

# Learning Out Loud.

Atlas on Child-Centred  
and Transformative Education  
through the CARES Framework



**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**



# Executive Summary

For millions of children, education remains an unfulfilled right. In 2024, UNESCO estimated that **251 million children were still out of school**, highlighting the persistent barriers posed by poverty, conflict, climate disasters, disability, and gender inequality. Even where education is available, it often fails to be truly meaningful. But education must go beyond attendance: it should be transformative, nurturing not only cognitive skills but also emotional and social competencies that empower children to understand themselves, connect with others, and shape their world. We advocate for an education that supports the holistic development of every child and contributes to inclusive, peaceful societies.

Central to this vision is **recognising children as active participants in their learning**. WeWorld promotes participatory school environments that value children's voices, challenge adult-centric norms, and foster intergenerational dialogue and democratic engagement. In a world facing climate emergencies and growing inequalities, education must prepare younger generations to respond to these challenges. Inclusive and transformative learning is key to building sustainable and just futures – a commitment to intergenerational justice and a more equitable world for all.

## A READER'S GUIDE TO THE ATLAS

The Education Atlas – the fourth in WeWorld's series following previous editions on sexual and reproductive justice, WASH (Water, Sanitation and Hygiene), and women's and girls' rights – is more than a collection of statistics. It offers a global snapshot of the state of education, drawing on key indicators from trusted secondary sources and presenting them through accessible visual formats: maps, graphs, infographics, and tables.

But the Atlas goes beyond data. It seeks to challenge the status quo and contribute to meaningful change. Alongside analysis, it shares **insights, field experiences, and concrete proposals** shaped by more than 50 years of work in over 20 countries. It highlights not only the barriers to education, but also the practical solutions we are co-creating in diverse and often complex settings, from fragile contexts and emergencies to areas marked by entrenched inequalities.

This Atlas is designed to inform, raise awareness, and inspire action, and must serve as our guiding compass for building more equitable, inclusive, and resilient education systems. Above all, it reaffirms our shared commitment to the **right to education**, a right that unlocks dignity, protection, and opportunities. Because every child, everywhere, deserves an education that expands horizons and builds futures.



Mirko Cecchi/WeWorld

# WEWORLD'S CARES FRAMEWORK ABOUT CHILD-CENTRED EDUCATION

The first chapter of the Atlas serves as a legend for our CARES Framework, a model that describes our child-centred approach to education - placing the rights, experiences, and perspectives of children at the heart of educational action, challenging the adult-centric dynamics still prevalent in many education systems. Rather than viewing children merely as project recipients, this approach recognises them as active participants capable of shaping and contributing meaningfully to the educational paths that affect their lives. The goal is to design truly *child-friendly* interventions built with them, in the environments where they live and grow.

Our CARES Framework about Child-Centred Education is structured around five key dimensions:

- 1. COMMUNITY** – Engaging Communities in Promoting Children's Agency
- 2. ACCESS** – Unlocking Access to Inclusive, Quality Learning
- 3. RIGHTS** – Advancing and Protecting Children's Rights
- 4. EXPRESSION** – Amplifying Children's Voices and Perspectives
- 5. SAFETY** – Safeguarding Children's Protection and Well-Being through Education

Three of these dimensions – Access, Community, and Safety – represent the **strategic goals** guiding our interventions:

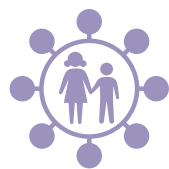
- to guarantee inclusive and quality education for all,
- to strengthen education systems and communities through active engagement,
- and to protect children through targeted, education-based interventions.

The remaining two dimensions – Rights and Expression – serve as **cross-cutting enablers** applied throughout all of our programmes and areas of work. Recognising children as rights holders and amplifying their voices are fundamental principles that inform the co-creation of educational pathways that are participatory and transformative.

