
[The global state of learning](#)

BRIEF 3

[Education and development](#)

[Inclusive education](#)

‘Education for all’ is the foundation of inclusion in education

The 2020 Global Education Monitoring (GEM) Report focuses on the SDG 4 commitment to provide inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning for all. The report puts forward a broader understanding of inclusion – beyond the association to people with disabilities – as a process that encompasses ‘actions and practices that embrace diversity and build a sense of belonging’. (GEM Report Team, 2020: 11)

Discriminatory policies and practices permeating education systems prevent people from enjoying their right to education because of their gender, socioeconomic status, ethnicity, sexual orientation, or disability, among other reasons, thus hindering efforts made towards fully achieving the SDG 4 targets. Examples in the 2020 GEM Report include Roma children in Europe and Rohingya refugees being denied access to public education institutions; in Latin America, meanwhile, the history of Afro-descendants is largely absent or misrepresented in learning resources and curricula (GEM Report Team, 2020: 4). Data collection on marginalized groups is still scarce, making it difficult to estimate and compare levels of exclusion across countries.

An inclusive education can lead to higher academic achievement and better self-esteem. It can help prevent stigma, stereotyping, and discrimination. Measures aimed at addressing the obstacles that prevent vulnerable and marginalized groups from enjoying the right to an inclusive and equitable education include abolishing exclusionary laws and policies in education; providing enough funding to implement inclusive learning opportunities; and training education professionals to be aware of stereotypes and how to address them.

The ongoing Covid-19 pandemic has revealed the striking contrasts between the haves and the have-nots across the globe; the education sector is no exception, with disparities in terms of access and outcomes. During the pandemic, 40% of countries have not been able to support learners at risk of exclusion, for example, the poor, learners living in remote areas, linguistic minorities, and learners with disabilities (GEM Report Team, 2020: 61).

Ten recommendations for inclusive education systems

1. Widen the understanding of inclusive education to include all learners regardless of identity, background, or ability. Although most countries (68%) have a definition of inclusive education,

only 57% of definitions cover multiple marginalized groups, and in 26% of countries, the definition covers only people with disabilities or special needs. Despite good intentions, laws, and policies on inclusive education are not always implemented; policy planning is often weak, resulting in inconsistencies and poor execution. Education sector plans, from early childhood to adulthood, should have an inclusion perspective.

2. Target financing to those left behind. Equity and inclusion will not be achieved without adequate funding reaching schools and students according to need. Promote a twin-track approach that allocates general funding to foster inclusive learning environments, as well as targeted funding to follow the furthest behind as early as possible. Integrated services that take a holistic approach to the child's needs are more accessible and can improve the quality and cost-effectiveness of provision.
3. Share expertise and resources. Human and material resources to address diversity are scarce; this presents a management challenge to ensure that specialist support reaches mainstream schools and non-formal education settings.
4. Engage in meaningful consultation with communities and parents so that they can voice their preferences as equals in the design of policies on inclusion in education.
5. Ensure cooperation across government departments, sectors, and tiers. Ministries sharing administrative responsibility for inclusive education must collaborate on identifying needs, exchanging information, and designing programmes. Central governments need to ensure that local governments have the necessary human and financial support to carry out inclusive education mandates.
6. Make space for non-government actors to challenge and fill gaps. Grassroots associations and international NGOs can also play a key role in supporting government policy as well as holding the government to account.
7. Apply universal design. Ensure inclusive systems fulfill every learner's potential. All children should learn from the same flexible curriculum. Assessment should be formative to allow students to demonstrate learning in a variety of ways. Standardized tests that cater to large numbers of students often disadvantage the most vulnerable individuals. Assessment should identify and value all students' learning progress and provide accommodations to remove obstacles without compromising test validity. School infrastructure should not exclude. Technology can also play a key role in supporting differentiated learning.
8. All teachers should be prepared to teach all students. This requires training on inclusive approaches that should be a core element of teacher education programmes. A diverse education workforce also serves as a role model for all students.
9. Collect data on and for inclusion with attention and respect. Lack of data (both quantitative and qualitative) means that planning solutions for inclusive education is difficult. Labeling and categorization of different groups can increase the risk of stigmatization. Education ministries must collaborate with other ministries and statistical agencies to collect population-level data coherently to understand the scale of disadvantage for the marginalized. Administrative systems should aim to collect data for planning and budgeting in the provision of inclusive education services, but also data on the experience of inclusion. The inclusion of qualitative data in national educational management information systems is a promising approach.
10. Learn from peers. Global, regional, and national networks and forums can help through the sharing of experiences.

Monitoring progress towards SDG 4

The second section of the 2020 GEM Report provides an update on the progress made towards SDG 4, its seven targets, and three means of implementation. The main updates include the adoption of the completion rate as a second global indicator for target 4.1. Data on whether teachers are trained

or qualified are scarce and difficult to compare, and other gaps remain, notably in terms of household survey data and good quality data on learning outcomes.

