LEARNING AGAINST THE ODDS
Evidence and Policies to Support All Out-of-School Children and Adolescents in East Asia and Pacific
Executive Summary
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Context
Why Is Caring About Out-of-School Children and Adolescents So Important?
1. **Context:** Why Is Caring About Out-of-School Children and Adolescents So Important?

The fundamental **right to education** is clearly acknowledged in the **United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC)**, and underlies the need for every girl and boy, regardless of race, economic, political, civil, health or cultural status, to develop and acquire skills for their future learning and well-being.

With the more recent adoption of the **Sustainable Development Goal on education (SDG 4)** in 2015, which aims to “ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all,” pressure mounts further for all countries to reduce the number of out-of-school children – not only those in the so-called ‘developing world’ – with an uncompromised commitment to ‘leaving no one behind’ at the heart of this goal.

In 2017, about **35 million** children and adolescents in the East Asia and Pacific (EAP1) region were still not in school (UIS, 2019) (see Figure 1). Of these, **4 million** were of pre-primary school age (**13 per cent** of 1 year before the official primary entry age), **7 million** were of **primary** school age (**4 per cent** of 6 to 11 year old’s), **8 million** were of **lower secondary** school age (**8 per cent** of 12 to 14 year old’s), and another **16 million** were of **upper secondary** school age (**19 per cent** of 15 to 17 year old’s).

In terms of historical trends (see Figure 2), there has been **significant reduction** in the number of out-of-school adolescents at both lower and upper secondary education, particularly for girls. However, those at primary level have seen no improvement over the past 2 decades or more, indicating that the **most vulnerable and excluded** children are yet to be reached and included.

**Equity in education**, as highlighted in the SDG 4, is also vital for any country’s development. If marginalized groups of children are not given the same access to quality education and learning opportunities, the cycle of poverty and disadvantage is perpetuated – a fact that is difficult to reconcile in a world where wealth and abundance is so plentiful for so many. UNICEF therefore works to identify and address the root causes of inequality that affect the most vulnerable children to better understand why some children do not attend school and support those children in learning.

Unless we take **bold actions**, children and adolescents will remain disadvantaged and left behind from the rapid economic growth and social transformation processes that are going on in the region. It is in this context that this report aims to provide **up-to-date knowledge** and **evidence** on the **profiles** of out-of-school children, examine **barriers** that children and families face in accessing education, and propose **policy responses** and **strategies** to achieve the SDG 4 targets across the region.

It should be noted that this report is also due to efforts initiated in 2010, when UNICEF and the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS) jointly launched the **Out-of-School Children Initiative (OOSCI)** globally to accelerate actions toward the goal of universal basic education of high quality in 2015.

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1 East Asia and Pacific Region consists of 28 countries, including 13 countries in East and Southeast Asia (Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, China, DPR Korea, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Mongolia, Myanmar, Philippines, Thailand, Timor-Leste, Viet Nam) and 15 countries in the Pacific (Cook Islands, Fiji, Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Micronesia, F. S., Nauru, Niue, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tokelau, Tonga, Tuvalu, Vanuatu) (see Figure 3).
FIGURE 1. Overview of Out-of-School Children and Adolescents in East Asia and Pacific Region (by sex and level)

![Graph showing the overview of out-of-school children and adolescents by sex and level.]

Source: UIS, 2019

FIGURE 2. Trends of Number of Out-of-School Children and Adolescents by Level in East Asia and Pacific Region (2000–2017) (by sex and level)

![Graph showing the trends of out-of-school children and adolescents by level and sex from 2000 to 2017.]

Source: UIS, 2019
FIGURE 3. UNICEF East Asia and Pacific map

Source: UNICEF EAPRO, 2018
Data
How Can We Count and Find the Out-of-School Children and Adolescents?
2. Data: How Can We Count and Find the Out-of-School Children and Adolescents?

This regional report is based on the Conceptual and Methodological Framework (CMF) which defines the Global Out-of-School Children Initiative (OOSCI) and standardizes data and policy analysis across national studies. The approach to modelling the OOSCI analysis is through the **Five Dimensions of Exclusion model** (see Figure 4), which presents 5 target groups of children and adolescents defined by the official age of the school level and by their school participation status.

The Five Dimensions of Exclusion are:

- **Dimension 1**: Children of pre-primary school age who are not in pre-primary (ISCED 02) or primary education (ISCED 1).

- **Dimension 2**: Children of primary school age who are not in primary (ISCED 1), lower secondary (ISCED 2) or upper secondary education (ISCED 3).

- **Dimension 3**: Children and adolescents of lower secondary school age who are not in primary or secondary education (ISCED 1, 2 or 3).