At the heart of the Education Atlas are the country factsheets, which combine **insights from trusted global sources and data from our MEAL Department with WeWorld's own experience on the ground**, offering a deep dive into our long-term, programmatic approach to education in 13 countries where we work: Brazil, Cambodia, Moldova, Ukraine, Italy, Benin, Mali, Palestine, Syria, Lebanon, Tanzania, Kenya and Mozambique.



Mirko Cecchi/WeWorld



## 1. COMMUNITY

### Engaging Communities in Promoting Children's Agency

- ◆ In many communities, traditional norms prioritise boys' schooling while girls are expected to stay home, marry early, or take on caregiving responsibilities (World Bank, 2024).
- ◆ In many communities, discriminatory beliefs persist that children with disabilities are unable to learn or that investing in their education is not worthwhile (Humanity & Inclusion, 2025).
- ◆ **Community involvement is a key pillar of education systems strengthening**, as it ensures that reforms are grounded in local realities and supported by those directly affected by them
- ◆ In 2024, only 30.2% of the required education funding was secured, and so far in 2025 just 10.1% has been covered (OCHA, 2025).

Educational communities are the foundation of a strong education system. They include not only school principals, teachers and other education personnel, but also families, local leaders, civil society, and children themselves. When these groups work together, **education becomes a shared responsibility and a driver of social change – not just a service for children, but a public good that benefits all**. Our interventions show promising results where **community-led school governance** has improved accountability and inclusion, **parental engagement** has enhanced learning and protection when adapted to local contexts, and **community mobilisation** has promoted inclusive education while challenging harmful social norms. However, there are some areas that still signal the need for improvement. **Male participation** in education and child protection remains limited, **inclusive outreach** to marginalised groups must be strengthened, and **community-led monitoring** requires sustained, long-term investment to be effective. Addressing these gaps is essential to ensure that all members of the educational community can contribute meaningfully and equitably.



## 2. ACCESS

### Unlocking Access to Inclusive, Quality Learning

- ◆ In 2023, **447 million children lacked a basic drinking water service at school, while 646 lacked a basic hygiene service** (WHO/UNICEF, 2024).
- ◆ **Menstruation continues to have a significant impact on girls' and female teachers' access to and participation in education** around the world: a lack of gender-separated toilets and menstrual hygiene support often prevents them from attending school regularly.
- ◆ In many cases, children are expected to help support their households, making it harder to attend school regularly. **Economic insecurity leads families to turn to coping mechanisms such as early marriage or child labour as a means of financial relief**.
- ◆ **44 million more primary and secondary educators are needed** to meet global education goals by 2030 (UNESCO, 2024a).

Around the world, **millions of children still struggle to access quality education**. The obstacles they face are many, and they are not the same everywhere. Whether it is poverty, conflict, discrimination, disability, or a lack of resources, these barriers can make it incredibly hard for children to get to school, stay there, and learn in a way that helps them grow. Our interventions have shown that targeted support can make a real difference. **Programmes focused on academic recovery and retention** have helped children catch up and stay in school, while **child-friendly reconstruction efforts** have improved safety and attendance in learning environments affected by crisis or displacement. **Investments in teacher training** have also contributed to the delivery of more inclusive and higher-quality education. At the same time, **persistent structural barriers** continue to limit access and quality, especially for the most marginalised. These include systemic inequalities, under-resourced schools, and discriminatory practices that exclude children based on gender, disability, or social status. Addressing these challenges requires not only programmatic innovation, but also sustained advocacy and policy change to ensure that every child has a fair chance to access quality learning.



## 3. RIGHTS

### Advancing and Protecting Children's Rights

- ◆ **The level of happiness correlates positively with school attendance**, indicating that children who attend school regularly tend to be happier, as it provides a stable and structured environment for learning, developing essential life skills and forming positive relationships with peers and teachers (Gómez-Baya et al., 2021).
- ◆ **Education is one of the most powerful tools for enabling children to understand, claim, and exercise their rights**.
- ◆ **In 2023, serious violations of children's rights increased by 21% due to ongoing global conflicts** (Scottish Alliance for Children's Rights, 2024).
- ◆ According to research, with regards to rights' perception, **46% of 8-year-old children claim to know about their rights, a lower percentage than for older children aged 10 and 12 – 58% said they understand what their rights are** (Jacobs Foundation, 2016).

