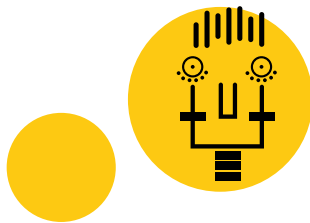


Thematic Working Aid

Leave no one behind in practice

Education

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What do we know about marginalised groups in education?

Education is integral to the inclusive, peaceful and sustained development of a society. If education is equitable and of good quality, it can ensure the participation of marginalised groups in the development process more broadly, thereby reducing social inequalities. Without attention paid to equitable access, learning opportunities and quality learning outcomes, education can entrench existing inequalities within societies. To create more inclusive and just societies, it is thus crucial to leave no one behind in education.

While the right to education is recognised as a **universal human right**,¹ an estimated 262 million school-age children, adolescents and youth (between 6 and 17 years) were denied this right in 2017.² This means **one in every five** school-age children, adolescents and youth are out of school. At primary school level, some 64 million 6 to 11-year old children are not in school. Some 61 million adolescents aged 12 to 14 years are not enrolled in lower secondary school. At upper secondary school level, some 139 million young people between the ages of 15 to 17 are out of school. These figures are increasing as the fast growing youth population, particularly in least developed countries, is adding pressure on already weak education systems.



The global statistics mask **great disparities** at regional and country level as over half of the children who are not enrolled in primary school, over 34 million, live in sub-Saharan Africa. South Asia has the next highest number, with 10 million children not enrolled. The poorest countries have the highest out-of-school rates. In low-income countries, 20% of children are not in primary school compared to 3% in high-income countries.³ Many children who enrol in primary education **drop out** in the course of time. Completion rates to the last grade of primary education stand at 51% in low-income countries compared to 95% in high-income countries. Only 33% in least developed countries finish lower-secondary education thereby managing to complete compulsory basic education.

For those who are in school, challenges remain to ensure the education provided is of a sufficient **quality** for it to lead to desired learning outcomes and to individual, societal and economically relevant development outcomes. In sub-Saharan Africa over 60% of children who complete primary school are not able to read and write. Many face marginalisation as they are **not able to regularly attend** classes or lag behind in performance due to poverty, gender, health and nutrition, psychological distress, conflict, or disability factors. Some 103 million youths worldwide lack basic literacy skills with more than 60% of them being female.

Against this backdrop, the **Sustainable Development Goal (SDG)** agenda regards equity as central to achieving sustainable progress and calls for leaving no one behind by “putting the furthest behind first”. SDG 4 aims to “ensure inclusive and quality education for all and promote lifelong learning”. It stresses the need to address all forms of exclusion and calls for addressing inequalities related to education access, participation as well as learning processes and outcomes.⁴

Target 4.1. aims to ensure that by 2030 “all girls and boys complete free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education leading to relevant and effective learning outcomes”. **Target 4.5** aims to “eliminate gender disparities in education and ensure equal access to all levels of education and vocational training for the vulnerable, including persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples and children in vulnerable situations”.⁵

To ensure equity in access and learning outcomes, it is important to understand **who is vulnerable to marginalisation and exclusion**. Exclusion is highly contextual and is influenced by supply- and demand-side barriers that prevent children, adolescents and youth from enrolling and succeeding at school. Besides environmental factors, exclusion is often related to individual and group-level characteristics, or equity dimensions.

- At the **individual level**, exclusion can be a result of socio-economic status (poverty or low levels of parental education), of location of residence (rural vs. urban, regional disparities), of disability and related specific learning needs, or of other vulnerabilities such as orphanhood.
- At the **group level**, exclusion can result from belonging to specific marginalised ethnic or linguistic groups, to nomadic or indigenous peoples. Exclusion can be related to gender or to socio-cultural and religious factors or to migration status.
- **Environmental and contextual factors** can result in exclusion regardless of social or individual characteristics. Subsumed under ‘vulnerable situations’ in SDG 4.5, they include state fragility, conflict or disaster that often entail forced displacement.

Risks for exclusion will be highest when several of these dimensions overlap. The **most marginalised and hardest to reach** tend to be girls from poor households living in rural areas. While the situation differs in every country, they are generally more likely to be out of school than boys in rich urban contexts. Amongst the most marginalised are also girls and boys affected by conflict and humanitarian crises, as well as those with disabilities.



