

# RIGHT TO LEARN, ROOM TO GROW

APPLICATION FOR  
OPERATION DAY'S WORK 2026

# RIGHT TO LEARN, ROOM TO GROW

**Partner organization/Country:** Equal Education, South Africa

**Norwegian partner organizations:** Norwegian Students' and Academics' International Assistance Fund (SAIH) and Norwegian People's Aid

**Program duration:** 4 years

**Summary:** “Right to Learn, Room to Grow” is a youth-led advocacy and organizing project that aims to secure safe, dignified, and quality learning environments for marginalized learners in South Africa. Through Equal Education’s grassroots model, over 5,000 high school learners (Equalizers) will lead campaigns to improve school infrastructure, hold government accountable, and influence education policy. The program strengthens youth leadership and democratic participation, and leads to systemic change—ensuring that the constitutional right to education becomes a lived reality for all.

## Context analysis

*“Being an Equalizer at Equal Education has taught me a lot about fighting for better schools. I think my work helps improve education because we make sure the government listens to our challenges and fixes them. My biggest concern is that many schools do not have good infrastructure like proper toilets and enough classrooms. This makes it hard for us to learn...some children have to sit on the floor which isn’t comfortable. I wish all schools could have the resources they need so we can focus on our studies.”* - EE Equalizer and Deputy Chairperson (Equalizer) of EE’s National Council (15 years), Gauteng

The Constitution of South Africa, adopted in 1996 after the end of apartheid, is widely celebrated as one of the most progressive and transformative in the world, and guarantees the right to basic education for all. It also affirms that this right is both immediately realisable and unqualified, meaning it is not subject to progressive realisation nor dependent on the state’s available resources. This commitment reflects international instruments such as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), which affirm every child’s entitlement to free, quality education. Moreover, it is consistent with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4), which aims to “ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.”

Yet, three decades into South Africa’s democracy, its schooling system remains beset by inequality, and this constitutional promise continues to go unrealised for millions of predominantly Black children attending public schools in mostly rural provinces and township<sup>1</sup> communities. In many cases, these systemic faultlines define and severely limit the trajectory of their entire lives. Youth unemployment in South Africa reached 46.1% in early 2025<sup>2</sup>. Without access to meaningful learning opportunities or skills development, youth face extended periods of economic and social precarity. Over that same period, 37.1% of young people aged 15-24 were not engaged in employment, education, or training (NEET), with young women slightly more affected (37.5%) than young men (36.7%).<sup>3</sup> These alarming outcomes stem from, and are

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<sup>1</sup> In this context, a ‘township’ refers to an area on the periphery of a town or city that has historically been used to uphold racially segregated living arrangements.

<sup>2</sup> Statistics South Africa (Stats SA), "Quarterly Labour Force Survey, 2025," Available: <https://isibaloweb.statssa.gov.za/pages/surveys/pss/qlfs/2025/qlfs2025.php>.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

worsened by, unacceptable schooling environments, driven by a lack of political urgency, weak accountability mechanisms and political and economic decisions that reinforce austerity budgeting.

### **Lack of adequate school infrastructure**

Education research widely recognizes that adequate school infrastructure is a critical enabler of quality education, influencing both academic outcomes and learner wellbeing.<sup>4</sup> In 2013, after years of [learner-led advocacy](#) by Equal Education (EE) that urged the national Department of Basic Education (DBE) to clearly define the basic physical components of a school, the Regulations relating to Minimum Uniform Norms and Standards for Public School Infrastructure (school infrastructure law) was signed into law. These binding regulations set clear deadlines for eliminating dangerous and undignified plain pit toilets, overcrowded classrooms, crumbling school buildings, unreliable access to water and electricity, as well as ensuring the infrastructure needs of learners with disabilities.

However, national and provincial basic education departments failed to meet these deadlines, despite multiple fatalities and injuries caused by dangerous and illegal school infrastructure. Missed deadlines became routine, and in April 2023, the DBE withdrew public access to its annual infrastructure delivery reports, removing a key tool for public oversight. This was followed in June 2024 by the removal of all legally binding deadlines from the school infrastructure law, effectively dismantling a critical transparency and accountability mechanism.

