

# 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY SKILLS



Students in a technical education program in Antioquia, Colombia.  
Charlotte Kest/World Bank

**Children need a broad range of skills, including creativity, problem-solving and collaboration to develop fully and to enter the modern workforce. Through policy dialogue and advocacy, financing and knowledge investments, the Global Partnership for Education (GPE) supports partner countries to improve learning and equip children and young people with 21<sup>st</sup> century skills.**

## THE CHALLENGE

- ▶ Young people 15 to 24 are having difficulty entering the workforce. Global **youth employment declined by 34 million** from 2019 to 2020, and young men are also 1.5 times more likely than young women to be employed.
- ▶ **A fifth of young people worldwide** do not have experience in the labor market, do not receive income from work and are not enhancing their education and skills.
- ▶ Close to 40 percent of **employers globally lack workers with the skills they need**, and the skills gap between low- and high-income countries is deepening. Half of today's jobs—around 2 billion—are expected to disappear due to automation by 2030.
- ▶ There is a global learning crisis exacerbated by COVID-19 pandemic related school closures, climate change, conflict and economic slowdown. The **cost of lost potential due to lack of learning** is US\$129 billion a year—roughly 10 percent of global spending on education.

## THE LEARNING CRISIS



**7 IN 10**

**CHILDREN** in lower-income countries can't read a simple story by age 10.



**90%**

**OF CHILDREN** in low-income countries could be left behind in terms of achieving even basic skills by 2030.



**\$97 BILLION**

The annual gap in education financing to reach Sustainable Development Goal 4 by 2030.

## WHY 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY SKILLS MATTER

Often referred to as ‘life skills’ or ‘soft skills’, **creative thinking, analytical ability, problem solving** and **effective coordination** are foundational skills in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

The Future of Jobs 2023 report suggests that girls and boys need these skills to make the most of opportunities in rapidly evolving fields like big data, artificial intelligence, climate change management and supply chain localization. Education systems must **train children for today’s workplace**, not yesterday’s.

Several initiatives and research on 21<sup>st</sup> century skills have culminated in the adoption of the Education 2030 agenda that commits countries to ensure learners acquire knowledge and skills in areas of sustainable development, human rights, gender equality and global citizenship.

## GPE APPROACH

GPE promotes 21<sup>st</sup> century skills in education planning across partner countries to equip children with skills that advance their future well-being and life opportunities, contributing to economic stability and societal resilience.

The GPE 2025 strategic plan sets out a goal for the partnership to accelerate access, learning outcomes and gender equality through equitable, inclusive and resilient education systems fit for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. GPE plays an active role in **global policy dialogue and advocacy, financing, knowledge investments** and **building partnerships across public and private sectors** to nurture 21<sup>st</sup> century skills in current and future generations in low- and middle-income countries:

- As part of the Assessment for Learning (A4L) Initiative, GPE undertook a landscape review on how 21<sup>st</sup> century skills are embedded within partner country education systems, and to identify how GPE can best support implementing partner country policy aspirations for these skills.

- A grant under A4L brought together the Brookings Institution and 6 partner countries across two regional networks—the Network on Education Quality Monitoring in the Asia-Pacific (NEQMAP) and Teaching and Learning: Educators’ Network for Transformation (TALENT) in sub-Saharan Africa—to develop or adapt classroom-based assessment tools for 21<sup>st</sup> century skills.

## GPE RESULTS

- One third of GPE grants active in 2023 focused on 21<sup>st</sup> century skills.
- Partner countries are increasingly prioritizing 21<sup>st</sup> century skills: **Timor-Leste** has a new 21<sup>st</sup>-century student-centered curriculum for grades 1-9; **El Salvador** plans to update and improve its curriculum to support socio-emotional skills; **Pacific Island countries** developed a regional education framework (PacREF) outlining a shared vision of 21<sup>st</sup> century skills; and **Sierra Leone** applies the “5Cs” framework in its curriculum that focuses on: comprehension, critical thinking, computational thinking, creative thinking and civic education.
- The Europe, Asia and Pacific regional hub within the GPE Knowledge and Innovation Exchange supported a learning cycle on integrating 21<sup>st</sup> century skills into curricula through a regional grant focused on assessing 21<sup>st</sup> century skills in adolescents in **Kenya, Tanzania** and **Uganda**.