



**Right to Education**

**RIGHT TO EDUCATION INITIATIVE**

# **ANNUAL REPORT 2021**

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

We often hear the phrase ‘new normal’ in discussions of the pandemic and post pandemic. Little about the last two years can be seen as normal, but I am constantly awed by the capacity of individuals and communities to adapt to changing parameters, and to find the rays of light in a panorama of darkness.



Delphine Dorsi, Executive Director

Undoubtedly, this has been a difficult year for education systems, for educators, and for learners. Many children spent much of 2021 outside of the classroom, with **616 million** affected by school closures. As the economic impact of almost two years of recession has begun to bite, many children have left school permanently, **and others face significant risk** of school drop out through poverty, marginalisation, early and unintended pregnancy, marriage, and creeping privatisation. Meanwhile, this year saw the continuation, intensification and initiation of conflicts, with dire impacts on the right to education for many children and young people.

Yet this difficult year also inspired new collaborations, and renewed energy with which to bring justice, accountability and greater realisation of the right to education. Despite the challenges we faced, I am proud to report on the

energy, dedication and professionalism harnessed at our newly expanded team to advance the right to education across multiple dimensions.

This year, we took great strides forwards on issues such as early childhood care and education and privatisation, engaging cross sectoral support for advocacy initiatives and raising momentum behind initiatives to enhance the access to and quality of education. We have raised the issue of higher education privatisation and territorial inequalities in education in academia, policy and human rights circles, while developing training initiatives and resources, and working to shape the minds of the next generation of decision makers. We have helped place the issue of education under attack back on the agenda of many, with the release of materials and efforts to boost collaboration between sectors for reporting and documentation.

At the close of another year blighted by the global pandemic, I am at once inspired and humbled by the indefatigable efforts of the education and human rights sector, and the contributions of my team. This report details the main highlights of our year, none of which would have been possible without the generous support of our donors, whose continued belief in our work helps make the right to education a reality.



*None of our work would be possible without the generosity of our funders, to whom we are immensely grateful.*

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# ABOUT US

## WHO WE ARE

We are an international human rights organisation focusing on the right to education.

## WHAT WE DO

Through a combination of research, advocacy, legal analysis and the development and provision of tools and resources, we engage with a wide range of individuals, actors and organisations to enhance the enjoyment of the right to education for all.

## WHY WE DO IT

The right to education is a fundamental right, but for many it is not a reality. From commercialisation in education limiting access and inclusion to the exclusion of girls from education for structural, social and economic reasons; from the violation of education in the context of conflict to limited access to early childhood care and education for multiple groups, there are myriad ways in which the right to education is denied. We are working to change this, so that learners of all ages have access and enjoyment to the right to education.

[Find out more about us](#)

## OUR TEAM

### EXECUTIVE BOARD

The executive board is RTE's governing body. It is presently composed of eight trustees representing a diverse range of actors from the human rights, development and education fields:

- David Archer, Head of Civic Participation, Tax Justice and Public Services at ActionAid
- Dina Hashem, Associate Director for Global Partnerships at Habitat for Humanity International
- Ayan Hassan, Programme Finance Manager at War Child UK
- Elin Martinez, Senior Researcher in the Children's Rights Division of Human Rights Watch
- Bharti Patel, Child Rights and Social Justice Advocate
- Nikki Skipper, Head of Fundraising at The Queen's Commonwealth Trust
- Anjela Taneja, Lead Campaigner Inequality / Lead Specialist Essential Services at Oxfam India
- Carole Coupez, Network representative - Solidarité Laïque
- Iain Byrne, Researcher/Legal Advisor, International Secretariat at Amnesty International - stepped down in 2022

### STAFF

- Delphine Dorsi, Director
- Natalia Dzvelaia, Finance and administrative officer
- Eleanor Rosenbach, Communications Manager
- Rajakumari Michaelmasy, Programme Manager - early childhood care and education
- Hoda Awwad, Programme Officer - non-state actors in education

With special thanks to the consultants and contributors who have supported our work, including Juliana Lima, Susie Talbot, Silke D'Heft, and Munirat Boly.

