Migration, displacement and education

Recent data indicate that about 1 in 8 people are internal migrants living outside their region of origin, about 1 in 30 people are international migrants, and about 1 in 80 are displaced by conflict or natural disasters (Global Education Monitoring Report, 2018). On International Human Rights Day (December 10, 2018), a majority of UN Member States adopted the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration. The 2019 Global Education Monitoring (GEM) Report - Migration, displacement and education: building bridges, not walls - provides a series of practical recommendations on education and migration that will help facilitate its implementation.

As a fundamental human right, education has a key role in advancing sustainable development. Every person should have access to quality education, regardless of his or her origin and background. The latest GEM report stresses the importance of providing access to migrant and displaced children, taking into account ways in which education interacts with these, affecting those who move, those who stay, and those who host foreign populations (Global Education Monitoring Report, 2018).

Internal migration mainly affects many rapidly urbanizing middle income countries, such as China, where more than one in three rural children are left behind by migrating parents. International migration mainly affects high income countries, where immigrants make up at least 15% of the student population in half of schools. It also affects sending countries: More than one in four witness at least one-fifth of their skilled nationals emigrating. Displacement mainly affects low income countries, which host 10% of the global population but 20% of the global refugee population, often in their most educationally deprived areas. More than half of those forcibly displaced are under age 18 (Global Education Monitoring Report, 2018, p. xvii).
Using as a framework the above mentioned interaction between migration and education, the report notes that “migration and displacement can profoundly affect education, requiring systems to accommodate those who move and those left behind.

Two main questions guide the analysis, findings, and recommendations presented in the 2019 GEM report:

- How do population movements affect education access and quality? What are the implications for individual migrants and refugees?
- How can education make a difference in the lives of people who move and in the communities receiving them?

**Key messages**

Although governments have taken steps to include migrants and refugees in national education systems, the 2019 report highlights some persisting barriers. Even when inclusion policies are in place, in practice children and youth from migrant background are still precluded from accessing instruction. Segregation may occur due to a variety of factors: socio-geographical (e.g. if the migrant population is concentrated in specific neighbourhoods); legal (e.g. in South Africa, immigration legislation prevents undocumented migrants from registering at school); performance-related (e.g. if the immigrant children lag behind their peers in host countries). Teachers are no less affected. Insufficient training and the lack of continued support and resources add to the task of managing increasingly diverse classrooms.

One of the key remaining issues at a global level is that refugee education is insufficiently financed. As indicated in the report, US$800 million was spent in this area in 2016 – about one-third of the latest funding gap calculated.

The 2019 report offers a series of recommendations to governments in order to ameliorate provision of access to quality education for migrant and displaced populations, as follows:

- Protect the right to education of migrants and displaced people.
- Include migrants and displaced people in the national education system.
- Understand and plan for the education needs of migrants and displaced people.
- Represent migration and displacement histories in education accurately to challenge prejudices.
- Prepare teachers of migrants and displaced people to address diversity and hardship.
- Harness the potential of migrants and displaced people.
- Support education needs of migrants and displaced people in humanitarian and development aid.

There is a need to address the lack of data on internal migrants (e.g. slum populations, seasonal migrants, nomads and pastoralists, etc.) and their education status, to improve their situation, by planning according to their needs with the aim of reducing legal, administrative, and financial barriers to education. In this regard, “innovative approaches, such as flexible calendars and migrant tracking, and development of teacher capacity should be prioritized” (p. 31).

Recommendations highlight the importance of prioritising increased access to early childhood
programmes, in order to set a strong foundation for children from migrant background and improve the chances of better learning outcomes in later years. Language support programmes are of utmost importance, not only to facilitate integration and academic achievement, but also to mitigate the risk of discrimination and bullying from peers. Preventing prejudices and stereotypes in education against migrant and displaced populations also requires adequate pedagogical and curricular tools delivered by qualified teachers prepared to manage a diverse classroom.

Monitoring progress towards SDG 4

The 2019 GEM report provides details of the monitoring process, based on the most recent available data. As of 2018, four new indicators have been added to measure the progress towards SDG 4, which will be reviewed for the first time in 2019 at the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development.

Target 4.1: Primary and secondary education

The 2019 report proposes a new method to synthesize completion rate estimates from multiple sources – such as surveys and census data – to project them to the most recent year. According to the report, between 2013 – 2017 (considered as a baseline for the SDG period) completion rates were 85% for primary, 73% for lower secondary and 49% for upper secondary education. Citizen-led assessments and a new module in the UNICEF Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys offer valuable insights into the learning achievements of children not in school. Legal, structural, and process factors have an impact on whether the right to education for migrant children is upheld.