As a result, despite the legally binding school infrastructure law, many primary and secondary school learners in South Africa are still confined to dilapidated classrooms that cannot withstand inclement weather or ensure reliable electricity for learning, with overcrowding further exacerbating the problem. The most recent official government data reveals that 8 071 schools require additional classrooms to meet existing demand.<sup>5</sup> In response to this shortage, government has resorted to increasingly providing temporary prefabricated mobile classrooms to schools as a stop-gap measure to prevent school overcrowding and replace unsafe school infrastructure, with no plan to replace these structures. These makeshift classrooms are highly vulnerable to extreme weather, including cold, flooding, and heat stress.

### **Unsafe learning environments**

Thousands of South African schools lack safe and dignified sanitation facilities. More than 1 000 schools still use pit toilets, with over 230 entirely dependent on them. Rural provinces such as the Eastern Cape, KwaZulu-Natal and Limpopo account for most school infrastructure backlogs.<sup>6</sup> These basic ablution facilities are little more than holes in the ground and their consequences come at a devastating cost. In March 2018, five-year-old Lumka Mketwa fell and drowned in a collapsed pit toilet, echoing the 2014 tragedy of five-year-old Michael Komape who died under similar circumstances. A further lack of access, or even limited access, to safe and sufficient water and sanitation facilities can have negative consequences, including learning time lost to absenteeism; feelings of discomfort, particularly for girl learners; and the inability to perform key hygiene practices. In KwaNobuhle, one of the largest informal settlements in rural Eastern Cape, hundreds of learners were sent home from school on a day in January 2022 when the school taps ran dry and learners were unable to access drinking water, use the school toilets, or wash their hands. This is the reality of many other schools in rural provinces.

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<sup>4</sup> Barrett, Peter, Alberto Treves, Tigran Shmis, Diego Ambasz, and Maria Ustinova, "The Impact of School Infrastructure on Learning: A Synthesis of the Evidence", Available: <https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/853821543501252792/pdf/132579-PUB-Impact-of-School.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> Department of Basic Education, 2024, "Education Facilities Management System Report", Available: <https://www.education.gov.za/Portals/0/Documents/Reports/Norms%20and%20Standard%20Reports%202021/Norms%20and%20standard%20reports%202023/EFMS%20Publication%202024.pdf?ver=2024-07-10-102139-047>

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

In urban areas, learners face further threats to their safety, with exposure to gang violence compounded by inadequate school safety measures and poorly maintained security infrastructure due to limited political will to train school leaders on implementing safety interventions. This environment has severe psychosocial impacts, leaving many learners anxious or traumatised, while the availability of professional psychosocial support services at the school-level remains critically overstretched.<sup>7</sup> The urgency of this crisis is starkly reflected in national and global indicators: in 2025, five South African cities ranked among the ten most dangerous in the world by crime rate per 100 000 inhabitants.<sup>8</sup>

*“My biggest concern is the lack of safe and proper classrooms, toilets, and access to clean water in my school. Some learners sit in overcrowded classrooms and have to learn under leaking roofs and classrooms with broken windows. It makes it hard to concentrate or feel safe at school. Poor infrastructure affects our dignity and confidence, and it sends a message that our education doesn’t matter. We deserve schools that are clean, safe, and fully equipped to support our learning.”* EE Equalizer (17 years), Qonce, Eastern Cape

Educational resources also remain severely limited. For example, nearly three quarters (74%) of all public schools in South Africa do not have libraries, and in the Eastern Cape province, only 7% of schools have libraries, more than half of these are not stocked. This lack of basic infrastructure is a profound contributor to South Africa’s literacy crisis, with the latest Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (2021 PIRLS) results revealing that the majority (81%) of Grade 4 learners in South Africa cannot read for meaning in any language, including their home languages.

Current levels of education funding further exacerbate this grim reality as government continues to allocate insufficient resources to meet the minimum funding requirements necessary to provide appropriate and adequate school infrastructure. According to the DBE’s 2023 assessment of schools—which evaluated the physical state and functional adequacy of each school—an estimated R42.4 billion per year is required to eradicate school infrastructure backlogs by 2030. This figure does not account for inflation. In contrast, consolidated spending on school infrastructure for 2025/26 is projected to total only R17.3 billion, revealing a significant and persistent funding gap.

### **Youth as advocates for change**

School learners face a paradox: while their lives and schooling realities are directly influenced by government policy, they are too young to vote at the ballot box. Even though they are not yet able to exercise this constitutional right, there are crucial avenues for them to participate in and influence democratic processes and decisions, particularly in education. Yet these opportunities are often inaccessible, and information on how to engage with decision-makers is too complex. Equal Education (EE) fills this gap.