# OUR WORK IN 2021

## BUILDING BRIDGES

*Core to our mission is to build bridges between different sectors, actors and language communities. We are a small, agile team and play a catalytic role in linking people and ideas to generate long term progress for the right to education.*

**Linking journalists and civil society organisations:** In the final quarter of the year, we engaged in an ambitious programme of cross sectoral engagement using our [Guidance note for journalists and photographers](#) on Education Under Attack and our guide on [Monitoring Education Under Attack from a Human Rights' Perspective](#). The guides, which build on our previous work on [education under attack in eastern Ukraine](#), were published to coincide with the [Second International Day to Protect Education From Attack](#) on September 9. We marked the launch with an online roundtable event bringing together civil society organisations and journalists to discuss how to make collaborations more fruitful, with the ultimate goal of making the world aware of attacks on education and their wide ranging impact on individuals, communities, and entire generations. The discussions are captured [in this brief](#).

**Expanding the Abidjan Principles to the Arabic Region:** While diverse CSOs and activists are preoccupied with the relatively unchecked spread of private actors in the Arabic region, little cohesive and collaborative work on this issue has occurred to date. In March, RTE co-organised [the first webinar on privatisation in the Arabic region](#) with the Arab Campaign for Education for All. An immediate impact of this work has been the increase

## HIGHLIGHT: EARLY CHILDHOOD CARE AND EDUCATION (ECCE)

*ECCE is a major area of focus for RTE, and one which saw substantial growth and progression in 2021. We are one of leading voices in the field, building bridges between different actors, inspiring advocacy, and influencing law and policy at the highest levels.*

### Shaping the research and policy agenda

In January 2021, UNESCO published [Right to pre-primary education: a global study](#), a global overview and analysis of the adoption of legal provisions for free and compulsory pre-primary education at national level, prepared in cooperation with RTE and using in-depth research on 17 countries which we carried out.

### Strengthening collaboration

Over the course of the year we have worked closely with global players and opinion formers, strengthening collaboration between actors from different sectors including international organisations, civil society organisations across three continents, and academics, and working together to spearhead global advocacy efforts.

### Shaping the global conversation

We participated in five events relating to ECCE over the year, two of which we organised. Among these include the OMEP, UNESCO and RTE seminar: [What's happening with ECCE in the World?](#); our CIES panel event on [ECCE and legal frameworks](#); and OMEP's seminar: [Early childhood care and education \(ECCE\) in debate](#).



in Arabic members of the Privatisation in Education and Human Rights Consortium (PEHRC), of which RTE is a member.

### ABIDJAN PRINCIPLES IN NUMBERS, 2021

Number of years since their adoption: 2

Number of recognitions: 10

Number of uses in court, policy, and academic research: 7

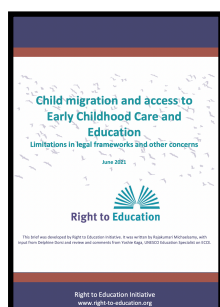
**Bringing together academics and civil society organisations to drive movement on early childhood care and education:** throughout 2021 we impulsed new intellectual and academic collaborations on the topic of ECCE. Our [panel at the CIES conference](#) in April: ‘Early Childhood Education from human rights perspective: overview and challenges as regards the international legal framework, national implementation and monitoring’ triggered a discussion [on the importance of strengthening legal frameworks](#), while helping to facilitate discussions and actions regarding advocacy efforts, including the establishment of a global advocacy working group alongside the [World Organisation for Pre-primary education \(OMEP\)](#), which will hold its first meetings in 2022.

**Building bridges between different sectors:** We recognise that across sectors similar challenges are faced, and work to map the intersections between the different dimensions of the right to education, and to harness expertise on complementary fields. In the latter part of the year we launched an initiative with the [Privatisation in Education and Human Rights Consortium \(PEHRC\)](#) and the [World Organisation for Pre-primary education \(OMEP\)](#) to map organisations and individuals working on ECCE and privatisation, holding two consultations in Asia Pacific/Europe, and Africa/Americas, in which 15 members from 12 countries participated. We continue to work on this issue, leading a PEHRC working group and seeking to link different sectors, actors and language communities around a common goal.

## INFLUENCING STRATEGIC DEVELOPMENTS ON LAW AND POLICY

*Long term change happens through the structures of legislation and governance. In recognition of this, we work to shape and influence policy and law at international level, for the benefit of learners worldwide.*

We helped draft UNESCO's flagship [Global Partnership Strategy for Early Childhood](#), born out of the necessity to counter two negative trends in education - school closures and the decline in funding for education among many low and middle income countries. We provided regular inputs to the development of the strategy, published in December 2021, which included drafting a section, and took part in the [launch event](#) as one of the key partners.