- **Dimension 4**: Children and adolescents, irrespective of their age, in primary school who are at risk of dropping out.

- **Dimension 5**: Children and adolescents, irrespective of their age, in lower secondary school who are at risk of dropping out.

*Upper secondary age group* Adolescents in this age group are not a dimension per se in the Global OOSC Initiative, as compulsory education ends at age 15 or below in half of the countries with available data in the EAP region, and thus, many are no longer required to attend school. However, given the critical importance of this level of education and learning, particularly in the fast-growing economies of the EAP region, this Report pays attention to upper secondary education when and as relevant.

This report uses a combination of **quantitative** and **qualitative** data sources for identifying out-of-school children and adolescents. To ensure methodological consistency and cross-country comparability in education statistics, this report analyzes internationally comparable data on population and education that were extracted from the databases of the United Nations and the UIS. Also, the report builds on the in-depth analysis in the national OOSCI studies conducted in 10 countries: Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Myanmar, Papua New Guinea, the Philippines, Thailand, Timor-Leste and Viet Nam.

**FIGURE 4. The Five Dimensions of Exclusion Model**

Source: UNICEF and UIS, 2015
Profiles
How Many, Where and Who Are the Out-of-School Children and Adolescents?

3–1. How Many and Where Are the Out-of-School Children and Adolescents?

**Dimension 1: Out-of-school children at pre-primary school age**

An estimated 4 million children (13 per cent) of pre-primary school age (1 year before primary) are out of school in the EAP region\(^2\), ranging from less than 3 per cent in the Cook Islands, Malaysia, Thailand and Tuvalu, to nearly 70 per cent in Samoa and Timor-Leste. The largest share live in the Philippines, Indonesia and Cambodia. Notably, however, many countries have experienced sharp declines in the rate of out-of-school children at the pre-primary level since 2000, thanks to the increased investment in this level of education. In most countries, gender gaps slightly favour girls over boys. In addition, children from the poorest households throughout the region are significantly less likely to be in pre-primary school.

**Dimension 2: Out-of-school children at primary school age**

An estimated 7 million children (4 per cent) of primary school age are out of school in the EAP region. Of these, approximately 30 per cent are concentrated in Indonesia, while the highest rates occur in Timor-Leste and several countries in the Pacific, such as Marshall Islands, Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands. Again, most countries have reduced the proportion of out-of-school children at primary age since 2000 due to prioritization of basic education, but numbers remain stable. Many of these out-of-school children enter school late and are subsequently classified as over-aged students for their grade. When this occurs, their risk of dropping out of school may become higher. Across the EAP region, there have been large increases in girls’ enrolment in primary education, with most countries either reaching gender parity or going beyond parity to have more girls than boys in school. Typically, there are large gaps associated with characteristics such as wealth, rural or urban residence, disability, minority ethnic or language groups and rural-urban migration.

**Dimension 3: Out-of-school adolescents at lower secondary school age**

An estimated 8 million children and adolescents (8 per cent) of lower secondary school age are out of school in the EAP region. Of these, most children are in Indonesia, Myanmar, the Philippines and Thailand. As is the case for Dimension 2, this estimate could be substantially higher if true figures for China and a few other countries were included. At this age, the vast majority of out-of-school children in most countries are those who previously went to school but have since dropped out. In most countries, there is a gender gap with more girls in school than boys. In numerical terms, girls’ disadvantage in access to basic education has largely been eradicated in the region, although girls may still face numerous barriers in terms of experiences in and around school (e.g. violence, discrimination etc.) and access to further education and work opportunities. Similar inequalities by wealth, residence, ethnicity, language and disability are observed as for Dimension 2. Child labour, which is concentrated in rural areas and among the poorest households, risks affecting adolescents’ school attendance and learning outcomes.

**Dimension 4: Primary school students who are at risk of dropping out**

Drop-out rates from primary education for the region as a whole have declined from 10 per cent in 2000 to 6.3 per cent in 2016. In Cambodia, the Cook Islands, Myanmar, the Solomon Islands, Timor-Leste and Tuvalu, 1 in 5 children (20 per cent) or more leave school before the last grade of primary education. Exposure to early childhood care and education – considered to be a key predictor of whether children are likely to stay in school and complete primary education – varies widely across the region. For most countries, few children are over-age; however, Cambodia, Timor-Leste, Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands all have more than 20 per cent of such over-age children and adolescents.

