
[The Global state of learning](#)

[Education and development](#)

The 2021/2 Global Education Monitoring Report examines the role of non-state actors in education and the delivery of inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning for all. What follows is a summary of key findings and recommendations from the report (GEM Report).

The share of private institutions is increasing and now accounts for approximately 17 per cent of primary (2013) and 26 per cent of secondary (2014) schools globally (GEM Report, 2021: 3). The reasons for choosing a private institution over a public one are varied and no one type of provider delivers a better quality of education than the other. In some cases, non-state actors are better positioned to fill a gap in education provision, including for disadvantaged groups. However, issues of quality and equity remain.

Core principles to ensure equity and inclusion

The report calls on governments to see all educational institutions, public and private, as part of the same system with common rules, financial support, and oversight.

1. Education financing should not favour some learners and exclude others.

Governments should ensure that households do not pay for education goods or services that the country has committed to making available free of charge. Public funding should be allocated based on student enrolment and students' needs. Schools should not select students for admission nor profit from provision. Currently, 28 per cent of countries ban for-profit provision of primary and secondary education, yet 30 per cent do not regulate fees at the same levels (GEM Report, 2021: 25).

2. All learners should receive quality education.

Governments should establish quality assurance mechanisms related to inputs, results, safety, and inclusion and apply them to all education providers. School standards and their achievement should be made publicly available. Private supplementary tutoring can exacerbate inequalities and requires monitoring and oversight.

3. Regulations must be effective and feasible, avoiding unintended harm to disadvantaged learners.

All education providers must be regulated by education authorities to ensure that equity and inclusion standards are met, for example for infrastructure or learning materials. Regulations should be simple,

transparent, easy to monitor and applied equally, and they should be periodically reviewed and adjusted. They should focus on education processes and results related to health, safety, quality, and equity.

4. Good ideas for education must be nurtured.

It is the government's role to create an environment where innovation can flourish. Governments can bring innovation into the education system by monitoring learning and its determinants, compiling information about good practices, providing resources to promote collaboration between state and non-state actors, and piloting and scaling up good ideas.

5. All voices should be given equal opportunities to shape the public debate in education.

Education must be protected from narrow economic and political interests. State and non-state actors should be involved in developing quality-enhancing and equity-oriented solutions for the education system. To this end, governments can use open and inclusive consultations, legislative hearings, petitions, and freedom of information acts to promote transparency and safeguard against inappropriate pressures to influence policy.

Monitoring progress towards Sustainable Development Goal 4

The GEM Report also updates progress towards Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4, its seven targets and three means of implementation. Official SDG 4 statistics reflect the situation prior to the COVID-19 pandemic.

COVID-19

According to a survey of education ministry planning units (June to September 2020), two-thirds of national education statistics units have had to delay or postpone data collection, and household survey administration was severely affected. International learning assessments such as the OECD's Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) were postponed by one year, while some studies collected teachers' views on the potential impact of school closures on learning loss. From February 2020 to October 2021, schools were at least partially closed for 55 per cent of total days (GEM Report, 2021: 208). Globally, only one in three children, and one in six of the poorest, had internet access: the most effective available distance learning method (GEM Report, 2021: 210). The COVID-19 pandemic continues to affect education systems globally, and understanding the pandemic's impact remains a challenge. Learning loss due to COVID-19 school closures is expected to be one of the costliest long-term consequences of the pandemic (GEM Report, 2021: 236).

Target 4.1: Primary and secondary education

Before the pandemic, 64 million primary-age children, 63 million lower secondary-age adolescents and 132 million upper-secondary youth were out of school. These numbers have been largely stagnant for a decade (GEM Report, 2021: 215). Primary school completion rates are approaching or exceeding 90 per cent in all regions except sub-Saharan Africa (GEM Report, 2021: 217).

Three major cross-national learning assessments were conducted in 2019: the [Programme d'analyse des systèmes éducatifs de la CONFEMEN](#) (PASEC), [Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study](#) (TIMSS) and the [Southeast Asia Primary Learning Metrics](#) (SEA-PLM). Results show that universal achievement of minimum proficiency in mathematics is out of reach, while 51% of

children have reached minimum proficiency in reading (GEM Report, 2021: 211, 224). With the adjustment to indicator 4.1.1b, which includes children who have not completed primary school, 43 per cent of children globally have reached minimum reading proficiency, but only 18 per cent in sub-Saharan Africa (GEM Report, 2021: 211).

Target 4.2: Early childhood

Globally, 75 per cent of children are enrolled in school one year before the official primary entry age: around 50 per cent in sub-Saharan Africa, North Africa and Western Asia, compared to 95 per cent in Latin America and the Caribbean (GEM Report, 2021: 244). 'The average attendance rate for children aged 36 to 59 months in 61 low- and middle-income countries was 37%, with a 16-percentage point gap between urban and rural areas and a 34-percentage point gap between the richest and poorest quintiles' (GEM Report, 2021: 241). Adapting to remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic was particularly difficult for young children and for those living in poor home learning environments.