In a world designed for adults, promoting and enacting child-centred policies and interventions remains a significant challenge. **Children are often not fully aware of their rights and potential**, and when their agency is not recognised, power imbalances are reinforced, limiting their ability to exercise their rights and impacting their self-perception and confidence. In many contexts where we work, efforts to make rights tangible and meaningful have been most effective when rooted in **play-based and interactive methodologies**. These approaches have created **safe spaces for children to explore sensitive issues**, express themselves freely, and engage critically with their surroundings. **Creative tools and inclusive activities** have helped amplify children's voices, while **youth-led initiatives** have fostered civic engagement and a deeper understanding of social justice. In classrooms, **teacher training** has begun to shift practices toward **more inclusive and rights-focused approaches**. Yet, building a strong and lasting understanding of rights among children requires **continued attention**. The capacity of teachers to embed rights-based education consistently, and the **role of communities in advocating for these principles**, still need to be strengthened. Without this, the transformative potential of rights-based education risks being diluted.



## 4. EXPRESSION

### Amplifying Children's Voices and Perspectives

- ◆ When students are meaningfully involved in school decision-making, they develop key civic skills, greater self-esteem, stronger motivation and a more positive atmosphere (Council of Europe, 2024; Voight & Nation, 2016).
- ◆ **Adults' attitudes represent a significant barrier to child participation, with many adults underestimating children's capacity** (Froden et al., 2020; Kilic et al., 2018).
- ◆ According to a European survey, **2 out of 3 children** (of 19,933 respondents) **in Europe reported being unhappy with the way their local decision makers in cities and towns engage with them** (UNICEF & Eurochild, 2019).
- ◆ **There are significant variations between and within regions in terms of youth participation**.

Recognising children and youth as agents of change requires affording them opportunities to participate in decision-making processes across various levels. Adults play a crucial role in this by creating spaces for children to voice their opinions, thereby enhancing their capacity to contribute to society. When children are given the chance to lead and express themselves, they demonstrate remarkable capacity for advocacy, leadership, and civic engagement. **Child-led governance and youth-driven initiatives** have shown how participation fosters ownership and strengthens community ties. In peacebuilding contexts, youth-led actions have created **meaningful platforms for dialogue and inclusion**, reinforcing the idea that children are not just recipients of education, but active contributors to it. However, meaningful participation is still hindered by **social and structural barriers**. **Adulthood** continues to limit children's agency, and participation mechanisms are often underdeveloped or absent in policy and system design. **Ensuring that children are involved not only in planning, but also in the implementation, monitoring, and evaluation** of projects, remains a critical challenge. **Embedding participation as a standard practice**, rather than an exception or a form of tokenism, is essential to building inclusive and responsive education systems.





## 5. SAFETY

### Safeguarding Children's Protection and Well-Being through Education

- While **schools** are meant to be safe spaces for learning and development, they **can also be sites of serious risk** – exposing children to bullying, corporal punishment, sexual violence, or psychological harm (Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action, 2021).
- Between 2022 and 2023, there were nearly **6,000 reported attacks targeting students, educators, schools, and universities** (GCPEA, 2024).
- Globally, **793 million school-age children live in countries where corporal punishment in school is not fully prohibited** (End Corporal Punishment, 2023).
- Around the world, girls and children with disabilities face a continuum of violence – at school, on their way to and from school, and even at home or in their communities – that undermines their right to education.