We provided a [briefing on early childhood care and education and migration](#) to the UN Special Rapporteur on the right to education, along with a range of other information sources and studies, with the objective of highlighting the significance of ECCE to child migrants. Her report on the right to education of migrants was [published in September 2021](#), and made reference to pre-primary education.

In June, we contributed to the drafting of the Human Rights Council Resolution on the right to education. Thanks to the joint submissions, in which we played a leading role, the resolution includes [reference to pre-primary education](#) and to the [Abidjan Principles](#).



In November, UNESCO published its flagship report 'Reimagining our futures together: a new social contract for education', the culmination of a participatory process spanning two years. We provided inputs to the consultation, and took part in the [International Seminar on the Evolving Right to Education](#) on 7-8 December.



## HOW WE ENGAGE WITH AUDIENCES ACROSS THE WORLD

- Between 2020 and 2021, website users increased by 59.8%, from 286,162 to 457,246
- Sessions per user and page views also increased significantly, up by 62.9% and 54% respectively
- We reached new audiences in multiple continents. Through targeted activity on social media, relevant content and organic growth, users in the Philippines increased by 161%, by 428% in Kenya, and 25% in the United States
- During 2021, we reached nearly half a million people in four languages ([English](#), [French](#), [Arabic](#) and [Spanish](#))
- We continued to provide researchers, activists and education actors with core materials: 66,695 downloads of our resources occurred during 2021
- We held and participated in 17 events across the year - click the images below to find out more about some of our highlights:



## RAISING AWARENESS

*Knowledge is power. We believe that everyone should have access to information which enables them to advocate for their rights, and we work to provide relevant, accessible information to a wide variety of groups.*

**S**haping curious minds: We have delivered in person and on-line teaching to students at Sciences Po and the British University of Colombia, in addition to ongoing work with a group of students from the Science Po Law School Clinic.

**A**rming the bearers of knowledge: through collaborative work with academics from the University of Sacramento, California, University College London, and the University of Geneva, we have raised awareness to the academic and research community regarding privatisation and commercialisation in education. We also strive to build bridges between education and human rights, raising awareness and assisting education researchers to use human rights in their research.

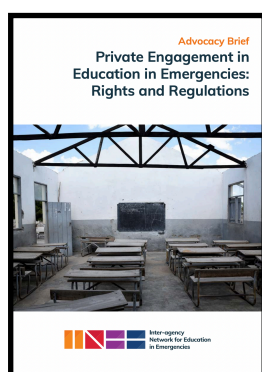
**M**aking information available to global audiences: our [open source resource library](#) makes information on the multiple dimensions of the right to education available to global audiences.



## WORKING TOGETHER TO STRENGTHEN OUR COLLECTIVE POTENTIAL

*We believe that through collaboration, more can be achieved. One of our strengths in the sector is our extensive network of contacts, our multilingual ability (our team of five speaks nine languages), our agility, and our firm belief in participatory action. We work closely with partner organisations and networks to support others' initiatives, to shape joint endeavours, and to link and inspire collaboration between partners.*

In 2021, we continued to play a consistent role in networks such as the Privatisation in Education and Human Rights Consortium, INEE, ESCR-Net, and the Francophone Network against the commercialisation of education.



- On 24 March 2021, the INEE Advocacy Working Group ran an [event](#), co-organised by RTE and moderated by Delphine Dorsi, to launch [a new advocacy brief: Private Engagement in Education in Emergencies: Rights and Regulations](#). We maintained momentum on this issue by holding a [joint webinar](#) with Coalition Education in April on the Right to education and private participation in emergency response contexts.



- On 22 September, we launched the first [mobilisation day against the commercialisation of education in Francophone countries](#) alongside the Francophone network. As part of the mobilisation day, a webinar attended by 98 people was held by the network. Similarly, other activities were impulsed and encouraged, including a press conference held by unions SYNEFAN and AGEDE-NIGER, and a digital campaign by NGO BENIN-ALAFIA, which reached 15,000 people through WhatsApp forums. This wide ranging activity cemented the importance of the day and highlighted far-reaching engagement with the issues and the network.

## HIGHLIGHT: HIGHER EDUCATION

For three years, we have worked collaboratively with students from Sciences Po Law School Clinic to address the issue of territorial inequalities in higher education.

Throughout 2021, as the pandemic continued to disrupt learning across the globe, we focused on the impact of Covid-19 on higher education. In June, we held a [roundtable event](#) bringing together French politicians, civil society representatives and students to discuss the ways in which the pandemic combined territorial and connectivity issues to the detriment of many. This event generated media attention, and led to greater collaborations with researchers on the issue of privatisation and financing.