Target 4.2: Early childhood

Although consensus around a common measure of early childhood development is difficult to reach, governments should invest in monitoring systems to track progress in cognitive, linguistic, physical, and socio-emotional development of children. Currently, global indicator 4.2.2 – ‘Participation rate in organized learning (one year before the official primary entry age), by sex’ – ranges from around 42% in low income to 93% in high income countries, with a global average of 69% (p. 136). Almost half of 29 humanitarian and refugee response plans reviewed made no mention of learning or education for children under five and less than one third specifically mentioned pre-primary education.

Target 4.3: Technical, vocational and tertiary education

Global participation in tertiary education, measured by the gross enrolment ratio, continued to increase rapidly in many countries, reaching 38% in 2017. It exceeded 50% in upper middle-income countries for the first time in 2016, up from 33% in 2010 (p. 145). Planners can help by recognizing prior non-formal and informal learning and providing career guidance to ease entry into labour markets (p. 142).

Target 4.4: Skills for work

Data for this target are scare outside of high-income countries. National financial education strategies exist in large traditional sending countries in the middle-income group. However, there is scope in both sending and receiving countries to coordinate financial education for migrants at the national level and integrate it into general migration policy to avoid duplication and to reach all migrants (p.167).
Target 4.5: Equity

Enrolment disparities at the expense of boys are likely to explain that only 49% of countries have achieved parity in lower secondary education and only 24% in upper secondary. Wealth and geographical factors are to account for existing disparities as well, but cross-categorisation by multiple dimensions (including gender, location, socio-economic status, etc.) is still difficult. Regarding learners with disability, data about those in displacement is still limited, which calls for adequate strategies to collect high-quality information.

Target 4.6: Literacy and numeracy

The global adult literacy rate in 2017 was 86%, but there a wide geographic disparities. It is recommended that language programmes include migrant and refugee voices in planning and adapt to a range of populations, including through age- and workplace-specific activities.

Target 4.7: Sustainable development and global citizenship

The report highlights the findings from the latest IEA International Civic and Citizenship Study: 11 of the 18 countries for which a comparison could be made improved students’ civic knowledge scores between 2009 and 2016 (p.188). The report indicates three paths through which formal education can contribute to this target: 1) increasing respect for diversity; 2) conflict prevention, peaceful resolution, and reconciliation should be systematically introduced in pedagogical materials; and 3) an open classroom environment that favours the development of critical thinking skills.

Target 4A: Education facilities and learning environments

In 2016, 69% of schools had basic drinking water, 66% sanitation, and 53% basic hygiene services. In 2014, the number of countries legally banning corporal punishment in schools increased from 122 to 131. Data on the numbers of boarding students and their living conditions remains scarce. In the 2013 – 2017 period, over 12,000 attacks on education were registered, harming over 21,000 students and education staff across 28 countries.(p.196).

Target 4B: Scholarships

EU countries have committed to ensure that by 2020 at least 20% of graduates experience part of their studies abroad. Non-EU destination countries do not all report back on students’ achievements or credits, which hampers monitoring (p. 206).

Target 4C: Teachers

Data on teachers at a national and international level remains strikingly scarce. Using national-level definitions, the report found that 85% of primary teachers were trained in 2017 globally, a decline of 1.5 percentage points since 2013. About a half of the countries have the minimum data to calculate teacher attrition rates, and even then, available data are not always easy to interpret – e.g. they do not include private schools, do not account for cross-regional mobility, etc.

The recent trends in migration and displacement have prompted countries to rethink their education systems to improve access for affected populations. Integrating refugees and migrants through education calls for a holistic approach that accounts for geographic, historical, financial, and infrastructural factors. It requires cooperation among the relevant actors in reaching to those who
have been deprived of access to quality education due to conflict or natural disasters. According to
the 2019 GEM report, the recently adopted Global Compact for Safe, Orderly, and Regular Migration
is a valuable framework to ensure that educational opportunities are available for all, regardless of
their status or origin. It brings the agenda of both the Global Compact and that of SDG 4 together in
an effort to facilitate that governments walk the talk with regards to education and migration.

References and sources

UNESCO. 2018. Global education monitoring report, 2019: Migration, displacement and education:
building bridges, not walls. Paris: UNESCO.