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

'Technical and vocational education and training suffered during the COVID-19 pandemic because up to 80 per cent of programmes focused on practical skills, which should be acquired in person' (GEM Report, 2021: 253). Enrolment for tertiary education has steadily increased at a rate of one percentage point per year, since 2000, with the gross enrolment ratio reaching 39 per cent (GEM Report, 2021: 258). Student loans can help alleviate financial constraints and increase access to tertiary education. They are currently available in over 70 countries, but high levels of student debt raise the question whether they actually make education more affordable and access more equitable as intended (GEM Report, 2021: 262).

Target 4.4: Skills for work

Digital skills are unequally distributed across countries and regions but are closely linked to the level of schooling acquired. In about 50 per cent of countries with data available, a majority of adults hold no core ICT skills. Young people who have not completed at least lower secondary school in low- and middle-income countries are also unlikely to possess ICT skills (GEM Report, 2021: 275, 276).

Target 4.5: Equity

Gender, conflict, and language continue to be factors contributing to education inequality. Globally, there is gender parity from primary through lower secondary education, and the disadvantage of girls in the upper secondary is narrowing. Challenges persist, however, where the language of instruction differs from the language spoken at home. Many children attend rebel-controlled schools (i. e. schools controlled by non-state armed groups), and sometimes for their entire school life (GEM Report, 2021: 290). Collaboration between state and non-state actors in educational planning and service delivery can play a particularly important role in promoting equity in territories governed by rebels. Childhood deprivation is a strong predictor of education outcomes, although household wealth does not always reflect a child's living conditions. In several countries, 10 per cent of children deprived of toys, books, or participation in social activities are in the richest households, while over 30 per cent of children in the poorest households are not deprived (GEM Report, 2021: 290).

Target 4.6: Literacy and numeracy

Global improvement in literacy has stagnated. Almost half of the students who have completed lower secondary school in 18 low- and lower-middle-income countries are unable to read a simple sentence (GEM Report, 2021: 301). Among Africa's poorest populations, numeracy skills have remained stagnant for decades. Gender disparities in literacy persist at 2.1 percentage points among people aged 15 to 24 and 11.5 percentage points among people aged 65 and above (GEM Report, 2021: 303).

Target 4.7: Sustainable development and global citizenship

Only 10 countries report fully incorporating the guiding principles of UNESCO's 1974 [Recommendation concerning Education for international understanding, cooperation and peace, and Education relating to human rights and fundamental freedoms](#). Life -skills based HIV and sexuality education continues to be low with only 5 of 24 assessed countries having established sexual and reproductive health content in curricula (GEM Report, 2021: 317). Knowledge of environmental science also remains low, with only 30 per cent of students reaching proficiency according to 2019 TIMSS data (GEM Report, 2021: 313).

Target 4A: Education facilities and learning environments

Good quality learning cannot take place if the environment is unsuitable or threatens children's well-being. One estimate by the World Health Organization (WHO) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) suggests that 818 million children lack access to basic hygiene facilities at school (GEM Report, 2021: 327). COVID-19 was a reminder that schooling can occur beyond the classroom, but home internet access remains out of reach for many low-income countries. The availability of soap, clean water, and masks to ensure safety during COVID-19 was dramatically different between low-income (10 per cent) and high-income (96 per cent) countries (GEM Report, 2021: 338).

The [Safe Schools Declaration](#), an inter-governmental political commitment to protect schools and universities from military use during armed conflict, has been endorsed by 112 countries. Corporal punishment is banned in 156 countries, but bullying – as measured through international learning assessments – continues to be a problem. The school calendar, the organization of the school day, and determining instruction time, are important factors in student learning outcomes. Consideration should also be given to agricultural seasons, realising that a lack of alignment between local cultures and long school breaks may result in a drop in achievement.

Target 4B: Scholarships

Scholarship funds have increased by 30 per cent between 2015 and 2019, predominantly in low-income countries. However, the number of outbound students has outpaced aid growth. The concept of 'brain circulation' is replacing 'brain drain' with the acknowledgement that although students may leave their countries of origin for education and not return, they can still be a positive asset for their home country.

Target 4C: Teachers

Information about the qualifications of the majority of the world's teachers is still lacking. Sub-Saharan Africa has the lowest percentage of teachers meeting national standards, and pupil/trained teacher ratios there are nearly double the global average. Teachers report that the COVID-19 pandemic has taken a toll on their physical, mental, and emotional well-being, but has also renewed

their enthusiasm for the vocation. In addition, the pandemic has led to calls for reviewing the content of teacher education to include digital skills, as well as training to respond to the new social-emotional and academic needs of students (GEM Report, 2021: 363).

References and sources

Global Education Monitoring Report Team. 2021. [*Global education monitoring report, 2021/2: non-state actors in education: who chooses? who loses?*](#) Paris: UNESCO.

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