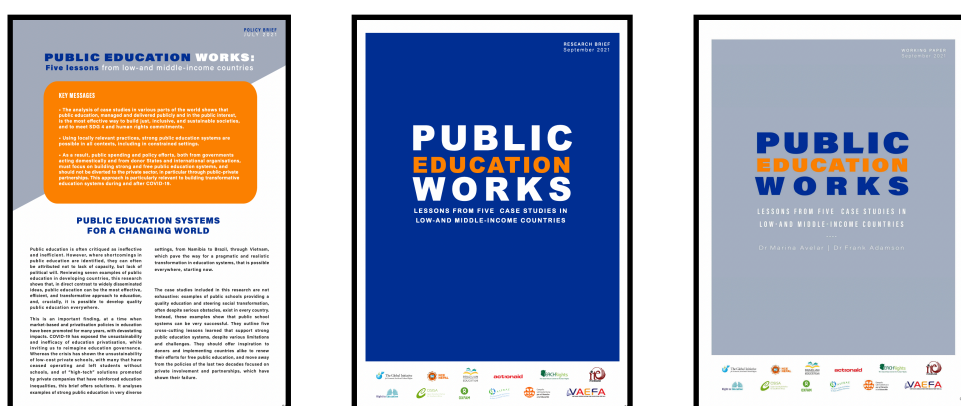
Over the summer, we published a blog series entitled: '[The impacts of Covid-19 on Higher Education: the student perspective](#)', which was widely read and shared, securing more than 4000 engagements. We also published a [case law document](#) and updated [policy brief](#) and report, supporting increased awareness raising and enhanced accessibility of legal precedents.

Finally, in line with our mission to make human rights information accessible and available, we updated our Higher Education issue page and translated it into [French](#), [Arabic](#) and [Spanish](#).

We continue to work on this issue, and are currently developing a thematic monitoring guide on higher education, which will be published in 2022. A new programme of collaboration has commenced with students from the Sciences Po Law School Clinic, whose focus is research on the financing of higher education, and will involve the compilation of testimony for inclusion into a report to be submitted to the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights in 2023. In addition, we are developing a knowledge document on the right to higher education with the UNESCO Right to Education Programme, which will be launched during the UNESCO World Conference on Higher Education in 2022.



- Over several months in 2021, we worked with PEHRC to publish 'Public Education Works: five lessons from low and middle income countries' - a [policy brief](#), [research brief](#), and [working paper](#) which present research into how public education systems deliver quality, inclusive and free education in the Global South, and provides five clear lessons for policy makers in terms of strengthening public education



- We are part of the ESCR-Net monitoring group, and throughout the year have been working on a collective position for data for economic, social and cultural rights, due for publication in 2022.

## JOINT STATEMENTS AND ADVOCACY

*In addition to launching our own advocacy initiatives, we lend our voice in support of those of our partners. This year, we supported the following calls, manifestos and open letters:*



## MAKING HUMAN RIGHTS ACCESSIBLE THROUGH TOOLS, RESEARCH AND TRAINING

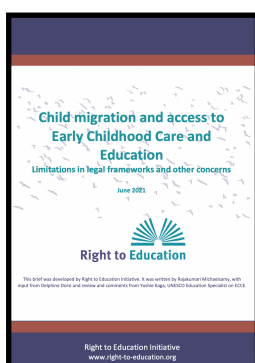
*We believe that for human rights to be enjoyed by more people, they must be accessible and understood. We produce tools and materials to enhance understanding and facilitate advocacy, and provide training on specific dimensions of the right to education.*



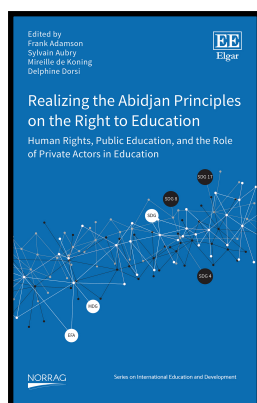
To mark the second UN International Day to Protect Education From Attack, we released two guides to assist journalists and civil society organisations to monitor education under attack from a human rights perspective. These guides, [Monitoring Education Under Attack from a Human Rights' Perspective](#),

and [Education Under Attack: a guidance note for journalists and photographers](#) are open source and are intended to support the efforts of those in the field.

In [October we initiated a training programme](#) in collaboration with the University of Geneva and the Global Initiative for Economic, Social and Cultural Rights on how to conduct research on the impact of private actors on the right to education.