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\(^2\) This UIS estimate includes inferred data for China, DPR Korea and Thailand for which data are not available, and so is possibly an underestimate of the true total. The estimated numbers and rates of children and adolescents for each Dimension by country are listed in Table 1 on page 13.
Dimension 5: Lower secondary school adolescents who are at risk of dropping out

As children enter lower secondary education, it becomes increasingly common to be over-age, which in turn affects the drop-out rates throughout secondary schooling. In 8 countries, 20 per cent or more of children at lower secondary level are at least 2 years over-age with 2.6 per cent of students in Samoa to 32 per cent in Cambodia in 2016. Larger gender gaps also emerge at this level, where boys appear to be lagging behind girls in terms of grade progression.

Upper secondary age adolescents: no longer required to attend school

Of the 16 million adolescents of upper secondary school age (15 to 17 years old), many are no longer required to attend3, as compulsory education ends at age 15 or below in half of the countries with available data in EAP. For example, compulsory education ends at age 16 in Indonesia, which accounts for nearly 13 per cent of the region’s out-of-school adolescents. At the same time, however, countries such as the Philippines have made upper secondary education compulsory. Women are less likely to be out-of-school in this upper secondary age group, and only 3 countries of the 18 with recently available data show a slight advantage for males (Lao PDR, Papua New Guinea, Tokelau). While many of these adolescents may be working or accessing informal education or training opportunities, it is important to understand the equity gaps in their access to education and learning.

Based on the data, most countries in the region can be classified into 3 broad typologies.

Typology 1: Countries with high out-of-school rates

Across all education levels throughout many Pacific States, Cambodia, Papua New Guinea and Timor-Leste, more than 10 per cent of children are out of school. While data is limited on pre-primary, it is considered that these countries have high out-of-school rates at this level too. In Cook Islands and Tuvalu, less than 4 per cent of pre-primary age children are out of school, while in Samoa, the figure jumps dramatically to 63 per cent. Attachment to schooling also tends to be weak for some of these countries (Cambodia, Solomon Islands, Timor-Leste), as indicated by high drop-out rates in primary and/or lower secondary levels. Policy priorities for these countries are likely to include ensuring that a school is accessible, including in remote and poor areas, and addressing poverty-related barriers to education. Policies to increase children’s access to early learning programmes/pre-school can also help reduce out-of-school rates and weak attachment at subsequent education levels.

Typology 2: Countries with weak attachment to primary education

In Cook Islands, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Samoa and Tuvalu, although enrolment in primary education is relatively high (less than 10 per cent out-of-school rates), attachment to school is low with high drop-out rates before completion of the primary education cycle. Policy priorities to reach and retain children in this group require identification of country-specific barriers to school access and completion – including for the most marginalized groups – with a focus on the quality of teaching and learning policies in the early grades. This also requires careful analysis of overlapping factors of disadvantage, such as girls from the poorest households in remote rural areas, child labour and the most disadvantaged geographical regions etc. Data-driven early warning systems, for example, could identify risks and prevent premature dropout.

Typology 3: Countries with weak transitions and/or attachment to lower secondary education

More than 10 per cent of children remain out of school or drop out at lower secondary age and do not finish the compulsory education cycles in Fiji, Indonesia, Malaysia, Niue, Philippines, Thailand, Tonga, and Viet Nam. These countries are nearly all lower-middle income countries but are quite diverse. In some countries, such as Indonesia, Malaysia and Tonga, a significant number of children are not continuing and/or completing lower secondary education after high levels of primary school participation. Some countries could be included in both Typologies 2 and 3 – such as Myanmar and Lao PDR – which face both weak attachment to primary education

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3 It is for this reason that the Global OOSC Initiative has not included upper secondary education in its analytical framework of the Five Dimensions of Exclusion. However, given the critical importance of this level of education and learning, particularly in the fast-growing economies of EAP region, this Report pays attention to the upper secondary education when and as relevant.
and weak transitions to lower secondary schools. **Policy priorities** need to focus on the transition to lower secondary education, including alternative forms of educational provision for those who are unable to stay in the formal system, and related issues such as preventing irregular school attendance, repetition and drop-out.

Across those ‘typologies’, all countries must prioritize strategies to ensure the **most marginalized** groups of children and adolescents are enrolled and supported to stay in school and learn effectively. Once in school, policies will need to provide these children with an **inclusive and supportive learning environment** to ensure that all children have the opportunity to complete basic education with solid learning outcomes.