Individual-level exclusion factors

Poverty

Poverty has been widely acknowledged as the greatest barrier to accessing education, attending school, completing it and learning. Children from the **poorest household quintile have the highest average out-of-school rate** at 22%, compared to an out-of-school rate of less than 6% among children from the richest households. In Burkina Faso and Pakistan for instance, primary school-age children from the poorest families are nearly five times more likely to be out of school than those from the richest families.⁶

While many countries have abolished school fees, it is not only direct costs that act as barriers. In contexts of extreme poverty, there are high **opportunity costs**. Children from poor families are less likely to go to school even when free schooling opportunities exist, as their parents need to prioritise sending them to work, or need them to look after their younger siblings while they go to work (as a result of a lack of accessible public childcare).⁷ These immediate returns will be valued over the longer-term returns additional years of schooling can yield in the future.

In the context of poverty, **child labour** remains a significant global problem and is clearly and negatively correlated with the achievement of education goals. Child labourers stand a far greater risk of being out of school. In some countries, school attendance rates of working children are only about half of those of non-working children. Children from poorer families are likely to work longer hours.⁸ The more hours they work, the greater the school attendance and performance gap. The higher the prevalence of children's work, the more likely it is that children will be repeating grades and will drop out before finishing primary education.⁹ High levels of child labour are significantly correlated with youth illiteracy rates.

Location of residence

Young people residing in **remote rural areas** are more likely to be excluded from education. Children in rural areas are twice as likely to be out of school than their peers living in urban areas, 16% compared to 8% on average. For instance, enrolments at primary education level in rural Niger are 39% against 77% in urban Niger. The links between location of residence and schooling are however context specific. In some countries, such as Bangladesh or Pakistan, children in **urban slum areas** are less likely to attend school than those residing in rural areas.¹⁰

Generally, in rural areas there are fewer teachers and fewer schools, with **distance** to these schools increasing at post-primary education level. This presents barriers for all, but means increased exclusion risks for poorer families who might not be able to afford transport, for working children who might not be able to invest the time, for learners with special needs and for girls.

Disability and special needs

Children, adolescents and youth with a **disability** have lower school attendance rates and are less likely to complete primary or secondary education compared to children with no disability. In low-income and lower middle-income countries, around 40% of children with disabilities are out of school at primary level and 55% at lower secondary level. In Cambodia one in every two children with a disability are not in school, compared to one in 14 children without a disability. In Burkina Faso, the out-of-school rate of disabled children is more than twice that of non-disabled children.¹¹ South Sudan has a 3.7% completion rate for children with disabilities for primary and secondary education. Data from 40 countries indicates that the completion rate for secondary education is on average 32% for people without disabilities and 21% for people with disabilities.¹²

Young people with disabilities may be excluded from education due to schools lacking capacity and knowledge to cater to their specific learning needs, due to lacking assistive devices and facilities, non-adapted curricula and pedagogy.¹³ Special learning needs can also result from **chronic health conditions** such as asthma, or diabetes where students require flexible and supportive learning environments. At the same time, vulnerabilities such as **orphanhood** bring along special learning needs.



Group-level exclusion factors

Gender

Despite some progress, gender gaps with regards to access, participation and learning in education persist in many countries. Globally, data indicate that **girls are more likely to be excluded**, although in some regions, boys stand at a disadvantage. In sub-Saharan Africa, for every 100 primary school-age boys out of school, 123 girls are denied the right to education. In North Africa and Western Asia, 132 adolescent girls are not in lower-secondary education for every 100 adolescent boys.¹⁴

Girls are less likely to start school, more likely to drop out of school following child marriage or teenage pregnancy, and in some regions socio-cultural norms and expectations shorten girls' educational cycles. For boys, pressure to provide for or contribute to family income, can result in exclusion, although girls often bear the double burden of domestic chores and economic activities outside the household.

