One way of measuring marginalization in education

Blog

Educational equality

The World Inequality Database on Education (WIDE) makes it easier to see the heart-breaking disparities in educational access and learning that affect children around the world.

In the Education for All goals, just as with the new global education goal, SDG4, the emphasis on reaching the marginalised was at the forefront of the minds of those tasked with creating education policy. But measuring marginalization and inequalities in education is not an easy task. National averages of indicators, such as average years in school, often hide huge inequalities within countries, especially among those at the margins.

This challenge prompted the creation of the World Inequality Database on Education (WIDE) in 2012, which now provides a platform for analyzing disparities for 160 countries. WIDE allows you to zoom in on selected countries and indicators, compare disparities across countries, and identify which groups are most disadvantaged within these countries. It is an indispensable tool for measuring marginalization in education.

Much remains to be done

WIDE paints an overall picture showing that much remains to be done to make access to education more equitable. For example, as we showed on International Women’s Day using WIDE, among the bottom-ranked thirty countries for female education, no young woman has acquired more than 3.6 years of education. No wonder, then, that the 2016 Global Education Monitoring Report said it would be half a century before the new global education goal is met – way past the 2030 deadline.

WIDE provides vivid visualizations that enable you to look beyond the averages. You can, for example, compare in detail how countries’ performance has changed over time. Looking at Cambodia, for example, below, you will find that, while the average years of education increased by two years over roughly a decade, the gap between the richest and poorest in the country has remained the same.
WIDE also lets you contrast countries with similar averages, but different levels of inequality. While Pakistan and The Gambia have very similar averages for the percentage of 17-22-year-olds with fewer than four years of education, the gap between the rich and the poor is half as large in The Gambia. In Pakistan, 76% of the poorest children had spent fewer than four years in school, compared with only 7% of the richest children. In the Gambia, 51% of the poorest had spent fewer than four years in school compared to 16% of the richest.

These findings are extremely relevant to our new SDG4 agenda, which calls for at least 12 years of education for all. Our WIDE database shows just how far we are from that goal at present, and how much effort will be required to meet the challenge. It shows that across 94 countries, the richest had completed at least 12 years of education in 36 countries; the poorest had completed at least 12 years in only three: Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Ukraine.
Illustrating gaps in the opportunity for education

WIDE is also useful for illustrating how different circumstances – for example, gender, household wealth, ethnicity and residence – play an important part in shaping opportunities for education. In particular, it demonstrates visually how overlapping disadvantages can compound education disparities.

This figure shows, for example, that, in Nigeria in 2013, the lower secondary completion rate was 75% in urban areas and 37% in rural areas. Within rural areas, there were large wealth gaps as well: only 10% of the poorest were completing lower secondary school compared with 93% of the richest. And, while there was near gender parity among the rural rich, the poorest rural males (17%) were more than five times as likely to complete lower secondary school as the poorest rural females (3%).

The WIDE database is constantly evolving, keeping up with changing policy environments and the availability of new data. For example, to coincide with the 2013/4 GMR on teaching and learning, learning achievement surveys were added to the WIDE database. For the 2015 EFA GMR, new indicators were added related to youth literacy rates and upper secondary completion, as it became part of the post-2015 targets. In addition, the database also started to cover national household surveys for countries not covered by Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS) and Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys (MICS).

To coincide with the launch of the 2016 GEM Report, and the beginning of a new series of GEM Reports analyzing education-related targets in the SDGs, new indicators were added to WIDE on out-of-school youth and tertiary education attainment. In addition, new pages with the parity index, which is the global indicator for SDG target 4.5.1, and many other high-income countries were also included in the coverage.

Help promote education equity by building your knowledge

We invite you to explore the WIDE database and share what you learn to help promote education equity, in your own context and beyond!