At the heart of EE’s methodology is sustained grassroots organizing that builds leadership and activism from the ground up. Our model tackles systemic challenges in education by creating a leadership pathway that develops critically engaged young people who can advocate for change in their schools, communities and broader governance systems. Our organizing model is structured and participatory, and embeds knowledge of rights, engagement in democratic processes, and leadership development in our advocacy work.

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<sup>7</sup> Equal Education, “iSafety Ngoku: Seeking Sanctuary in Western Cape Schools”, Available: <https://equaleducation.org.za/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/iSafety-Ngoku-Final-Digital.pdf>

<sup>8</sup> Statista, “Ranking of the most dangerous cities in the world by murder rate per capita,” Available: <https://www.statista.com/statistics/243797/ranking-of-the-most-dangerous-cities-in-the-world-by-murder-rate-per-capita/>

EE has grown into a youth-led social movement that equips over 5 000 young people between the ages of 13 and 19 to advocate for change—as organizers, advocates, researchers, and watchdogs—working towards equal and quality education by, with and for the benefit of all youth in South Africa.

## Theory of Change

Equal Education's (EE) Theory of Change is rooted in its history and practice as a youth-led movement. Since its founding in 2008, this approach has enabled EE members to secure hard-won, tangible victories for learners' right to education. In addition to the binding school infrastructure law mentioned above, these include increases in education budgets, the introduction of the first provincial policy for [Scholar Transport](#), the earmarking of budgets for School Infrastructure, the introduction of a national [special intervention](#) to address classroom overcrowding, and the reinstatement of [school feeding](#) scheme for over nine million learners during the COVID-19 lockdown.

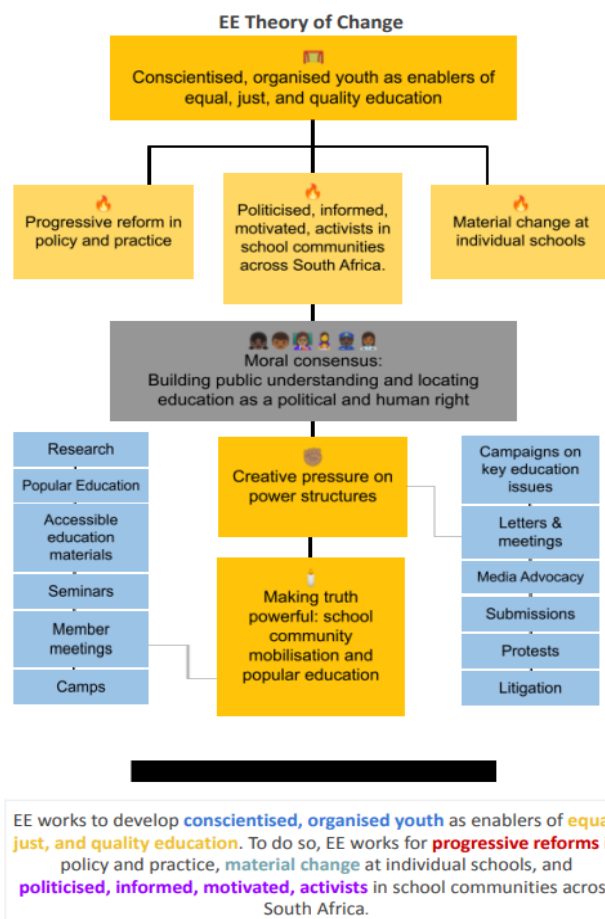
The foundation of EE is grassroots organizing. It is based on the principle that when young people, specifically learners between the ages of 13 and 19 (referred to as "Equalizers") are informed and organized, they are able to bring about change. Through a combination of democratic decision-making, grassroots organising, participatory action research (PAR), parliamentary monitoring, media advocacy, creative direct-impact actions and strategic litigation, EE's model continues to produce critically engaged young leaders whose activism improves the education system.

Together with post-school youth, parents and community members, Equalizers gather in membership spaces which equip them with the knowledge and skills to work together for change. Here, they are able to reflect on their own experiences of the education system and learn about the broader structures of inequality which shape these experiences.