Gender-based violence can lead to girls' exclusion. Both girls and boys can be victims or perpetrators of school-related violence. However, evidence suggests girls are at greater risk of sexual violence, harassment and exploitation at school, while boys are more likely to experience frequent and severe physical violence.¹⁵ Inadequate sanitary facilities can also lead to exclusion. While a lack of access to water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) facilities can affect all children, vulnerable populations often bear a disproportionate burden. A six-country study into access to WASH in schools found that menstruating girls in Malawi and Uganda faced consistent challenges in obtaining adequate access to facilities, preventing them from comfortably practising proper hygiene and potentially causing increased drop-out rates. In Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan, the main issue girls faced was poor maintenance of facilities and lack of privacy, rather than overall lack of basic access.¹⁶

Ethnic and linguistic minorities, nomadic, indigenous peoples

Young people from ethnic and linguistic minorities as well as those from nomadic or indigenous communities are less likely to be enrolled in school and are more likely to underperform. In Bangladesh, children in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, which is home to ethnolinguistic minorities, have significantly lower enrolment rates than their counterparts in other regions.¹⁷

Beyond explicit discrimination and bullying, barriers to education for these groups include **inappropriate learning environments** and non-adapted curricula that might be insensitive or less relevant to their realities and future aspirations. **Language** challenges are a big hurdle where schooling is not available in the learners' mother tongue. Being taught in a language that learners do not understand inhibits their literacy and learning and devalues their cultural identities. For nomadic communities, school requirements often fail to consider and accommodate their **mobility**.¹⁸

Environmental and contextual exclusion factors

Fragility, conflict, disaster and displacement

In crisis and conflict-affected environments, all children and youth are vulnerable to exclusion from education regardless of individual and group-based characteristics. Children of primary school age in such situations are nearly three times more likely to be out of school than children in other parts of the developing world.¹⁹ They are more likely to miss long periods of schooling, increasing the likelihood of dropping out altogether. This presents a vicious cycle for the concerned contexts where lower educational attainment and literacy rates present barriers to peaceful and sustainable development in the future.

An estimated 75 million children aged 3 to 18 live in **conflict-affected situations** and are deprived of education. Conflict and violence often result in schools being destroyed or the way to school made unsafe. Out-of-school students in these situations are most vulnerable to violence, forced labour, forced





recruitment into armed groups and displacement.²⁰ Equitable education opportunities are inextricably connected to the likelihood of violence. In countries with greater inequalities between ethnic and religious groups, the likelihood of experiencing violent conflict doubles.²¹

In 2017, an estimated 4 million **refugees** did not attend school. Only 61% of refugee children attended primary school, compared with a global average of 91%. Amongst refugee adolescents, 23% were enrolled in secondary school, compared to 84% globally.²²

Internal displacement puts additional strains on education systems and has negative impacts on enrolment and attendance. In Iraq, attendance rates at primary school level were estimated to be around 54% in some IDP camps.²³

Besides conflict, **natural disasters** such as earthquakes and health epidemics like Ebola also have negative impacts on education when students face long-term challenges to make up for lost weeks, months or years of schooling. In countries plagued by growing **violence** linked to organised crime, drugs, human trafficking and gang wars, in particular in regions of Latin America and the Caribbean, going to school can present a security risk.

Education financing and lack of data as exclusion factors

Households in poor countries spend more on education than in developed countries

Data confirm that households in many developing countries are spending a far greater proportion of their average GDP per capita on education than those in developed countries. This raises concerns about the prospects of achieving the global education goal, when such a heavy burden of current spending lies on the shoulders of families. For example, household expenses on secondary education amount to 20-25% of average GDP per person in Benin, Chad, Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea and Niger, and more than 30% in Togo. By contrast, in high-income countries this share does not exceed 5%.²⁴

Aid to basic education is low and not going to poorest countries

Within donors' aid portfolios, few prioritise basic education. Moreover, the share of aid to basic education going to the poorest countries, where most support is needed, has been on a downward trend. The share of basic education aid to low-income countries fell from 36% in 2002 to 22% in 2016.²⁵

Education most underfunded sector in humanitarian crises

Education is traditionally the least well-funded sector in humanitarian aid. The share of education in total humanitarian aid was 2.1% in 2017, which is far below the requirements as well as the indicative target of allocating at least 4% of humanitarian aid to education.²⁶

Lack of reliable data

Reliable national statistics and data to identify inequity and assess the particular bottlenecks of marginalised groups are lacking. The SDG 4 Goal "inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning opportunities for all" requires countries' capacity to have statistics and measures to collect and monitor data related to quality, inclusion and equity.