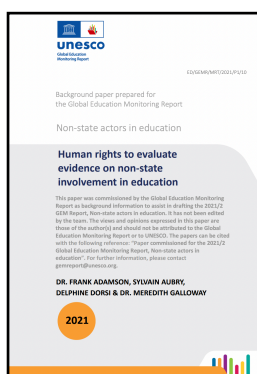


In June we published [a brief on ECCE and child migration](#), highlighting the barriers to young migrant children's access to ECCE and pre-primary education, the limitations of current legal frameworks, and the ways in which policy development and legal frameworks can be strengthened to ensure the inclusion of ECCE in migrant-response strategies.



## Realizing the Abidjan Principles on the Right to Education:

In June, we launched a new book on the Abidjan Principles at an event attended by 87 participants. In the lead up to joint RTE, GI-ESCR, and NORRAG event, a series of short videos introducing the chapters were launched, including a video by Delphine Dorsi and Frank Adamson on Chapter 10: ‘Strengthening the implementation of the Abidjan Principles’. The videos have been widely shared, and are an important move towards democratising and making human rights content accessible to a wider audience.



In December, UNESCO published the 2021-2 Global Education Monitoring report: Non-state actors in education: who chooses? who loses?. Delphine Dorsi, our Executive Director, co-authored a background paper to the report entitled ‘Human rights to evaluate evidence on non-state involvement in education’. The GEM Report is a flagship annual publication which is instrumental to tracking progress towards the UN2030 goals, and our contribution helps ensure the Abidjan Principles are central to conversations on privatisation.



## ADVOCACY AND CAMPAIGNING

*Pivotal to our work is effective advocacy and campaigning to raise awareness of the right to education and ensure progress is made towards the realisation of this right in international fora. Among our key activities this year include:*

**We participated in the Abidjan Principles campaign led by ICJ**, which included the publication of social media and informative materials, and advocacy aimed at governments, the Global Partnership for Education, and the Human Rights Council. The impact was an increase in engagement with the Abidjan Principles via Twitter, with RTE ranking top among 47 twitter users for replies and mentions for tracked hashtags. RTE also featured as the most significant influencer in the campaign, above those with significantly higher twitter followers. Additionally, the [Abidjan Principles newsletter](#) has seen an increase in subscribers.

**On 16 July 2021, Right to Education Initiative and 24 civil society organisation partners co-signed a public statement** welcoming the [Human Rights Council's resolution](#) on the right to education. The resolution was adopted by consensus on 12 July 2021, sponsored by 54 States. Through this resolution, the Human Rights Council (HRC) reaffirms its recognition of the [Abidjan Principles on the right to education](#) and urges States to act against commercialisation of education, requesting the UN to work with the [Global Partnership for Education](#) to implement it. This is a significant step forward in terms of the recognition of the Abidjan Principles, and reflects an important opportunity for increased collaboration between the Global Partnership for Education (GPE), UNESCO and OHCHR.

**We inspire and provide tools to support others' advocacy efforts.** In partnership with the [Latin American Campaign for the Right to Education \(CLADE\)](#), we have impulsed the inclusion of ECCE related content in the CRC Review for Guatemala and Peru. We supported CLADE's national partners with inputs and indicators for the drafting of the alternative report, which led to the CRC including ECCE related questions under four subcategories of its list of issues to Guatemala.

## PROVIDING EXPERTISE AND ASSISTANCE

*We are regularly called upon to take part in discussions as an expert contributor, to assist in the development or review of academic and legal texts, and to advise on strategic human rights priorities. This is testament to the recognition of our collective knowledge and the vital role we play in bringing together education and human rights.*

- We contributed to the [UNESCO futures of education global call](#), and played a role in the [International seminar on the evolving right to education](#), in which we provided expert contribution.
- UNESCO has consulted with us as a key partner in the development of the [World Higher Education Conference](#), scheduled for 2022.
- We participated in the drafting of the new African Commission's General Comment on States' obligations to regulate private actors in the provision of Social Services, as one of five partners working with the Commission's [working group on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights](#).
- Our Director Delphine Dorsi contributed to a range of training, events, consultations and discussions, including guest lecturing on the right to education at Sciences Po Paris and the University of British Columbia.
- Our ECCE Programme Manager Rajakumari Michaelmasy, participated in several expert panels, including a panel on 'How to profile pre-primary education provision' organised by University College London, and OMEP's 2021-22 seminar series on the theme '[Rights from the start: how to advocate for early childhood](#)'.