according to Unicef, around 3.2 million children in Yemen were out of school even before the war escalated last month.

Reporting from a school in Taiz, south-western Yemen, the BBC heard from children who are determined to keep learning despite the fighting.



Back to school in Gaza: Learning in tents after years of disruption

After nearly three years of disruption, children return to school in Gaza in makeshift spaces with scarce resources.



Theory Applied

War and education: can SDG 4 still be reached?

Conflicts such as in Gaza and Iran are destroying schools and keeping children out of classrooms. Can SDG 4 be achieved where education itself is under attack, and what is the international community doing to protect schools and children's right to learn in these conflicts?

De Standaard

Raad van State zeer kritisch over voorstel van Demir voor besparing op studietoelagen

Leidt de besparing op studietoelagen tot ongelijke kansen tussen studenten? De Raad van State is in zijn advies bijzonder kritisch voor het plan van minister van Onderwijs Zuhair Demir (N-VA) om de voorwaarden te verstrengen. Meer dan 20.000 studenten dreigen daardoor hun studietoelage te verliezen.



CASE #3

LE SOIR

Enseignement : le vote final du décret prévu ce jeudi, l'opposition dénonce un délai illégal

Le décret-programme de la majorité MR-Engagés a franchi une nouvelle étape. Les ultimes discussions pour l'adoption définitive sont programmées ces mercredi et jeudi malgré un flou juridique certain. Alors que le PS et Ecolo réclament la démission du président du parlement, les écoles tentent d'organiser la fin d'année.

Theory Applied

Education policy in Belgium: what future for our schools?

Belgian education ministers have reportedly gone against the Council of State's advice on the principle of equality, while cuts hit welfare and research funding. What do these choices mean for the future of education in Belgium, and for equal access and quality, the core of SDG 4?

DeMorgen.



Drie op de tien leerkrachten hebben niet het juiste diploma

vr̃ nws

Meer dan 3.700 voltijdse leerkrachten te kort in Nederlandstalig onderwijs: "Leraren moeten doen wat ze het best kunnen: lesgeven"

Het Nieuwsblad

Provincie Oost-Vlaanderen ontslaat leerkracht die hoofddoek weigert af te zetten: "Alles wat ik heb opgebouwd, is nu ineens weg"

Theory Applied

Teacher shortages in Belgium: what can be done?

Belgian schools struggle to find and keep enough and qualified teachers. What would make the profession more attractive and sustainable, and how much public investment does that require? And how does the debate over the expression of religion in schools, such as the headscarf question, affect teachers and pupils and the inclusive school SDG 4 aims for?

Forbes

Soft Skills: The Most Critical Skills To Teach In The Age Of AI

By [Diane Bartoli](#), Former Forbes Councils Member.

for [Forbes Business Council](#), COUNCIL POST | Membership (fee-based)

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The Importance of Soft Skills in Today's Workplace: What Employers Really Value



University of Applied
Sciences Europe
—
Amsterdam

In today's fast-moving, highly connected world, the importance of soft skills matters more than ever. Technical knowledge and qualifications (hard skills) are still essential, but employers increasingly want people who can communicate well, adapt quickly, work confidently with others, and think things through.

These behavioural, everyday abilities often shape the difference between someone who can do the job and someone who genuinely excels in it.

In this blog, we take a closer look at the question: 'What are soft skills?', as well as how they differ from hard skills, why employers place so much value on them, and how you can build these skills to support long-term career growth.

Theory Applied

Soft skills in education: the role of non-formal learning

Schools focus on knowledge, but skills such as communication, critical thinking, collaboration and intercultural understanding matter just as much for life and work. What role can youth organisations like UNYA Flanders and Brussels play in building these skills alongside formal education, and how can schools and such organisations work together?

CASE #5

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