*"Being an Equaliser has taught me leadership, confidence, and how to speak up about issues that affect us as learners. I've learned how to advocate for change, understand my rights, and support others doing the same. Our work at EE helps improve education by putting pressure on the government to fix schools, provide resources, and make sure every learner has a safe and equal learning environment. We raise awareness in our communities and make sure our voices are heard because education is a right and not a privilege."* EE Equalizer (17 years), Qonce, Eastern Cape

The lived experiences of EE members, combined with participatory action research, shape EE's campaigns. Involvement in EE structures and campaigns develops a critical mass of committed young people, who are well informed about the education system, and are equipped to lead and challenge authority.

EE's research team works closely with members to break down complex policy issues into accessible training materials, and to design participatory



research projects that are led by Equalizers. Using participatory action research methods, learners co-design surveys, document unsafe conditions, and gather testimonies from their peers and school communities, including school-governing bodies, parents and school management. In this way, learners directly affected by education and social inequality produce knowledge and use it to effect change.

The research findings form the basis for EE's campaign and advocacy work. Equalizers influence public discourse through radio and television interviews, they issue powerful media statements and opinion pieces that shape national debate, and they develop social media campaigns that reach over 165 000 followers across different social media platforms.

The evidence-based approach also gives youth legitimacy in spaces often dominated by large NGOs and private sector stakeholders. In South Africa, parliamentary and legislative processes are, to an extent, intimidating and inaccessible to ordinary citizens, let alone young people. EE's approach overcomes these barriers by inserting the realities of learners directly into these spaces. Equalizers are able to testify at public hearings, make written and oral submissions to national and provincial parliaments, and present their findings to elected representatives, ensuring that those in power hear the truth directly from the young people who live it.

The assumptions that underpin the program are:

- Young people, even without formal political power such as the vote, can be decisive when organized. EE's own victories, as well as South Africa's history, from the 1976 Soweto Uprising to the 2015 Fees Must Fall movement, affirms this.
- Evidence strengthens activism: facts gathered and presented by learners themselves carry significant weight.
- Accountability from government and decision-makers requires active citizenship. South Africa's Constitution provides strong mechanisms for this, but these mechanisms necessitate organizing and mobilisation.
- Solidarity strengthens collective struggle, and in this program, between learners and parents, communities and NGOs, and between South African youth and their international peers.

The outcomes are achieved when Equalizers become leaders who are knowledgeable, confident, and skilled in advocacy and activism. At the community level, parents and teachers are drawn into collective action and intergenerational organizing efforts. At the systemic level, government policy reflects the voices of our youth and allocates requisite budgets for upgrades to school infrastructure. Ultimately, empowered youth sustain campaigns that contribute to systemic reform beyond isolated upgrades at specific schools.

As a result, schools become safer, more dignified spaces where children can learn without fear while democracy is deepened, as a cohort of young people develops the skills and organizing and advocacy capacity to hold government accountable. The systemic victories achieved through this model lay the foundation for future struggles, ensuring that rights are realised and defended against regression.

## Expected changes

| Right to Learn, Room to Grow                                                                                                                            |         |            |          |                        |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------|------------|----------|------------------------|
| Impact: All learners in South Africa enjoy their constitutional right to basic education and access adequate, safe and dignified school infrastructure. |         |            |          |                        |
| #                                                                                                                                                       | Outcome | Indicators | Means of | Examples of activities |