### 3–2. Who Are the Out-of-School Children and Adolescents?

Major **characteristics** of out-of-school children and adolescents in the EAP region are as follows, with the most vulnerable populations usually characterized by **several combined factors of disadvantage** – such as gender, ethnicity and geographic location – which are not easily disentangled (e.g. ethnic minority girls from poorest household in remote rural area).

| **Children and adolescents from poor households** | Children and adolescents from the poorest households (usually defined as the lowest 20 per cent in the income quintile) are much more likely to be out of school at pre-primary, primary or lower secondary levels (in Dimensions 1, 2 or 3) than children from richer families in all countries, where data is available. |
| **Children and adolescents living in rural areas** | Disparities in school attendance can be based on area of residence, creating large rural-urban gaps (e.g. Cambodia, Lao PDR, Timor-Leste). In some cases, the rural-urban gap may be compounded by differences in poverty incidence, so that the rural poor are worse off than the general rural population, and notably worse off than the urban poor, as is the case in Cambodia, Indonesia, and Viet Nam. |
| **Children and adolescents living in remote areas or small islands** | The isolation of small islands or other remote locations in mainland countries tend to cause a scarcity in the supply of education (e.g. fewer schools, more physical barriers, fewer qualified teachers). Although data are not always available, studies indicate this is likely to be an issue for attending school in the Pacific Islands, especially Solomon Islands, Micronesia, F. S., Palau and Marshall Islands, as well as in remote areas in Cambodia and Myanmar, for example. |
| **Children and adolescents living in poor urban areas** | There is less poverty in urban than rural areas, but those who are poor in urban areas are among the children at risk of educational exclusion. The urban poor are similarly, if not more, disadvantaged as the rural poor in terms of access to primary education in Lao PDR, Myanmar, Thailand, Timor-Leste and Viet Nam. Although pre-primary provision is usually highest in urban areas, children from the poorest urban households are unlikely to attend school at all or attend low quality public schools or unregulated private institutions. |
| **Young and adolescent girls** | Girls are less likely to attend or complete schools than boys in some countries, although gender parity has increasingly been achieved across the region. Girls are more likely to be out of pre-primary school (Dimension 1) in Micronesia, F. S., Mongolia, Brunei Darussalam, Thailand and Marshall Islands. Disadvantages in primary and lower secondary are less common in the EAP region, but the disadvantage of being a girl can often be compounded with being poor or living in rural areas. For example, in Lao PDR and Myanmar, girls are disadvantaged relative to boys among the poorest families, but not among wealthier families. |
### Young and adolescent boys

The disadvantage for boys (relative to girls) can be observed across all education levels in different countries. For example, boys are less likely to attend pre-primary school in Palau, Nauru, Cook Islands and Malaysia or primary school in Marshall Islands, Timor-Leste, and the Philippines. The scale of the disadvantage tends to grow in lower secondary education. Boys are particularly likely to be over-age for their grade in several countries (including Cambodia, Lao PDR, Marshall Islands, Palau, the Philippines, and Timor-Leste), a risk factor for dropping out. In Cambodia and Viet Nam, boys are disadvantaged relative to girls among the poorest families, but not among wealthier families.

### Children and adolescents from ethnic or linguistic minorities

These children and adolescents are over-represented in the out-of-school population across several countries including Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar Thailand, Timor-Leste and Viet Nam. There are varying degrees of educational (and other) exclusions among different ‘minority groups’ in each country context.

### Children and adolescents who work

In Lao PDR and Myanmar, there is a strong association between working and being out-of-school in primary and lower secondary school (Dimensions 2 and 3). In other countries, children who work often seem to be able to combine work and school to a certain extent, but children who work long hours or who live in challenging conditions may still have difficulty doing so and become out-of-school.

### Children and adolescents who migrate or whose parents migrated

Across all education levels and out-of-school dimensions, rural-urban migrants are more likely to be out of school than non-migrants. This is the case in Viet Nam with internal migrations, as well as in Thailand, where children of international immigrants often drop out after completing primary education. Vulnerabilities associated with migration might also be related to non-economic factors such as climate change. In these cases, data are limited for most countries.

