



# Global Catholic Education Report 2021 SYNTHESIS

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## Catholic schools and universities serve 68 million students and contribute to the right to education especially in low income countries

According to the Global Catholic Education Report 2021, 62 million children are enrolled in Catholic K12 (pre-primary, primary, and secondary) schools globally, with in addition more than 6 million students enrolled in Catholic higher education (\*). Catholic schools are especially present in low-income countries. In those countries, one in seven students in primary school is in a Catholic school. Yet the COVID-19 pandemic is threatening the sustainability of some schools and universities, especially when they do not benefit from state support.

Each year, the Global Catholic Education Report provides analysis of major trends affecting Catholic schools and universities. The report is produced by a volunteer team. In the spirit of collaborations called for by Pope Francis towards a global compact on education, it is co-sponsored by the four organizations that represent Catholic education at the international level: OIEC for schools, IFCU for universities, OAMEC for alumni, and UMEC-WUCT for teachers (\*\*). The theme for the 2021 report is **education pluralism, learning poverty, and the right to education**. Key findings include the following:

- Over the last four decades, enrollment in Catholic schools has been growing especially rapidly on the African continent, which now accounts for 55.3% of all students in Catholic primary schools in the world. Globally, according to the World Bank classification of countries, seven in ten students in Catholic primary schools live in low and lower-middle income countries (40.9% in low income and 29.7% in lower-middle income countries). By contrast, Catholic higher education remains concentrated in upper-middle and high income countries, as is the case for other universities.
- The Catholic Church is responding to the rising demand for education in the global south. In sub-Saharan Africa, 11.0% of all primary school students are in a Catholic school. In low income countries, the proportion is 13.7%. The fact that Catholic primary schools serve proportionally more students in low income countries is good news for the mission of the Church to serve the poor.
- Schooling is not enough however: we must also ensure that children are learning. In low- and middle-income countries, 53% of all 10-year-olds (those in schools and those out of school) cannot understand an age-appropriate text. Efforts are needed in Catholic schools as well as in other schools to improve learning outcomes. This is essential for realizing the right to education.
- Apart from improving learning outcome, ensuring education pluralism is also essential. Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that “parents have a prior right to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children”, which calls for education pluralism. The report proposes a new measure of education pluralism and ways to assess the fulfillment of the right to education that take pluralism into account. Catholic schools and universities contribute to the right to education not only through quality education, but also through education pluralism.
- Catholic schools and universities aim to educate towards fraternal humanism. They are responding to Pope Francis' call for a Global Compact on Education, and seek to place their projects in a culture of dialogue and in the spirit of the education village. Yet today, their ability to continue to respond to the aspirations of students and parents is threatened by the COVID-19

pandemic, especially in countries where they do not get support from the state. In the United States, the pandemic has led to the largest reduction in enrollment in Catholic K12 schools in close to 50 years. Supporting Catholic education in times of crisis is essential to protect education pluralism. It also makes economic sense. Estimates for 38 countries suggest that Catholic schools and universities generate annual budget savings for these states of more than \$100 billion (in purchasing power parity). The long-term cost of not supporting Catholic schools and universities when they need support may be larger than the cost of providing support.

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(\*) Data for 2018 from the 2020 statistical yearbook of the Catholic Church.

(\*\*) OIEC is the International Office of Catholic Education; IFCU is the International Federation of Catholic Universities; OMAEC is the World Organization of Former Students of Catholic Education; and UMEC-WUCT is the World Union of Catholic Teachers.

The Global Catholic Education Report 2021 and other related resources are available free of charge at <https://www.globalcatholiceducation.org/global-reports>. The Report is published annually under the volunteer-led Global Catholic Education project (<https://www.globalcatholiceducation.org/>). It is co-sponsored by the four leading international organizations representing Catholic education globally: OIEC, IFCU, OMAEC, and UMEC-WUCT. The vision of the Global Catholic Education project is to connect Catholic education to the world, and the world to Catholic education. The project brings global knowledge on education and integral human development to Catholic schools, universities, and other organizations by sharing evidence-based good practices emerging from international experience. It also brings to the attention of the international community the work of Catholic schools, universities, and other organizations promoting integral human development, including their approaches to educate the whole person towards fraternal humanism.