Diagnosing and measuring marginalisation to enable inclusive education


Ensuring no one is left behind in education requires a solid contextual diagnosis of who is at risk of marginalisation and who is already excluded. Such assessments are vital for the development of sound and **inclusive education policy** in the framework of broader sustainable development goals, as education is inextricably connected to the achievement of other goals. Schools play a key role for development as the locus for identification and treatment of malnutrition, for instance, or for vaccination or social information campaigns. Those out of school thus face a double disadvantage.

Identifying and **measuring exclusion in education is challenging**. This is precisely because those who are not in school are less visible or even invisible. In some countries, child births might not be registered and there are no records of children who do not appear in school registers, and their parents may work outside conventional administrative information systems.

Household surveys are thus an important source for analysing the relationship between various individual and group-level characteristics and education opportunities. It is important for such surveys to also be carried out in regions and amongst communities that are at risk of marginalisation and for surveys to reveal intersections between marginalising factors to gain a more holistic understanding of overlap and interaction of different layers of disadvantage.²⁷


For those who are registered in schools, **education management information systems** (EMIS) run by ministries of education are the key data source for analysing marginalisation and exclusion in education through participation and learning outcome data. However, across different countries, EMIS include varying degrees of disaggregation, so it is not always possible to relate school attendance and performance to particular social and individual characteristics.

Meaningful **disaggregation** levels will vary and need to be identified at local and national levels to enable sound analysis of marginalisation and exclusion. These include gender, place of residence, socio-economic situation, nationality and legal status, affiliation to ethnic and social group including religion, mother tongue, as well as individual diversity aspects such as disability, orphanhood or other vulnerability criteria as included in the SDG4 indicators framework.²⁸ It is important to consider that in some contexts revealing affiliation to particular groups or legal status (e.g. refugee) can be sensitive, so data collection needs to be carried out in protection-sensitive ways to avoid doing harm.

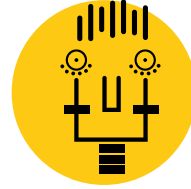


Data collection and compilation are joint efforts by various **actors** including community groups, non-governmental organisations, ministries, research bodies and UN agencies, reaching from the household and school level up to national ministry level. Besides EMIS and household surveys, **data sources** can be completed by rapid education assessments, specific student assessments, population census, national welfare surveys, labour force surveys, public sector monitoring and evaluation systems, or academic and market research studies.

Beyond these data sources, **contextual analysis** of marginalisation and exclusion include assessing social dynamics, conflict dynamics, classroom practice, nature of curricula to identify potentially discriminatory, sensitive or exclusionary content and images.



Data analysis can help identify '**zones of exclusion**', points at which exclusion starts occurring, which gives the opportunity for intervention to address specific moments of exclusion.²⁹ The zones of exclusion model illustrates how enrolments face a steep decline throughout primary grades and how students with low attendance and performance rates fall into 'at risk' zones.



The following four key steps can be taken to diagnose marginalisation in education:

1. **Investigate *who* experiences marginalisation and exclusion in education:** are there particular social groups that are not enrolled, not regularly attending or performing lower than average? What are particular individual characteristics of out-of-school children and of those at risk of grade repetition or dropping out? What are contextual realities in regions with low enrolments or low performance?
2. **Identify *when* marginalisation and exclusion occur:** are children not starting school, dropping out between specific grades, not transitioning between education levels? Are groups or individuals not attending at particular times of the year (such as harvest time)?
3. **Identify *where* marginalisation and exclusion occur:** are children in particular schools or geographical regions attending less or performing worse than others?
4. **Understand *how* marginalisation and exclusion take place:** are pedagogy and curriculum insensitive or discriminatory with regard to certain groups or individuals? Are there specific administrative requirements that might present barriers to certain groups or individuals (such as academic track records or birth certificates for forcibly displaced populations who are often unable to produce these)?

