



## **New Campaign to Help Citizens Claim their Legal Right to Education**

Paris, 8 December—The Global Education Monitoring (GEM) Report at UNESCO is launching a youth campaign, [#WhosAccountable](#) to support the enforcement of people’s right to education ahead of Human Rights Day, celebrated on December 10.

Currently, citizens in almost half the countries of the world are unable to take their governments to court if they violate the right to education although every country has ratified at least one human rights treaty guaranteeing some aspect of the right to education. This right is also guaranteed by 82% of the world’s national constitutions, yet only 55% of countries let citizens take their governments to court for violating the right to education. Citizens have resorted to legal action in only 41% of countries to date.

*“Youth play a vital role holding governments responsible for equitable quality education,”* said Dr Koumbou Boly Barry, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Right to Education. *“The GEM Report shows we can work together to improve education systems, and play our part in reaching our education goal. Join us in helping us call on governments to make sure the right to education is enforced.”*

Legal action in countries where it is possible has prompted changes to unfair legislation and policies. Thus, the judiciary prompted Colombia to establish free primary and secondary education. In Argentina, it obtained an increase in spending on pre-primary education. In India, it allowed for the inclusion in education of children with HIV/AIDS, while in South Africa courts obtained improvements in school infrastructure.

*“Governments are responsible for the right to education,”* said Manos Antoninis, Director of the GEM Report. *“If governments aren’t doing as they said they would, we should be able to legally claim our right to education. Without this, international rights treaties are worth no more than the paper they’re written on”*

The campaign is launched along with a [youth version](#) of the 2017/8 GEM Report on Accountability, which demonstrates the power of youth to hold their governments to account for quality, equitable education.

In Chile, students began protesting the privatization and socio-economic segregation of education in 2006. As a result, the new government introduced the biggest education reforms in 30 years,

aiming to counter some of the worst consequences of privatization. In 2016, free tuition was extended to poorer students attending some types of tertiary education institutions.

*“For those students who are thinking about standing up for their right to education, there is no one recipe,”* said Camila Cocina, who participated in the student movement in Chile. *“The only way to trigger deep transformation is to get organized, think collectively, identify key demands, and build momentum through different means: occupying the streets, negotiating with stakeholders, discussing, convincing and learning. In a collective endeavour like this one, everyone is necessary, but no one is indispensable.”*

The #FeesMustFall protests that took place in 2015 in South Africa were the largest national student uprising since 1976 and denounced the fact that poorest were being left out of financial aid for higher education. The protests led to a freeze in tuition fees and an inquiry into possible solutions. One of a set of recommendations published in November 2017 foresees the establishment of student loans that would only be reimbursed once a graduate’s income reached a certain level.

*“Progress is never as far away as you might think,”* said Dylan Barry, who headed the Economic Research task team of the #FeesMustFall student protest at South Africa’s University of the Witwatersrand in 2016. *“The struggle to fix our higher education system continues, but the #FeesMustFall protests illustrated the power that students still have.”*

**Governments must ensure that the right to education is enforceable.** At least three conditions are required to increase the likelihood of this happening: Public awareness of the right to education, legal support from civil society organizations, and action to obtain complementary rights protections for people with disabilities and other vulnerable groups. [Find out more and join the campaign.](#)

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Notes to Editors

Join in the conversation online @GEMReport / #WhosAccountable

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