## Right to Learn, Room to Grow

|   |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  | verification                                                                                                                |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
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| 1 | EE learner members (Equalizers) in 145 marginalized schools across South Africa are organized, aware of their education rights and equipped to lead national, provincial and school-based campaigns for improved school conditions. | <p>X number of EE Equalizers demonstrate increased knowledge of the enablers of their right to education, including the school infrastructure law.</p> <p>Equalizers launch x number of school-based campaigns.</p> <p>x number of campaigns are monitored and adapted in response to identified challenges.</p> | Attendance registers, activity reflection / feedback forms, learner testimonials                                            | <p>Mobilise youth in schools in EE's 5 organizing provinces.</p> <p>Hold youth groups, in-school meetings and mass meetings.</p> <p>Learners lead tailored school-based campaigns to their contexts.</p>                                                                                                                                                   |
| 2 | Public commitment from education decision-makers and policymakers to implement infrastructure improvements.                                                                                                                         | <p>X number of formal commitments and/or statements by education / state officials.</p> <p>EE Equalizer demands are reflected in official commitments.</p>                                                                                                                                                       | Media statements, official correspondence from education officials and members of Parliament, parliamentary meeting minutes | <p>Learner-led direct engagement with policymakers in formal parliamentary submissions, in meetings, and in correspondence (e.g. letters).</p> <p>Learner-led stakeholder engagements and roundtables.</p>                                                                                                                                                 |
| 3 | Tangible upgrades in specific schools (e.g., improved toilets, provision of additional classrooms)                                                                                                                                  | X number of schools receiving infrastructure upgrades in line with school infrastructure law.                                                                                                                                                                                                                    | EE school infrastructure audits, government records                                                                         | <p>Conduct participatory action research (e.g. school visit surveys and audits).</p> <p>Monitor and verify improvement with physical observation tools.</p> <p>Monitor and verify progress made through analysis of official government progress reports.</p> <p>Advocate for increased budget allocations for infrastructure improvements in schools.</p> |
| 4 | Increased engagement with democratic processes by youth on education rights, with a specific focus on infrastructure and                                                                                                            | <p>X number of localised and mass actions held.</p> <p>X number of submissions made to national parliament and provincial legislatures.</p>                                                                                                                                                                      | <p>Media coverage on actions.</p> <p>Parliamentary Monitoring</p>                                                           | <p>EE members hold localised and mass actions including marches and pickets.</p> <p>EE Equalizers make formal written and oral submissions to national parliament and provincial legislatures on the state of their schools.</p>                                                                                                                           |

| Right to Learn, Room to Grow |                                                                                                                                  |                                                                                                                                                                  |                                                     |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
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|                              | budget allocations.                                                                                                              | X number of meetings held with education officials and other relevant policymakers and stakeholders.                                                             | Group meeting reports, parliamentary press releases |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
| 5                            | Education policies and regulations are strengthened and enforced to secure safe and dignified school infrastructure.             | Deadlines for the delivery of school infrastructure are reinstated into the school infrastructure law.                                                           | Government gazette                                  | <p>EE Equalizers and their peers lead school-based and national campaigns calling for the reinstatement of school infrastructure deadlines.</p> <p>EE Equalizers host town hall conversations and convene the civil society sector to increase awareness of the consequences of no deadlines in the law.</p> <p>Meetings with government officials and policymakers.</p> |
| 6                            | EE directly influences and shapes public discourse on the right to education, and infrastructure of the enjoyment of this right. | <p>EE Equalizers take radio and television interviews.</p> <p>EE Equalizers participate in EE's Communications Committee and develop social media campaigns.</p> | <p>Media coverage</p> <p>Social media analytics</p> | <p>Media engagement (radio, television, newspaper interviews)</p> <p>Drafting opinion pieces for publication in national and community publications and digital platforms.</p> <p>Carry out social media campaigns.</p>                                                                                                                                                  |

### Target Group

The primary target group of the “Right to Learn, Room to Grow” program is Equal Education’s (EE) youth membership - over 6 000 members, including more than 5 400 Equalizers (of which are 70% are girls) , aged 13 to 19, who attend marginalized schools across 18 areas in five provinces:

- **Gauteng:** Thembisa, Daveyton, and KwaTsuDuza (KwaThema, Tsakane, and Duduza)
- **Eastern Cape:** Qonce, Dimbaza, and Zwelitsha
- **Western Cape:** Cape Town’s central district, Elsies River, Delft, Khayelitsha, Kraaifontein, Mfuleni, Mitchell’s Plain, Nyanga, Langa, and Strand
- **KwaZulu-Natal:** Nquthu
- **Limpopo:** Ga-Mashashane

EE works to foster a culture of inclusivity that is respectful, free of discrimination on any basis including gender and disability and is responsive to challenges through clear reporting mechanisms and wellness support available to all members. Our organising spaces are representative and resist patriarchy, tribalism, ageism, sexism and racism. Further, EE has clear inclusive policies and practices that promote fairness and inclusivity across our membership and staff spaces.



The secondary target groups include e EEs 400+ parent members, parents, teachers and community members, who play key roles in EE's community-based advocacy. They amplify the struggles of EE Equalizers and all learners, mobilize communities, and assist with organizing campaigns, ensuring that learners' voices are strengthened and sustained.