Based on this analysis, relevant equity dimensions can be identified and equity indicators³⁰ and disaggregation levels defined to be subsequently incorporated into EMIS and relevant surveys.³¹

Intervention design: strategic entry points to LNOB in education

Inclusive and equitable education policies. Marginalised groups bear the most consequences of failings of education systems, but they also stand to benefit the most if policymakers and practitioners pay sufficient attention to their specific needs, reflected in inclusive and equitable education sector policies and plans. While inclusive policy may be more expensive to implement and monitor, it pays off at a higher rate. Education sector plans often fall short of identifying marginalised groups and individual characteristics of at-risk groups. In line with commitments to the sustainable development agenda, national and regional policy and sector plans should highlight specific needs of marginalised groups and outline strategies to address these, along with required funding and competencies. Inclusive practice at classroom level requires an enabling environment for policy implementation.

Participatory planning starting from the community level is a key strategic entry point to ensure no one is left behind. Including parents, teachers and students in educational planning and decision-making at local level provides for greater levels of ownership and awareness of the importance of education, while ensuring that education is more relevant and sensitive to localised needs of groups and individuals.

Flexible learning arrangements are crucial in order to get to those who are hardest to reach, including bridges between formal and non-formal education. In situations of protracted conflict, for instance, learners might be overaged and will be better served with accelerated education programmes rather than having to sit through conventional lessons with younger children. For children of nomadic pastoralists, alternative basic education with flexible class hours and curricula suited to their realities and cultural practices have proven successful.³²



Safe and protective learning environments that prioritise the physical and social-emotional safety of learners are a key requirement for inclusive education. This includes physical school buildings and facilities that are adapted to the needs of learners with disabilities, and adequate sanitary facilities with water supply. But it also refers to relationships between students, teachers and the wider learning community, psychosocial and physical well-being of learners and teachers, protection and safety from violence.

Trained teachers are the key to ensuring good-quality inclusive education practice and to creating an enabling classroom environment where all students feel welcome, inspired and encouraged to learn and excel. Investing more in teachers, equipping them with special needs pedagogy competencies, awareness and sensitivity on inclusive and non-violent practice, and tangible skills to handle diversity in classrooms with regard to student backgrounds and learning capacities is crucial to improving student enrolment and performance.

Context-adapted teaching and learning includes relevant curricula and language. For instance, implementing mother-tongue teaching in multilingual countries requires major investment in the production of learning materials and teacher training. However, this investment is to be balanced against the social cost of out-of-school children, higher expenditures as a result of grade repetition or drop-out. A study in Mali found that when taught in their mother tongue, children were five times less likely to repeat the year and more than three times less likely to drop out. In terms of investment, while French-only programmes cost 8% less than multilingual programmes, a World Bank study estimated that the total cost of educating a student through the six-year primary cycle in French actually cost about 27% more, because of the high repetition and drop-out rates.³³

Enhanced financing for basic education is required. After multiple years of stagnation, although aid for basic education slightly increased in 2016 it is still below the required levels to reach SDG4 targets in order to leave no one behind, and below aid allocations to other sectors. Financing also needs to be sustained for several years just to make up for the stagnation over 2010–2015. Moreover, more remains to be done to ensure that donor funding for basic education goes where it is most needed and that humanitarian funding for education scales up.³⁴ In addition, allocation of national budgets to education should rise (target 20%) with a significant proportion to go into basic education.³⁵

Adapted per capita financing for education based on the analysis of equity dimensions and on degrees of exclusion, are another important strategic entry point to ensure adequate funding is available to respond to specific learning needs of individuals and social groups.

Improved data systems allowing analysis at meaningful disaggregation levels are an important strategic entry point. Many countries require technical and financial assistance to further develop EMIS.³⁶ For complementary assessments and surveys to be meaningful, they need to be inclusive of those who are marginalised and hardest to reach.

Achieving equity in education access and learning outcomes also requires actions and reforms **beyond the education sector** to break down barriers on the demand side, such as broader changes in public policy to enable and empower families to send their children to school, and not to work. This calls for improved social protection mechanisms, income and livelihood opportunities and access to social services.

Useful resources

- World Inequality Database on Education (WIDE) - <http://www.education-inequalities.org/>
- Fixing the Broken Promise of Education for All: Findings from the Global Initiative on Out-of-School Children. UIS and UNICEF. 2015. <http://allinschool.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/oosci-global-report-en.pdf>
- Monitoring Education Participation: Framework for Monitoring Children and Adolescents who are Out of School or at Risk of Dropping Out. UNICEF and UIS. 2016. http://allinschool.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/MonitoringEducationParticipation_accessibleWEB.pdf
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