As 2022 ended, there was hope that education was finding its rightful place on center stage of the world’s agenda. The COVID-19 pandemic was slowly receding as an immediate threat, allowing education policy makers and their partners an opportunity to finally put education systems back on their feet.

The landmark Transforming Education Summit in September focused global attention on the scale of the widening education crisis and on the scope of the response needed to meet it. But heading into 2023, these efforts were complicated by overlapping crises including natural disasters, food shortages, economic hardship and the displacement of millions of people by conflict and climate change.

Education should be at the forefront of all efforts to achieve equitable growth and sustained social and political stability. Neglecting the plight of education across the globe will condemn a generation and leave us facing dire consequences socially, politically and economically. Education is a crucial springboard for stronger economies and fairer, more stable societies.

The UN Development Programme estimates that, all else being equal, an additional year of schooling can reduce the likelihood of voluntary recruitment into extremist movements by 13 percent. Research also suggests that 12 years of quality education for every girl could create US$30 trillion in lifetime earnings, while also reducing the chance of conflict by as much as 37 percent. Instead, this generation is at risk of losing $21 trillion in potential lifetime earnings, representing 17 percent of current economic output.

As the world grapples with conflict, a changing climate and a resurgence of sweeping economic pressures, such a loss is unthinkable. It is also preventable, if countries recognize the urgency and provide the leadership and resources that can get more girls and boys learning.

The scale of the challenge is daunting, but the Global Partnership for Education (GPE) continues to bring together the skills, resources and intent to support a growing number of partner countries seeking to transform their education systems.

During 2022, we welcomed Angola, El Salvador, Eswatini, Fiji, Guatemala, Indonesia, the Philippines, Tunisia and Ukraine to the GPE community of nearly 90 countries. We approved the first grants under the GPE 2025 Strategic Plan. Altogether, GPE grants leveraged cofinancing of around $1 billion from development partners and foundations, more than three times the $300 million it approved from its own funds in 2022. Partner countries were drawing on active GPE grants worth $3 billion – the largest amount in 7 years.
GPE continued to refine its approach under GPE 2025, which is being embraced by countries to align support behind a priority reform with the greatest chance of triggering systemwide change. Across 2022, 13 partner countries drew up new partnership compacts under the GPE 2025 framework to set out how they would improve learning, early childhood education, and teacher development and training based on specific, coordinated support from GPE and others.

For Ghana, Nigeria and Sierra Leone, that support in 2022 included lessons shared through the Knowledge and Innovation Exchange (KIX) to improve learning for girls and children with disabilities. Grants from Education Out Loud across 63 countries and states promoted civil society engagement, giving them a stronger voice in key policy changes.

GPE also remained closely allied with countries facing severe crises by providing accelerated funding to countries including Afghanistan, Ethiopia and Somalia that benefited the most vulnerable children, particularly girls.

In 2022, GPE marked its twentieth anniversary and in those two decades, more than 160 million more children were able to attend school in partner countries. I am confident that GPE will be even more effective in the crucial years ahead thanks to the lessons we’ve learned, and the growth and strength of our partnership.

Laura Frigenti joined GPE as Chief Executive Officer in December 2022. Laura arrived with more than 30 years of experience in global development, gained through her service in multilateral institutions, the Italian government, global nonprofit organizations and the private sector where she led the Global Development Assistance Service Practice at KPMG. An increasing amount of her work in the aftermath of the pandemic was dedicated to vaccine distribution and COVID-related issues, as well as supporting governments to improve social protection measures targeting the most vulnerable.