Beyond its direct target groups, the "Right to Learn, Room to Grow" project ultimately benefits South Africa's broader learner population - over 12 million public school learners (4.9 million between 13 and 19 years) and 400 000 teachers across over 22 000 schools in South Africa's public education sector<sup>9</sup>. The program seeks to establish improved learning environments and stronger accountability mechanisms through learner-led advocacy which means that its gains are not limited to a select few but ripple across the entire basic education system.

### **Youth Participation**

Youth participation is at the heart of Equal Education's (EE) work and the target group of this project are existing members of EE. EE is a democratic, youth-led, women-led, and black-led social movement that prioritizes learners as the key decision-makers in planning, implementing and evaluating programs, including the proposed "Right to Learn, Room to Grow" program. This commitment is reflected in EE's highest decision-making body, the National Council, which has Equalizer representatives on it, giving learners direct influence over EE's priorities and strategy.

Equalizers actively participate in program design through structured, democratic membership spaces. They meet monthly in Youth Groups or in-school meetings to engage in political education, build solidarity, and shape their campaigns—while also acting as activists in their schools and communities. Assisted by a trained group of post-school youth facilitators, they analyse current affairs, history, and social movements past and present. They learn about complex parts of the South African education system, such as how schools are funded and governed and discuss issues specific to their school. When necessary, Equalizers come together for larger regional mass meetings. Their commitment and energy are central to EE's success. Informed by both their lived experiences and the insights they have gained, Equalizers help to determine the issues on which EE campaigns.

A key process that shaped the "Right to Learn, Room to Grow" project beyond the concept note stage was the equalizer-led working groups, or commissions, which focused on school services and access to quality education—topics directly chosen by members. Through these commissions, it became clear that curricula, resources, learning environments, and school services that support learning, improve learners' lives, and advance their journey to freedom were critical issues for EE to address and build upon. Each commission facilitated deep analysis, discussion, and debate on how inequities in school infrastructure and services hinder learning. Equalizers collectively drafted resolutions and proposed strategies that informed both provincial and national campaign plans, ensuring that campaigns are directly aligned with learners' priorities and evidence-based insights from their schools.

Each year, Equalizers in every school EE organizes in, elect two of their members to represent them on the provincial Leadership Committees (LC). LC members serve as representatives and liaisons, facilitating communication and consultation between equalizers and the rest of the movement. These committees are instrumental in planning for the campaigns that the movement advances and in building the momentum needed to ensure the campaigns are run effectively. With the assistance of EE's trained post-school youth facilitators, LC members will also conduct in-school meetings that address specific challenges confronting their school. Equalizers will lead both local and mass actions to pressure government for interventions, document unsafe infrastructure through participatory action research, supported by EE's Research Department, and be equipped to present findings to government officials and policymakers.

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<sup>9</sup> Department of Basic Education, School Realities Report 2024, Available: <https://www.education.gov.za/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=RFeMphVi3kQ%3d&tabid=462&portalid=0&mid=1327>

Equalizers continue to influence learning throughout program implementation by actively participating in membership spaces, where they strategise, refine campaigns, and plan learning activities. These forums allow learners to reflect on ongoing activities, assess progress, and identify new approaches to advance their campaigns, ensuring that the program remains responsive to their experiences and priorities.

In 2024, EE piloted member evaluation forms at a sample of membership meetings to capture learners' feedback. While this pilot highlighted the value of systematic feedback, it also revealed practical challenges: the large number of members and the staff resources required to process all evaluations made this approach unfeasible at scale. To address this, in 2025 EE has introduced practical, event-specific feedback mechanisms, including event reflection sheets completed by departments after any activity. These reflections are embedded in EE's practice, allowing insights from learners' experiences to inform adjustments in real time and ensure that campaigns remain learner-centred.

EE exists to confront education crises head-on, giving voice, power, and agency to the very young people who experience them daily. From EE's beginnings in Khayelitsha township with eight learners to a national movement of over 6 000 members, EE demonstrates that youth-led action and participation is central to reshaping South Africa's future.

