

FOCUS

Quality education and child-friendly schools

On any given day, more than a billion children around the world go to school. Whether their classes are held in buildings, in tents or sometimes even under trees, these children should be learning, developing their potential and enriching their lives. For too many children, however, school is not a positive experience.

The child-friendly school model is based on the simple premise that schools can and should operate in the best interests of the child. Educational environments must be safe, healthy and protective, staffed with trained teachers, equipped with adequate resources and offering conditions appropriate for learning. Such educational quality is important, first of all, because it is integral to fulfilling each child's fundamental right to education; what's more, improving the quality of education can also lead to gains in access, gender equity, empowerment and learning achievement.

Child-friendly schools have become the main approach through which a network of international and national partners is promoting quality education for all children, in everyday situations as well as in emergencies.



DID YOU KNOW...

Globally, 85 per cent of primary-school-age children attended school in 2006. In more than 60 developing countries, at least 90 per cent of primary-school-age children were in school in 2007.

In 93 countries, the child-friendly school approach is used for ensuring children their right to quality education.

Some 75 million eligible children were not enrolled in school in 2006. In 2007, 101 million children of primary school age – 53 million girls and 48 million boys – were not attending school.

Universal primary education is a particular challenge in sub-Saharan Africa, where 46 million children were out of school in 2007, and South Asia, with 35 million out of school that same year.

UNDERLYING ISSUES

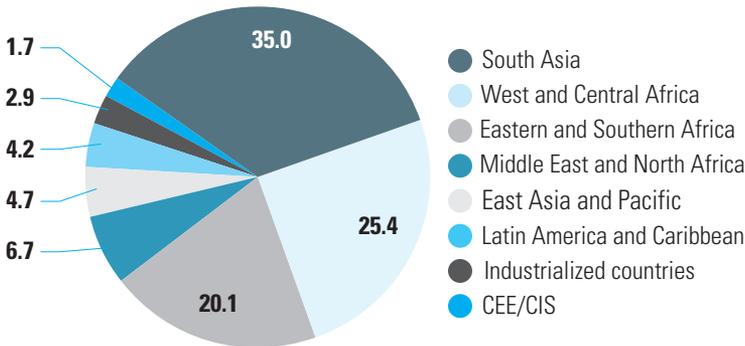
Schools are not 'one size fits all' institutions, and children have diverse needs. They come to school with unique personalities and backgrounds, shaped by the differing circumstances of their homes and communities. Child-friendly schools build upon these assets. At the same time, these schools adjust for the factors in the home and community that might make it difficult for children to enrol in school, attend regularly and succeed in their studies.

Child-friendly schools are inclusive and marked by their quality. Their physical environment, and the emotional and social atmosphere that prevails within, should be

appropriate for learning. In such schools, children's rights must be protected and their voices heard. The environment must be a haven in which children can learn and grow, and it must reflect innate respect for their unique identities and varied needs.

Inclusiveness, gender-sensitivity, tolerance, dignity and personal empowerment are all fundamental to child-friendly schools. Girls' privacy and safety are ensured through the provision of separate toilet facilities for girls and boys, and healthy practices are promoted through the provision of hygiene education and safe water for drinking and hand-washing.

Number of primary-school-age children in millions not attending school in 2007



Note: CEE/CIS stands for Central and Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States.

Source: UNICEF global databases, 2008, and UNESCO Institute for Statistics Data Centre, 2008.

ACTIONS

Ratify all relevant human rights conventions. Formally recognize education as a human right and ratify all relevant international treaties. This must happen if states are to fulfil the Education for All goals.

Ensure access to education. Budget for and implement early childhood education; commit to compulsory primary education; develop secondary education, supported by measures to make it accessible to all children; and ensure equitable access to higher education.

Remove economic barriers to education. Abolish fees for primary education; collaborate with the non-formal education sector to promote and facilitate access to other learning opportunities; and include specific measures related to the removal of economic barriers in national plans of action and poverty reduction initiatives.

Promote inclusion and end discrimination. Ensure that births are registered, because the lack of a birth certificate may result in the denial of a place in school; eliminate all forms of discrimination.

Provide a broad, relevant and inclusive curriculum. Promote a broad-based curriculum that aspires to equip children with numeracy and literacy, as well as with knowledge in science, the humanities, sport and the arts; provide opportunities for play consistent with the right to optimum development.

Develop rights-based learning and assessment. Ensure that children's right to express their views is granted and that their views are given due weight;

ensure that teaching and learning materials are adequate.

Ensure adequate training, support and respect for teachers. Establish minimum qualification standards for teachers at all levels of education; introduce measures to protect teachers' rights (for instance, regarding pay scales, management support, and other areas of concern to them).

Introduce child-friendly, safe and healthy learning environments. Ensure minimum health and safety standards, and guarantee a minimum frequency of school inspections; provide packages of health care, including nutrition, screening, health checks, malaria prevention and attention to children affected by HIV and AIDS.

Respect identity. Provide bilingual or multilingual education for children not familiar with the language of instruction; consult with the community to ensure respect for religion, culture and language.

Ensure children's participation. Establish and encourage student participation at all levels; involve children in the development of relevant school policies.

Protect integrity. Prohibit all forms of violence against children, including physical and humiliating punishment in school and at home; support and train teachers to end physical punishment and introduce strategies for non-violent conflict resolution; and provide effective mechanisms for complaint by children.

Adapted from, A Human Rights-Based Approach to Education for All.

SPOTLIGHT

ON ACHIEVING RESULTS

The Schools for Africa campaign, launched by former South African President Nelson Mandela in 2004 to provide safe learning environments and improve the quality of education for the continent's children, by mid-2008 had benefited around 3 million children in **Angola, Malawi, Mozambique, Rwanda, South Africa** and **Zimbabwe**.

Thailand has developed standard architectural designs for the construction of new schools and the renovation of existing ones as part of its drive to implement a child-friendly school policy.

In **the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia**, following a 2006 Ministry of Education endorsement, the child-friendly school model became law.

In **China**, successful piloting of the child-friendly school model in 1,000 schools informed the Government's 2007 decision to adopt the approach as its model for improving the quality of primary and secondary education.

In West Africa, girl-friendly school models have been implemented in **Burkina Faso, Cameroon, the Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Mauritania, Nigeria** and **Senegal**.

Some governments have introduced Learning Plus, an initiative that expands school functions to include delivery of social services to children. **Lesotho, Rwanda, Swaziland** and **Zambia** have found these services so crucial to learning that they have made them part of their child-friendly school approach.

For more information, see:

Child Friendly Schools Manual
UNICEF, New York, 2009

A Human Rights-Based Approach to Education for All, UNICEF and UNESCO, New York, 2007

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