Target 4.1: Primary and secondary education

The completion rate has reached 85% for primary, 73% for lower secondary, and 49% for upper secondary education. 'In low-income countries, as enrolment rates stagnated, completion rates continued to increase, but not enough to ensure universal completion by 2030' (GEM Report Team, 2020: 210). Many countries have high over-age attendance. In high-income countries, some categories of students are greatly affected by exclusionary practices. Results for 2018 from the OECD's Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) show an overall lack of progress over the past 15 years. More work is needed to understand the socioeconomic gaps in learning.

Target 4.2: Early childhood

Participation data on early childhood education depend on the age group definition as well as the institutional arrangements. Average pre-primary school participation has been increasing by about two percentage points every five years and globally stood at 67% in 2018 (GEM Report Team, 2020: 226). Age-appropriate early childhood education has a positive impact on children's development, but in some countries, early school entry is an issue, which can have a negative impact.

Target 4.3: Technical, vocational, tertiary, and adult education

Regional progress shows that in northern Africa and western Asia, gender parity in tertiary education has increased, but in adult learning, there are still some persisting barriers for women related to the cost and difficulty of complying with training schedules. Disadvantaged young people face multiple barriers in accessing tertiary education, including information and networking barriers (GEM Report Team, 2020: 241).

Target 4.4: Skills for work

The acquisition of ICT skills is still uneven, depending on variables such as age, gender, and socioeconomic status. Disaggregated data collected on spreadsheet skills illustrate these findings: '3% of women from the poorest quintile had this skill vs 35% from the richest in Suriname and 39% in Mongolia' (GEM Report Team, 2020: 246). A majority of entrepreneurs in Africa, the Arab states, and Asia and the Pacific are in the informal sector and require entrepreneurship training tailored to their small-scale businesses.

Target 4.5: Equity

Characteristics such as gender, wealth, disability, and ethnic background have a considerable impact on education, yet data are scarce and in the absence of an intersectional approach, it is difficult to identify the real extent of the disparities. Globally, there is gender parity from pre-primary to secondary education, but this hides country-level disparities. In addition, 'measures of disparity by wealth typically compare the poorest and richest 20% of households. However, poorer households tend to have more children. In India, the poorest households have 25% of all children, compared with 15% for the richest' (GEM Report Team, 2020: 254). Identifying indigenous groups in Latin America remains a challenge.

Target 4.6: Literacy and numeracy

According to the 2019 UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS) youth and adult literacy data for 72 countries (including 21 whose last estimates dated from 2010 or earlier), 86% of adults (people aged 15 and above) and 92% of youth (aged 15 to 24) are literate, though significant regional gaps remain. Gender gaps persist among adults particularly in central and southern Asia and sub-Saharan Africa, with women being less likely to be literate, although this gap is closing in the younger generation (GEM Report Team, 2020: 266). ‘Even if universal primary completion is achieved by 2030, the proportion of adults who have not completed primary school may remain above 10% in sub-Saharan Africa until the 2050s’ (GEM Report Team, 2020: 264).

Target 4.7: Sustainable development and global citizenship

The 2016/17 consultation on the guiding principles from the 1974 Recommendation concerning Education for International Understanding, Cooperation and Peace and Education relating to Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms surveyed 83 countries to assess whether said principles were reflected in their education systems. The results were far from encouraging – ‘only 12% of countries fully reflected the guiding principles’ (GEM Report Team, 2020: 274). A new consultation is under way, with simplified questions and coverage of all target 4.7 dimensions; in addition, it will require governments to document responses.

Target 4A: Education facilities and learning environments

Only about 45% of schools in low-income countries have access to basic water services. Menstrual hygiene facilities for girls across the globe remain scarce, as well as the minimum school standards for students with functional difficulties. Gender-based discrimination and violence is a widespread phenomenon, and although 102 countries have endorsed the 2015 Safe Schools Declaration, enforcement is lacking (GEM Report Team, 2020: 282).

Target 4B: Scholarships

About half of the post-secondary education aid in 2018 was directed to scholarships and imputed student costs (GEM Report Team, 2020: 292). This target is among those with a 2020 deadline, but ‘there is no comprehensive database of scholarships for reporting’ (GEM Report Team, 2020: 294).

Target 4C: Teachers

Globally, an estimated 85% of primary and lower secondary teachers are trained according to national standards. In sub-Saharan Africa, 64% of primary teachers and 58% of lower secondary teachers are trained. Less than half (49%) of pre-primary teachers in the region are trained (GEM Report Team, 2020: 302). Preschool teachers are less likely to be trained, even in high-income countries. Education support personnel definitions vary from country to country and data on their inclusion-related use are generally not available.

References and sources

UNESCO. 2020. [*Global education monitoring report, 2020: Inclusion and education: all means all*](#).

[print](#)