

# Educaid.be International Conference

## Brussels – 10.10.2025

### **“When health educates and education cares”**

Cross-perspectives in times of polycrisis

The current global crisis – marked by epidemics, conflicts, climate disruption, the rise of nationalist policies with populist overtones and threats to democracies – is putting education and health systems under severe strain. In this context of multiple crises, it is crucial to understand the profound interconnections between health and education, two complementary and interdependent sectors.

Education and lifelong learning, in their various forms, play a key role in addressing global challenges, as they foster the skills, values, and attitudes necessary for a healthy life, informed decision-making, and positive relationships. Education acts as a lever to improve well-being and health, while also benefiting from advances in the health sector. Children and young people who have access to quality education are more likely to be healthy and to pass this advantage on to future generations. Conversely, good health, including mental health, is also essential for learning.

In times of polycrisis, the most vulnerable individuals, including those with disabilities, are the most severely affected. Rehabilitation, still too often overlooked, is a vital pillar of health systems, as it enables full social, educational, and economic participation. Strengthening rehabilitation systems globally requires intersectoral and multi-stakeholder collaboration – essential for sustainably meeting growing needs and ensuring full and inclusive participation.

**Statistics** show that higher levels of maternal education improve child nutrition and vaccination rates while reducing preventable child deaths, maternal mortality, and HIV infections. Maternal deaths could be reduced by two-thirds, saving 98,000 lives annually. If all girls completed secondary education, two-thirds of child marriages would be prevented, and the use of modern contraceptives would increase significantly. Furthermore, the quality of learning depends largely on safe, inclusive, and student-centred school environments.

## Aims of the conference

The Educaid.be international conference, taking place on **10 October 2025 in Brussels and online\***, aims to explore the strong and complex links between health and education in today's polycrisis context. It will focus on the mutual influence between these two sectors, with particular attention given to low- and middle-income countries.

Through contributions from international experts, the conference will highlight strategies, cross-cutting approaches, and perspectives that have proven effective in reinforcing the transformative role of education in improving public health. It will also examine how training, research, and collaboration between health, education, and international cooperation actors can contribute to building sustainable, inclusive, and resilient health systems. Global examples will illustrate the challenges and existing solutions for (better) integrating these two dimensions.



This event will also be an opportunity to celebrate the **15<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Educaid.be**, making it a festive edition as well!

## On the programme

### Keynotes

International experts will discuss the intersecting impact of education and health in this era of polycrisis, stressing the importance of their coexistence in an increasingly fragmented and uncertain world. They will examine the links between school environments, planetary health, and global citizenship education as a lever for resilience.

*\*October 10 is recognised as World Mental Health Day, and October 11 as International Day of the Girl.*

## Parallel practical sessions

Member organisations of Educaid.be and their partners will offer reflections and concrete action proposals on a variety of topics, including:

### *1) The first 1,000 days of childhood matter: A crucial period at home and at school, especially in times of crisis*

The first 1,000 days of a child's life profoundly influence brain development, physical and mental health, well-being, learning ability, and future economic prospects, including income levels.

Nutrition, particularly through **school meals**, supports health from an early age. School meals are more than nutritional support; they create an environment conducive to learning. By supporting school attendance, concentration, engagement, and learning, canteens contribute to educational success. Conversely, poor health can negatively affect schooling. This session will highlight the need for coordination between the education and health sectors.



### *2) The power of gender-transformative education in times of crisis*

In response to the backsliding of sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), driven by growing conservative policies, education plays a central role in protecting and promoting these fundamental rights. This session will explore practical actions that can be implemented in schools and universities to address these issues, despite increasingly limited dialogue spaces.

Integrating sexual and reproductive health education into curricula strengthens young people's knowledge. Additionally, implementing appropriate menstrual hygiene management (MHM) solutions and raising awareness of gender-based violence in schools are essential steps toward creating safe and inclusive learning environments.

### *3) Mental health: too often misunderstood or neglected in times of crisis*

Despite being essential to the overall development of children and young people, mental health is often deprioritised during crises.

However, conflict, health, and environmental crises deeply impact psychosocial well-being, undermining young people's ability to learn, interact, and envision the future.

This session will stress the importance of incorporating holistic, context-sensitive approaches into all intervention programmes. This includes strengthening the capacities of educational and community actors to identify and support mental health challenges, creating safe spaces for emotional expression, and actively involving families and young people in co-creating suitable solutions.



### *4) Collective action for training as a lever for global rehabilitation development*

In a polycrisis world, people with disabilities are among the most affected. According to the WHO, over 2.4 billion people require rehabilitation services, yet only a minority have their needs met. Rehabilitation, though a fundamental pillar, remains marginalised within health systems. It is essential to ensure everyone's full participation in social, educational, and economic life.

This session will explore the transformative role of training, research, and collaboration among health, education, and international cooperation actors to strengthen sustainable rehabilitation systems, in alignment with WHO's "Rehabilitation 2030" strategy.

It will showcase how to develop locally anchored, internationally aligned training, produce evidence, innovate, and train professionals capable of driving lasting change.



## Advocacy & recommendations

Concrete recommendations will be formulated for policymakers to tackle these challenges and promote sustainable, inclusive educational practices that integrate health.

This concept note marks a first step towards an intercultural and international dialogue on education as a lever for improving public and mental health, and vice versa, in a world in crisis.

## Practical information

Join us on 10 October 2025 in Brussels or online.

For more information, visit [www.educaid.be](http://www.educaid.be) or follow us on our LinkedIn and Facebook pages. Participation is free, but registration is compulsory.

**An event co-organised by:** Educaid.be and Be-cause health, with support from APEFE, VVOB – *education for development*, Belgian Development Cooperation, CEBIOS, the Institute of Tropical Medicine Antwerp, Enabel, ULB Cooperation, HIVA/KU Leuven, and UNICEF Belgium.