### Risk Assessment

We have scored impact and probability as follows:

- Impact score: Critical (5), Severe (4), Moderate (3), Minor (2), Negligible (1)
- Probability: Expected (5), Highly likely (4), Likely (3), Not likely (2), Slight (1)

| Risk                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           | Impact score | Probability score | Mitigation measure                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
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| <p>Safeguarding risks due to the nature of EE's work and the program that involves working with minors.</p> <p>In addition, Equalizers and EE members and staff may face risks of intimidation or retaliation when participating in activism in unsafe community contexts.</p> | 5            | 3                 | <p>EE has a <a href="#">safeguarding policy</a> in place. This policy applies to all EE paid staff and volunteers who work with, or come into contact with Equalizers and/or school learners during the course of volunteering/working for EE. Volunteers include EE facilitators. The policy also applies to members of partner organisations, guests and service providers (including but not limited to taxi-drivers and caterers) who interact directly and/or regularly with Equalizers.</p> <p>All individuals receive a copy of this policy and a training on its contents before coming into contact with Equalizers for the first time.</p> <p>It is important to note that all EE's activism is non-violent.</p> |
| Fluctuation of EE's membership base.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           | 3            | 2                 | Intensified mobilising strategies, further deliberate investment in EE's leadership pathway for Equalizers, and staying responsive to the issues and campaigns identified by them.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| Reduced Equalizer participation in program activities due to socio-economic barriers confronting them.                                                                                                                                                                         | 5            | 2                 | EE will budget safe transport for learners from far-flung areas and food for all Equalizers and volunteers who participate in program activities. This is a standard practice at EE.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
| Facilitators dominate discussions and debates                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  | 5            | 2                 | EE mitigates this through rigorous and ongoing facilitator training. Train-the-trainer sessions are provided and compulsory for all facilitators ahead                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |

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| in Equalizer spaces, diluting learners' voices.                                                              |   |   | of program activities. This is a standard practice at EE.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
| Equalizers experience emotional and mental wellbeing challenges during the course of the program.            | 4 | 3 | EE consolidates available psychosocial support services across all areas we work in and facilitates Equalizers' and broader membership's access to these where needed.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| Negative portrayal of Equalizers and EE activism by government or media (e.g. "disruptive" youth narrative). | 3 | 3 | EE Communications Department does, as a matter of practice, conduct media training for all members assuming spokesperson roles for localized and mass actions. EE builds relationships with legitimate media houses and journalists who provide honest and fair coverage of EE activities. EE proactively shapes the narrative through the release of media alerts and statements ahead of public action. |
| Community violence and crime, or political instability disrupts activities in program locations.             | 5 | 3 | In the planning phase, EE will ensure a degree of flexibility in scheduling and make alternative arrangements where necessary (for example, have alternative venues or host a virtual meeting if absolutely necessary and account for data and other costs for participants).                                                                                                                             |
| Government resistance to program advocacy.                                                                   | 5 | 5 | EE will strengthen partnerships with other civil society organizations to increase pressure on government, strengthen program advocacy efforts, leverage media and international solidarity.                                                                                                                                                                                                              |

### Local Partner

Equal Education (EE) is a unique youth-led mass democratic social movement of over 6 000 members. EE is the only independent large-scale youth movement that sustainably organises young activists in South Africa, particularly between the ages of 13 and 19. EE's model - combining education, democratic decision-making, peaceful activism, public advocacy, parliamentary oversight, and strategic litigation - is unique.

### Norwegian Applicant Organizations

SAIH and Norwegian People's Aid (together with NPA's Solidarity Youth) have chosen to collaborate on this application for ODW2026. We are experienced solidarity organizations with strong youth engagement and long-standing experience in international development work. With local chapters across the country, we actively work to engage youth and students in solidarity efforts, political advocacy, and campaigns. Both organizations have a long history of engagement in South Africa, dating back to the 1960s and 70s, including active support for the anti-apartheid struggle. Both SAIH and Norwegian People's Aid continue to work with organizations in South Africa, including Equal Education, which we have partnered with since 2015 (NPA) and 2017 (SAIH).

- **SAIH** is the solidarity organization of students and academics, working under the motto "Education for Liberation." For nearly 65 years, SAIH has fought for equal access to education, knowledge, and freedom—because education is the most powerful tool we have to change the world. SAIH's work is rooted in the principles of solidarity, equality, and non-discrimination, and we collaborate with over 30 partner organizations in 9 countries.
- **Norwegian People's Aid** is the humanitarian solidarity organization of the Norwegian trade union movement. In Norway, NPA works on first aid, rescue services, refugee support, and anti-racism. Internationally, NPA works in

around 30 countries on mine and explosive clearance, development cooperation, and humanitarian response. NPAs work is based on partnerships between equals—not charity—and their vision is “Solidarity in Practice.”