### Children and adolescents with disabilities

Children and adolescents with disabilities are much more likely to be disproportionately out of school in all education levels and out-of-school dimensions than those without disabilities or with partial disabilities. Although data collection on children with disabilities is limited in most countries, reports in Viet Nam, Cambodia and Myanmar strongly confirm their disadvantage.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dimension 1</th>
<th>Dimension 2</th>
<th>Dimension 3</th>
<th>(additional)</th>
<th>Dimension 4</th>
<th>Dimension 5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pre-primary school-age children</td>
<td>Primary-age children</td>
<td>Lower secondary-age children</td>
<td>Upper secondary-age children</td>
<td>Cumulative drop-out rate before last grade of primary</td>
<td>Cumulative drop-out rate before last grade of lower secondary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of OOSC</td>
<td>Rate of OOSC</td>
<td>Number of OOSC</td>
<td>Rate of OOSC</td>
<td>Number of OOSC</td>
<td>Rate of OOSC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brunei Darussalam</td>
<td>321</td>
<td>4.9</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>4.7</td>
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</tr>
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<td>57.0</td>
<td>56.4</td>
<td>57.5</td>
<td>184,824</td>
</tr>
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<td>China</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cook Is</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>n</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DPR Korea</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fiji</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>3.2</td>
<td>n</td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>2,061,360</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kiribati</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>577</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lao PDR</td>
<td>57,012</td>
<td>36.9</td>
<td>36.4</td>
<td>37.4</td>
<td>50,332</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malaysia</td>
<td>6,969</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>n</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>2,061,360</td>
</tr>
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<td>Marshall Is</td>
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<td>35.2</td>
<td>33.6</td>
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</tr>
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<td>23.6</td>
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<td>Mongolia</td>
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<tr>
<td>Myanmar</td>
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<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
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<td>15.7</td>
<td>32.7</td>
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<td>Niue</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>44.3</td>
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<td>-</td>
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<tr>
<td>Palau</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>9.6</td>
<td>19.6</td>
<td>n</td>
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<tr>
<td>Papua New Guinea</td>
<td>52,598</td>
<td>26.5</td>
<td>26.9</td>
<td>26.1</td>
<td>254,607</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philippines</td>
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<td>20.4</td>
<td>19.3</td>
<td>21.4</td>
<td>596,284</td>
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<td>Samoa</td>
<td>3,062</td>
<td>63.1</td>
<td>60.9</td>
<td>65.1</td>
<td>1,154</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Solomon Is</td>
<td>5,613</td>
<td>34.6</td>
<td>34.3</td>
<td>34.9</td>
<td>29,887</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thailand</td>
<td>24,053</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Timor-Leste</td>
<td>26,799</td>
<td>66.9</td>
<td>66.5</td>
<td>67.2</td>
<td>42,619</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tonga</td>
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<td>116</td>
<td>n</td>
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<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuvalu</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>n</td>
<td>5.8</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vanuatu</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>5,103</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Viet Nam</td>
<td>10,613</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>n</td>
<td>127,071</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East Asia and Pacific</td>
<td>4,020,976</td>
<td>13.0</td>
<td>12.1</td>
<td>13.9</td>
<td>6,978,891</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Note:** Table 1 provides data on the number of OOSC (out-of-school children) and the rate of OOSC by gender and age group for various countries in East Asia and the Pacific region. The data includes information on pre-primary school-age children, primary-age children, lower secondary-age children, upper secondary-age children, and cumulative drop-out rates before the last grade of primary and secondary education.
Barriers
Why Are These Children and Adolescents Out of School?
## 4. Barriers: Why Are These Children and Adolescents Out of School?

