Reaffirming education as a strategic priority in European Union's External Action

Excellency,

Ahead of the forthcoming Foreign Affairs Council on Development, which will be held on the 18 May, we, representatives of civil society organisations, United Nations agencies and global education partners, call on European Union's (EU) Development Ministers to reaffirm access to inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all, as a strategic priority of EU external action and ensure that education remains adequately financed within the future Global Europe Instrument (GEI).

Education is a strategic investment for the European Union. Education strengthens resilience, economic productivity, social cohesion and long-term stability, while helping partner countries withstand shocks and reduce fragility. Investing in education advances the EU's values of equity, inclusion and sustainability. It also serves the EU's political priorities and long-term strategic interests. Today, partner countries face shrinking fiscal space, rising debt and multiple crises. These challenges disproportionately affect the most marginalised groups, including girls, children with disabilities and learners from displaced and host communities. In this context, sustained investment in inclusive education systems is essential to protect human capital and support long-term self-reliance, economic growth, peace and stability. Addressing the global learning crisis, where a majority of children are unable to acquire basic skills, must remain a core priority.

Recent EU evidence confirms the strategic value of education. The independent evaluation of EU support to education (2014–2024)[1], commissioned by DG International Partnerships, finds that the EU is widely seen as a trusted and consistent education partner. The evaluation appreciates the EU's strong alignment with partner-country priorities and its focus on system strengthening. It clearly recommends maintaining a high level of financial commitment to education and skills in the next EU Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) and calls for continued EU leadership on education financing. The evaluation also highlights the importance of the EU's long-term contributions to global pooled funds, notably the Global Partnership for Education (GPE) and Education Cannot Wait (ECW).

[1] Evaluation of the EU's support to partner countries in the education sector (2014-2024), European Union, 2026

EU institutional positions are aligned with this evidence. In Resolution 2023/2067[2], the European Parliament called on the European Commission to allocate at least 10% of current and future EU development policy budgets to education. More recently, a parliamentary report on the Global Gateway[3] underlined that higher investment in education generates strong economic and social returns and is essential to maximise the long-term impact and sustainability of infrastructure and connectivity investments. Infrastructure, digital and green transitions cannot succeed without healthy, educated and protected populations. At the same time, it noted that education and research currently account for less than 10% of Global Gateway flagship projects.

As negotiations on the next EU MFF and the GEI move forward, we therefore call on EU Development Ministers to:

- **Protect inclusive education and lifelong learning for all,** starting from the early years, as a strategic and macro-critical investment as part of an ambitious spending benchmark of at least 20% for human development within the GEI.
- **Improve delivery by ensuring structured engagement** with governments, local authorities, civil society – including local civil society and expert organisations-, and continued investment in proven multilateral mechanisms including GPE and ECW, supporting country-led reforms and sustainable financing for inclusive education through a twin-track approach that strengthens systems and reaches the most marginalised learners.
- **Fully integrate education into EU development finance and investment frameworks**, including by strengthening its place within Global Gateway, so that investment in human development complements infrastructure and delivers lasting impact.
- **Ensure partnerships with private sector actors meet clear safeguards and ethical standards**, protecting and promoting inclusive public systems and services, equity, quality and human rights including children's rights.

These commitments should be reflected in the Global Europe Instrument Regulation itself in order to provide predictability, accountability and long-term strategic coherence.

Please accept, Excellency, the assurances of our highest consideration.

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[2] European Parliament resolution of 13 December 2023 on EU development cooperation to enhance access to education and training in developing countries (2023/2067(INI))

[3] European Parliament resolution of 26 March 2026 on Global Gateway -– past impacts and future orientation (2025/2073(INI))