- **Norwegian People’s Aid Solidarity Youth** is Norwegian People's Aid’s youth movement focused on promoting international solidarity in Norway. Its target group is youth aged 13–30, with most active members being between 15 and 24 years old.

### **Roles and Responsibilities**

As both SAIH and Norwegian People's Aid are current partners of Equal Education, it was natural for us to submit a joint application for OD2026. Together, we have a broad reach in Norway and can contribute effectively to mobilization and recruitment, as well as a resource in the development and dissemination of the ODW campaign. Given their close connection to ODW’s target group, it was natural to also include NPAs youth organization, Solidarity Youth. We know Equal Education as a strong youth-led movement with a unique model of grassroots organizing that builds youth-centered leadership and activism from the ground up. Given ODW's strong focus on youth participation, both the project and EE are a natural fit.

Equal Education will be the main owner and implementer of the “Right to Learn, Room to Grow” project. Both NPA and SAIH strongly believe in partnerships based on mutual trust and accountability where we respect partner’s autonomy, integrity, and identity. It’s important for us that it is Equal Education, knowing best the South African context and the target group, that is in the lead. We acknowledge the inherent relationship of inequality that often defines traditional donor-recipient relationships, and we actively work to reduce such imbalances.

SAIH will take primary responsibility for following up Equal Education and the ODW project from Norway. SAIH has extensive experience in managing development projects, including previous ODW projects. Norwegian People's Aid will be an important stakeholder throughout the project and can provide support if or when needed. NPA has a physical presence in South Africa through its country office in Johannesburg.

### **Campaign experience**

Norwegian People's Aid and Solidarity Youth will, together with SAIH, contribute to campaign development, recruitment, and mobilization in Norway.

- SAIH has 10 local chapters at universities and colleges across Norway.
- Solidarity Youth has 10 youth groups and local chapters across the country.
- Norwegian People's Aid has over 16 000 members, 2 000 volunteers and around 100 local chapters nationwide.

All partners have extensive experience in campaign work. SAIH develops new creative campaigns each year that attract significant attention, such as *RadiAid* (challenging stereotypes in aid) and the *D\*\*ktator* campaign (on repression of student activism). Solidarity Youth also develops annual youth-focused campaigns, such as “*jeg er papirløs, ikke verdiløs*” (on undocumented migrants) and the *Anti-Racism* campaign (which contributed to the implementation of a receipt system for police in Oslo). For both SAIH and Solidarity Youth, youth and student volunteers play a central role in the development and execution of campaigns. Equal Education also has long experience in campaign development and will be a key contributor to the ODW campaign.

The “Right to Learn, Room to Grow” project invites Norwegian youth to reflect on how inequality persists in education systems and how the structural injustice of apartheid lives on, still affecting the youth of South Africa today. At the same

time the project offers a powerful example of how youth can organize, mobilize, and influence governments, inspiring youth in Norway who also want to make a difference. The theme opens up multiple possibilities for awareness-raising, be it youth activism, the fight against inequality, or the physical surroundings that make education possible (and that we often take for granted in Norway).

### **Youth Participation**

All applicant organizations have extensive experience with, and believe in the importance of, not only youth participation, but youth leadership. It was therefore natural for us to apply together with Equal Education, an organization that not only targets youth, but is youth-led and youth-driven. We have actively worked to strengthen youth involvement over several years (SAIH especially through previous OD projects), and we are always striving to improve. On the Norwegian side, both SAIH and Solidarity Youth are led by students and youth. We see young people as a vital force for change toward a just future and work to ensure that youth have real influence in political processes, both locally and globally.

### **Monitoring and Accountability**

SAIH and Norwegian People's Aid have both supported Equal Education with public development funds over several years. We have existing cooperation agreements, know the organization well, and maintain close communication to improve routines where needed. SAIH will take primary responsibility for follow-up of the OD project, including financial and narrative reporting, as well as auditing. We have solid experience in collaborating with Equal Education on these matters through our Norad framework agreement. SAIH's program advisors collaborate with our controllers and financial advisors to ensure quality assurance and prevent misuse. SAIH has zero tolerance for misuse of funds and requires all partners to have anti-corruption procedures in place.