A variety of demand- and supply-related barriers keep children out-of-school in countries of the EAP region. Major barriers include the following:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Demand-side Barriers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>School-related fees and costs</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The abolishment of school fees and other pro-poor targeted policies reduce the cost of school for all families. The provision of free meals (including breakfast), learning supplies and textbook provision, scholarships, stipends, cash transfers or other demand-side financing mechanisms are just some of the policies introduced to support children from the poorest families. Despite the tuition fee free policies however, schools continue to charge some sort of fees – formally or informally – to account for budget gaps. Tuition fees levied by teachers for extra lessons outside of normal class time are a common barrier in many countries. These hidden costs of schooling can be a disincentive for entering school on time or for completing school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Child labour</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child and adolescent labour is overwhelmingly concentrated in rural areas and among the poorest households with most employed children working in agriculture alongside their families. Child work in the household, which is disproportionately done by girls, can affect schooling just as much as paid employment, while boys from poor families are also likely to face societal and family pressures to start working. A basic legal framework should be in place to protect children and adolescents who work so that child labourer’s are able to benefit from non-formal and complementary education programmes which combine work and education.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>National and international migration</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural-urban migration can cause major disruptions in schooling as it is linked to absenteeism and being over-age due to repetition, which thereby increases the risk of dropping out. Migrants often settle in urban slums serviced by poor quality public services, with these gaps enabling the proliferation of unregulated, frequently low quality, private schools. Household registration systems present a formal bureaucratic barrier to education for rural-urban migrants. International migrants face a range of barriers to education in their host country, especially if they do not have permission to be there. Other barriers remain to further decrease access, including documentation, language, stigmatization and non-formal school fees. Countries may be reluctant to extend public services to migrants, especially to those who do not have permission.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Climate change</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The physical geographies of many EAP countries make them particularly vulnerable to climate change, and children and adolescents are likely to be most impacted by the negative consequences of sea level rising, massive flooding, crop failures and other outcomes. Existing evidence shows that children are already impacted by climate change, in terms of their nutrition, health and livelihood, which in turn, has an impact on their ability to attend school and learn effectively.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnicities, languages and social norms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disabilities</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Supply-side Barriers | **Beginning of compulsory schooling** Many children from poorer households do not have access to early childhood education and learning opportunities. In most EAP countries, compulsory education starts only at primary level, but given the strong evidence on multiple benefits for subsequent education and learning outcomes, beginning and duration of compulsory schooling could be lowered.  
**Physical access** Insufficient availability of primary and lower secondary schools in rural areas is a key barrier in many countries. Long distance to schools (especially secondary) and lack of transportation in rural areas discourage many children and adolescents, particularly girls, to continue their schooling. Many schools in rural areas are incomplete and do not offer the full primary cycle or create multi-grade classrooms. Poor infrastructure and facilities, including lack of water and sanitation, are likely to deter children and adolescents from attending school, and remains a key barrier to those with disabilities.  
**Entry and registration requirements** Birth certificate requirements for enrolment in school are identified as a significant administrative barrier to the right to enrol in school. Often, the cost of obtaining a birth certificate can be prohibitive for those from the poorest families in rural areas. Also, children and adolescents from migrant groups and ethnic minorities tend to have lower birth registration rates than the national average. Other barriers for schooling, including progression and transition to the next level of education include, for example, age limit, requirement for test scores and result of high-stakes examinations etc. |
| Teachers and learning environment | Developing a qualified workforce does not match the rapid expansion of education. There is a need for more equitable deployment and allocation of teachers to the areas that need them, which usually are poorer, and more remote, rural areas. Teachers’ attitudes, including gender-biased expectations, can also create disincentives and conditions for dropping out of school or lower performance for certain groups. School-related violence (sometimes gender-based) – including sexual and emotional violence and corporal punishment – create unsafe and often abusive learning environments for children and adolescents. |
| Curriculum relevance and learning | To address the irrelevant nature of certain curricula, efforts are being made to make them more competency-based, with other life skills (so-called 21st Century skills), and to introduce more child-centered and gender-responsive pedagogical methods. Several EAP countries supported mother tongue-based multilingual education by developing relevant teacher training, recruiting teachers from ethnic or indigenous communities, and developing learning materials; however, coverage still remains limited. |
| Education finance | Education expenditure in many EAP countries is below international recommendations (4–6 per cent of GDP or 15–20 per cent of public expenditure) and is often not focused on basic education. Fee free education tends to incur surges in household expenditure, as various levies are charged on parents to cover school’s operational budget. One of the most effective ways to target poor populations is to channel funds to where they are most needed through a equitable block grant process and decentralized financing mechanism. Critical to this is an equity-based formula which favours small and disadvantaged schools, to offset their increasing households’ costs. Also, there need to be more innovative financing mechanisms/modalities. |
Policy Actions
How Can We Reach and Include All Out-of-School Children and Adolescents?
5. **Policy Actions:** How Can We Reach and Include All Out-of-School Children and Adolescents?

This report presents a set of 10 key policy actions to tackle the barriers most disadvantaged and excluded children and adolescents face in their education and learning in the EAP countries.

1) **Expand public early childhood education provision and ensure smooth transition to primary education**

Public investment in early childhood education should be increased to provide the most disadvantaged children with foundational skills, including cognitive, physical and socio-emotional skills, in preparation for life-long learning. As a result, the current trends of a heavy reliance on household expenditure for private service providers should decline. Early learning promotes school completion and increases the learning outcomes of children and adolescents later in primary and secondary education. Targeted resources and investments are needed to reach the most disadvantaged children, who would benefit the most from quality early learning opportunities, such as those provided in their mother tongue. Ensuring learning at this foundational level and smooth transition into primary education is a key gamechanger for the lives of children and adolescents in the region.

2) **Facilitate on-time enrolment, progression and completion, particularly during grade transitions and emergencies**

Grade repetition and dropouts are costly and counter-productive for ensuring equitable access and participation, as well as better learning outcomes. To motivate and support all children and adolescents in the EAP region, education systems need effective policies and strategies to facilitate on-time enrolment, promote smooth transition between education levels and to safeguard education during emergencies. To this end, it is essential to have a combination of improved teaching, relevant curriculum and inclusive pedagogies throughout education pathways. Also, effective use of Education Management Information System (EMIS) data with an early warning system can identify at-risk children and prevent dropouts. Ministries of Education should create an enabling environment for risk reduction and increase the resilience of education systems through risk-informed and conflict-sensitive planning, budgeting and programming in the face of emergencies, which include both natural disasters and conflicts.

