The 17 Sustainable Development Goals — also known as the SDGs or the Global Goals — came into effect on January 1, 2016 following an historic United Nations Summit in September 2015. 193 governments from around the world agreed to implement the Goals within their own countries in order to achieve the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Over the next fifteen years, with these new Goals that universally apply to all, countries will mobilize efforts to end all forms of poverty, fight inequalities and tackle climate change, while ensuring that no one is left behind.

These new, interconnected goals build on the successes of the Millennium Development Goals, or MDGs, while also identifying new priority areas such as climate change, economic inequality, innovation, sustainable consumption, peace and justice, among others.

Although each country faces specific challenges in pursuit of sustainable development, special attention is given to the most vulnerable countries, in particular, African countries, less developed countries, landlocked countries and small island developing states. There are also serious challenges within many middle-income countries.

For each of the 17 goals, there is a list of specific targets we aim to reach. The targets discussed in this guide have been summarized for ease of reading. For a more detailed list of all the 169 targets, visit GlobalGoals.org.
ENSURE INCLUSIVE AND EQUITABLE QUALITY EDUCATION AND PROMOTE LIFELONG LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES FOR ALL

In many parts of the world, women, people with disabilities, Indigenous People and victims of conflict do not have access to quality education. This goal aims to ensure everyone has access to basic education so we can understand the world around us, critically reflect on what we see, do and hear and make informed choices about our health and well-being. This goal also aims to improve school facilities, increase the number of training and vocational opportunities for people and increase the number of trained teachers available to provide a safe and positive learning environment.

TARGETS

- By 2030, Goal 4 intends to provide early childhood, primary and secondary education for all.
- For adults, the goal is improvements to technical, vocational and job skills education, including university.
- Eliminate gender disparities and ensure equal access for vulnerable populations.
- Ensure all youth and a substantial amount of adults achieve literacy and numeracy.
- Promote global citizenship topics in all subjects including sustainable development, sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality and peace through education.
- Build and upgrade education facilities that are safe, inclusive, non-violent and effective learning environments.
- Increase the number of qualified teachers through training and education investment.

“A well-educated mind will always have more questions than answers.”

Helen Keller
American author, activist
1 Where did it begin?

- The right to education is written in international law, in Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Learning can be **formal** (in an institution delivered by trained teachers) or **informal** (occurring outside of a school setting, cultivating learning through conversation and experience).

- Education is a fundamental **human right** and is essential to understanding all other human rights. Being able to learn about the world around you promotes freedom, empowerment and understanding.

- However, more than 59 million children of elementary school-age are being denied the right to education. Sub-Saharan Africa accounts for more than half of all children worldwide out of school, 55 per cent of whom are girls.¹

- The problem is that many millions of children and adults do not have access to education. The biggest reason people are deprived of education is **poverty**, in addition to **gender**, conflict, isolated populations, ethnicity and disability.

2 Why does this issue matter?

- **Education is the key**
  Education unlocks the potential for many other **SDGs** to be achieved. When people are able to access quality education, they are able to begin breaking the **cycle of poverty**, learn about sustainable living, make healthy choices and inform themselves and their communities about important issues.

- **Education promotes gender equality**
  Education has the potential to significantly improve the well-being of women and girls. Having access to education can help girls and women increase their income, narrow wage gaps in and promote economic independence. When women are educated and have surplus income these increased resources also benefit their families and communities.

- **Education promotes environmentalism and sustainable development**
  Environmental education can help give individuals the skills needed to make changes to policies and practices in their community. Future farmers who pursue secondary education will have a strong foundation for implementing **sustainable agriculture**. It is also important to teach **sustainable development** topics like environmental protection, sustainable agriculture, human rights, **gender equality**, peace and **global citizenship** to get people talking and doing something about our present and future.
Who and what are affected?

- **Girls**
  Within education systems, women and girls continue to be discriminated against due to various political, religious, cultural and social beliefs and principles. Two-thirds of illiterate adults are women, and out of 59 million children out of school worldwide, more than half are girls.

- **Migrants, refugees and internally displaced people**
  People who are away from their home regions or countries often have difficulty exercising their right to education. Currently, 91,000 Syrian children registered with the UN High Commissioner for Refugees remain without access to formal education. In addition to the Syrian Civil War, there are millions of migrant, refugee and internally displaced children who lack access to education. Poor infrastructure, inadequate resources and a lack of trained teachers are common limitations in refugee camps. It is often difficult to find education in their mother tongue while displaced or away from their home regions.

- **Persons with disabilities**
  An estimated 93 million children live with a moderate or severe disability. In many countries in the Global South, disabled children are the most likely to be out of school compared to any other group. States are obligated to ensure that people with disabilities are not excluded from the general education system because of their disability, yet accessibility to buildings and the education system remains a barrier.

- **Persons in detention**
  Detention can include people who have committed a criminal offence, people awaiting trial, illegal migrants, persons in health centres and detained children. People in detention are often denied their right to education before and during their incarceration. Education can also play a key role in their rehabilitation and reintegration into society.
What needs to be done?

- Ensuring schools are safe and violence-free will help reduce the likelihood of girls dropping out. It also helps protect their right to learn without fear. Employing adequate teachers and helping them improve their skills through training can have strong impacts in the quality of education for girls. Focusing on the needs of the student and engaging the community helps involve diverse stakeholders to support high quality education for girls.

- To achieve this goal, we need to improve the quality of education and the number of children in schools. Some countries have done this by eliminating school fees, providing food at school, educating parents and improving resources and training for teachers. Enrollment increased by 51 per cent in Malawi after school fees were abolished. Actions like these can help improve the quality of education and encourage enrollment, reducing barriers and allowing children and adults to access education.

- Physical accessibility, sanitation and learning materials need to be provided in formats that suit the needs of learners with different abilities, in order to improve education for disabled learners. Inclusive education is continuously evolving and teachers should be trained to encourage lessons that are inclusive, learner-centred and empowering.

“Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world.”

Nelson Mandela
South African anti-apartheid politician
Investing in education is one of the greatest ways to break the cycle of poverty. When people have basic life and literacy skills, economies grow quickly and poverty rates decline. Strengthening the quality of education services and access is a huge step forward for poverty reduction.

For each additional year of school completed, a girl’s wage can increase up to 25 per cent. An investment in girls’ education is an investment in the community by enabling more opportunities to involve diverse stakeholders and contributors to growth and development. Eliminating barriers to education is a mission of gender equality.

Improving the quality of education needs to include education about sustainability and our environment. Engaging students to think critically about the world around us and how our practices and policies have an impact on the environment will help sustain the momentum for change.
Consequences of Inaction

- Without access to a full education, girls’ ability to learn essential life skills, learn about health and hygiene, avoid unwanted pregnancy and improve their income is deeply impacted. By not achieving equal access to education for all children, regardless of their gender, we are denying them a fundamental human right.

- When we don’t include aspects of environmentalism and sustainable development in education models and systems, we miss the opportunity to educate future generations on the important issues of our time. Our ability to pass on important knowledge to improve how we engage with our environment and resources is then limited, hindering future generations.

Reflection and Action Questions

1. How do you feel about the issue now that you know more about it?

2. How might this issue have been prevented? What could have been done differently?

3. How has this problem changed over time? Where do you see it going in the future?

4. What questions do you still have?

“One child, one teacher, one book and one pen can change the world.”

Malala Yousafzai
Pakistani education advocate