Schools and learning environments should be spaces where children grow, play, and thrive. Inclusively built and managed schools and learning environments provide structure, protection, and opportunities for physical, emotional, and social development through a balance of learning, play, and connection. Achieving this requires a comprehensive understanding of safety. Across our interventions, **integrating child protection into school systems** has proven essential for **improving children's well-being and fostering inclusive learning environments**. Safe and welcoming schools contribute to **better attendance and retention**, while cross-sector collaboration has enhanced both protection and inclusion. **Psychosocial support (PSS)** has played a key role in helping children recover emotionally and socially, especially in contexts affected by crisis or instability. Nonetheless, **stigma around sensitive issues** continues to limit access to psychosocial services, leaving many children without the support they need. **Inadequate infrastructure and the absence of emergency protocols** expose children to risks and disrupt their learning. To ensure that safety is not treated as an add-on but as a core component of education, **child protection must be systematically embedded across all educational interventions and policies**.

## THE COUNTRY FACTSHEETS

Following the CARES Framework, each country factsheet, which combines data, insights and field experience, offers a comprehensive view of WeWorld's response to educational challenges, presenting good practices, proven methodologies, and scalable models to create lasting impact. This commitment is brought to life through the voices of those directly involved, such as **local staff, teachers, parents, and children**, whose testimonies turn data into real-life experiences and offer a valuable perspective on the impact of our interventions in the education sector.



## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

As part of our strategic commitment to addressing the challenges related to education, we have adopted our **CARES Framework** to guide our educational interventions. This framework was not conceived as a theoretical model, but as a **practical tool to support the design and implementation of programmes that place children at the centre of our education strategy**, reflecting our belief that education must be approached in a way that is **multisectoral, rights-based, and responsive** to the lived realities of children and their communities.

The CARES Framework has been applied across a variety of contexts, informing both **emergency response and long-term development programmes**. While we recognise that our approach must be further strengthened and adapted to local needs, the evidence gathered, confirms its effectiveness in improving access to inclusive and quality education, strengthening community engagement, enhancing protection and well-being, and amplifying children's voices and rights. **In this section, we share the lessons learned, the good practices that can be recontextualised and scaled, and the areas where we see room for further improvement**. This Atlas, therefore, is not only a reflection of our journey, but also an invitation to explore the added value of the CARES Framework. For us, it has proven to be an effective and meaningful approach, that has helped us respond to complex challenges and strengthen education systems in a way that is both holistic and grounded in children's right to education.

To achieve lasting impact through these interventions requires more than well-designed programmes: it demands **adequate resources, expertise on the context, a deep understanding of the realities children face, and cross-sectoral coordination mechanisms with partners to create inclusive, responsive education systems**. This must be supported by flexible, sustained and long-term donor investment that recognises education not as an isolated intervention, but as a transformative force that intersects with protection, health, gender equality, rights, participation and social cohesion.

## THE GLOBAL EDUCATION FUNDING CRISIS

Education is a fundamental human right and a cornerstone for resilience, social cohesion, and sustainable development. Yet, despite its transformative potential, it remains **one of the most underfunded and undervalued sectors in global humanitarian and development efforts**. Over the past decade, education has consistently received a disproportionately small share of humanitarian aid compared to sectors like health and food security, reflecting the failure to recognise its cross-cutting impact on other sectors such as child protection, gender equality, health-care and livelihood.

In 2025, the crisis in education financing reached a critical point. Deep budget cuts by major donors have led to a projected 9–17% drop in Official Development Assistance (ODA) (OECD, 2025). If current trends continue, **international aid for education could decline by \$3.2 billion by 2026, pushing the number of out-of-school children from 272 million to 278 million** (UNICEF, 2025). The impacts are already visible: school closures, rising dropout rates, reduced psychosocial support, and deteriorating conditions for teachers. To reverse this trend, funding must be increased and made more inclusive, locally driven, and focused on the most vulnerable children.





**To read the full Atlas check the QR code**

<https://www.weworld.it/en/what-we-do/publications/learning-out-loud-atlas-on-child-centred-and-transformative-education-through-the-cares-framework>