3) **Focus on learning, particularly to acquire the foundational skills and achieve better learning outcomes for all children and adolescents**

Good learning environments and outcomes contribute to better participation and completion, not vice versa. Education systems thus need to strengthen the quality of teaching and learning so that all students meaningfully progress in the school system and acquire basic literacy and numeracy skills by the end of compulsory/basic education. Children and adolescents can then build on these foundational skills and obtain more complex knowledge and the transversal skills (also known as 21st Century skills). It is critical to establish strong national assessment systems to regularly monitor learning outcomes at various stages of education. Investing in such systems is cost-efficient, as data analytics can provide insights into critical policy questions around learning gaps and inefficiencies. Also, teachers should be trained and supported to carry out classroom-based formative assessments to improve teaching and learning, and by so doing, prevent grade repetition and dropouts. Key to this is pedagogic leadership and support by principals and supervisors to create effective and inclusive learning environments within schools.
4) Develop a truly inclusive education system with flexible strategies and pathways

The education system needs to become more inclusive by addressing the multiple challenges and barriers, such as those identified in this report. With strategic vision, political commitment and realistic planning and budgeting, various inclusive education strategies should be implemented. They are, for example, mother tongue-based and multilingual early literacy programmes, gender-sensitive teaching and learning materials, scholarships for the poorest children, and universal design and assistive technologies for children with disabilities etc. Also, the education systems should become adaptive and flexible, and embrace innovative ideas in the delivery of non-formal programmes, such as accelerated learning, flexible models, and catch-up programmes, with pathways to certification and accreditation. Such a national equivalency framework can facilitate children’s and adolescents’ movement across formal and nonformal education systems while promoting equity in education opportunities.

5) Promote decentralized accountability and provide comprehensive school support for local actions/solutions

Effective school-based management is key to delivering improved education services in each locality, with decision-making authority, resources, associated responsibilities and accountability at the forefront. Well-managed decentralization can increase school autonomy, empower school communities and stakeholders, encourage their responsiveness to local needs, and ultimately improve educational participation and learning outcomes. Disadvantaged schools should be prioritized in the provision of resources and support by local and national authorities as they tend to lack internal capacity and resources to tackle various challenges. To have real impact, various forms of support (e.g. infrastructure, materials, teachers, funding etc.) need to be provided at the same time rather than in a fragmented and uncoordinated manner. These schools should also be assisted by regular, well-intended supervision and quality assurance (rather than fault-finding inspection) to support self-evaluation and improvement, enhanced school leadership and meaningful community participation.

6) Attract, develop and retain teachers and school leaders with the right set of skills, and deploy them in an equitable manner

The capacity of the education workforce in schools is the foundation to delivering successful policies which respond to children and adolescents’ learning needs in an equitable manner. In other words, teachers and school leaders, who are well trained, qualified and motivated, are key drivers to transform low performing disadvantaged schools into well-functioning effective schools that promote equity and quality. Policies need to ensure the provision of pre-service training and in-service continuous professional development opportunities (including during the induction periods). To attract and retain a high-quality education workforce in these disadvantaged schools, the education systems should develop and provide supportive working conditions, including adequate financial and career incentives, as well as mentoring/coaching support. Deployment and management of each education workforce needs to be driven by data and needs, rather than ad-hoc decisions, favouritism and urban-bias.

7) Collect, analyze and use data effectively for equity

Data is at the heart of efforts to tackle inequities in education. Therefore, the national statistics system – and EMIS in particular – needs to be strengthened to produce timely, relevant and reliable data with
variables related to vulnerable populations (e.g. ethnicity, disabilities, language). In the SDG 4 era, education monitoring activities must integrate different data sources (e.g. administrative, household surveys, learning assessments, financial data), so close links should be established with various data producers/owners within and beyond Ministries of Education (e.g. civil registry, health, social protection, labour etc.). As this report has demonstrated, profiles of out-of-school children and adolescents can and should be regularly monitored and updated in each EAP country so that relevant and innovative policies are developed and implemented further to reach and support those who are at risk of being left behind. Annex 5 further suggests specific recommendations for enhanced data production, analysis and use for equity in education.

8) **Prioritize education in government budgets, and invest smartly and efficiently**

Government budgets in the EAP region need to prioritize education to meet the internationally suggested benchmark of education expenditure towards 15 to 20 per cent of total government expenditure, and 4 to 6 per cent of GDP, with a large proportion allocated for pre-primary and basic education. Strengthening public finance management systems in education is one of the key game-changers to bring better results for children, particularly the most disadvantaged, through equitable resource allocation and targeted investment in priority areas/population groups etc. (e.g. school grants, capitation grants, scholarships, teachers and other support systems). With equity-focused financial monitoring, data analytics can facilitate better understanding of financial effectiveness and efficiencies, or wastages, as they relate to enrolment, progression and retention.

9) **Enhance partnership and coordination among stakeholders who serve marginalized groups**

In most countries, marginalized groups need a greater voice and participation in the development and implementation of policies at a national and local level. Tackling the complex and enormous challenges around out-of-school children and adolescents necessarily requires that various stakeholders join forces and bring their strengths and resources together. At the national level, effective advocacy and communication is fundamental to encourage more partners and service providers – including civil society, religious leaders, business/companies, youth groups etc. – to come together to support education for the excluded populations. Stronger coordination among education providers is needed to advocate against unregulated, low-quality private schools which target the vulnerable children of immigrants or rural-urban migrants, children with disabilities or children who need to work.

10) **Promote cross-sectoral approaches and interventions to tackle barriers related to poverty and violence in and around schools**

The diverse needs and challenges of the out-of-school population require a holistic approach to policies and programming, including the integration of health, nutrition, water, sanitation, child protection, social protection and gender-responsive interventions, as needed. For example, challenges of poverty require cross-sectoral solutions to reduce families’ reliance on child labour and incentivize their support to their children's schooling and learning. Appropriately targeted social protection mechanisms, such as cash transfers or stipend programmes based on good attendance and performance, can have positive effects on reducing the impact of family poverty on school retention and learning. Also, barriers related to violence in and around school, including gender-based violence and attacks on schools in conflict-affected situations, require urgent policy interventions to ensure children’s well-being, and effective and safe learning in the EAP region.
Way Forward
What Should We Do Now, Together?
6. The Way Forward: What Should We Do Now, Together?

The issues around equity in education in general, and out-of-school children and adolescents in particular, are both complex and daunting. At a national level, they require strong commitment and leadership to realize the promise of SDG 4 and the CRC, with governments and key stakeholders – the ‘duty bearers’. Identifying and supporting all out-of-school children and adolescents to survive and thrive, is also a strategic approach to accelerate social and economic development across low to middle income countries, and also ensure social cohesion in upper income countries. As highlighted in this report, it is essential to have a consistent, budgeted and long-term strategy led by government. Such strategy should be based on evidence, while also remaining flexible enough to adapt to the various needs of children and adolescents.

Responding to these challenges and needs also requires collective commitment and extra efforts by key partners and stakeholders. Indeed, there are opportunities in the EAP region where a number of regional mechanisms, platforms and initiatives exist. These can be strategically mobilized to further facilitate cross-national fertilization and intra- and inter-regional exchange and collaboration.

- In the context of the Asia Pacific Regional Roadmap for the SDG 4-Education 2030 Agenda, developed by the Regional Thematic Working Group on Education 2030, the SDG 4 National Coordinators from each government and key regional stakeholders, including the Southeast Asia Ministers of Education Organization (SEAMEO) and Asia South Pacific Association for Basic and Adult (APSBAE), could join force with UNICEF, UNESCO and other partners to address the barriers that many marginalized children and adolescents face in the EAP region.

- Financial and technical support needs to be mobilized to the implementation of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Declaration on Strengthening Education for Out-of-School Children and Youth. The forthcoming SDG 4 Progress Review and the Asia Pacific Regional Education Conference (2020) could further highlight this and mobilize the political will and momentum around the issues of out-of-school children and adolescents in the region.

- A range of issues and recommendations could be followed up by various regional initiatives, such as the joint regional initiative by UNICEF EAPRO, UIS and UNESCO Bangkok on ‘Enhancing Statistical Capacity for Education 2030-SDG 4’. Data and statistics are key drivers to monitor and support out-of-school children and adolescents, and can contribute to the strengthening of capacity and systems.

- The national OOSC studies point to the need for further research. There is a strong call for more evaluations of targeted policies to reduce out-of-school children and adolescents at national and local levels so that policy changes and investment can be linked to more structured monitoring and evaluation tools and outcomes. Similarly, regarding the complexity of multiple factors of disadvantage, rigorously designed research should be able to provide a better understanding of which policy targets might be more effective to reach the most marginalized.

- Finally, the challenge in increasing access and retention for the out-of-school population lies beyond the education sector. Developing more adequate and effective social and labour market policies can engage various actors to provide marginalized students with greater learning opportunities. Furthermore, enabling links between the education sector and the labour market can provide additional reinforcement to developing life-long learning needs for economic growth and sustainable development.

Alignment among these and key efforts led by other partners such as the Global Partnership for Education, World Bank, Asian Development Bank, the Pacific Community, bilateral donors, among many others, will be key to accelerate results and achieve SDG 4 commitments for all children and adolescents out of school in the EAP region.

UNICEF stands ready to further promote such collective efforts and contribute to the realization of the right of every child to quality education and learning.

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4 The Declaration was adopted in September 2016 and accessible at: https://asean.org/storage/2016/09/ASEAN-Declaration-on-OOSCY_ADOPTED.pdf