ALL IN SCHOOL كلّنا في المدرسة

MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA
OUT-OF-SCHOOL CHILDREN INITIATIVE

SUMMARY
STATE OF PALESTINE
COUNTRY REPORT ON OUT-OF-SCHOOL CHILDREN

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Executive summary

The country report on out-of-school children (OOSC) in the State of Palestine is the product of a year-long collaboration between the Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MoEHE) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). Motivated by their shared commitment to securing the right of every child in Palestine to inclusive and equitable quality education, the out-of-school children country report puts a spotlight on 5-15-year-old children excluded from and within education.

To this end, the report undertakes three tasks. It first provides detailed analyses of 5-15-year-old children who are both out of school, and who are in school but are at risk of dropping out, using the analytic frameworks developed by the Global Initiative on Out-of-School Children (OOSCI). It then identifies and describes the barriers that contribute to these children's exclusion from education. Concurrently, it presents brief descriptions of existing policies and efforts towards addressing these barriers and recommends ways to strengthen existing efforts. Finally, the annexes to this report provide an in-depth exploration of three particular groups: children living in the Gaza Strip, 16-17-year-old children[1] , and children living in East Jerusalem.

This Executive Summary highlights the main findings from the analyses of children who are out of school or who are currently in school but are at risk of dropping out, the barriers bringing about their exclusion from and within education, and the landscape of pertinent policies. Those barriers to accessing quality education in the State of Palestine are grounded in the context that includes the reality of the ongoing development of Palestine's education system, Israeli occupation and frequent episodes of armed conflict.

Out-of-School Children and the Dimensions of Exclusion from Education

The OOSCI has developed an analytic framework that seeks to understand out-of-school children through five dimensions. These five dimensions include two different groups of children: children who are out of school (Dimensions One, Two and Three) and children who are in school but are at risk of dropping out (Dimensions Four and Five). Thus, the term "exclusion" takes on a different meaning for each group. For children who are out of school, the term refers to their exclusion from education. For children who are in school but are at risk of dropping out, the term refers to their possible exclusion within education as a result of non-inclusive teaching practices and discriminatory attitudes in the school environment, among others.

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[1] The upper secondary school age (11 and 12 Grade) is not part of the main analysis in terms of numbers. Including this group required special methodology because upper secondary is not mandatory in SOP, hence if a kid is out of school at grade 12, we cannot officially call it a case of drop out or out of school child.

Accordingly, in capturing exclusion from education in the State of Palestine:

- **Dimension 1:** refers to 5-year-old children who are not in pre-primary or primary school,

- **Dimension 2:** refers to 6-9-year-old children who are not in primary or lower and upper secondary school,

- **Dimension 3:** refers to 10-15-year-old children who are not in primary or lower and upper secondary school.

In capturing exclusion within education in the State of Palestine:

- **Dimension 4:** refers to children who are in 1st-4th grades but are at risk of dropping out,

- **Dimension 5:** refers to children who are in 5th-10th grades but are at risk of dropping out.

Employing this analytic framework and comparing across the five dimensions, two notable patterns emerge. Firstly, using data from the 2014 Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) of Palestinian households, an estimated 1.2 per cent of 6-9 year olds (corresponding to an estimated 5,611 children) and 4.9 per cent of 10-15 year olds (corresponding to an estimated 31,773 children) in the State of Palestine are out of school; and the relation between the rate of exclusion from education and age of the child is J-shaped[2] . At age 5, about one out of ten children are excluded from education. The rate of exclusion decreases at age 6, 7 and 8 and then increases slightly and gradually until age 12. The rate of exclusion almost doubles between ages 12 to 15, with about one out of fifty 12-year-old children excluded from education compared to about one out of seven 15-year-old children. This rapid increase in the rate of exclusion is particularly extreme for boys: about one out of four 15-year-old boys are out of school in the State of Palestine.

Figure 1: Gender and Age Patterns for Exclusion from Education
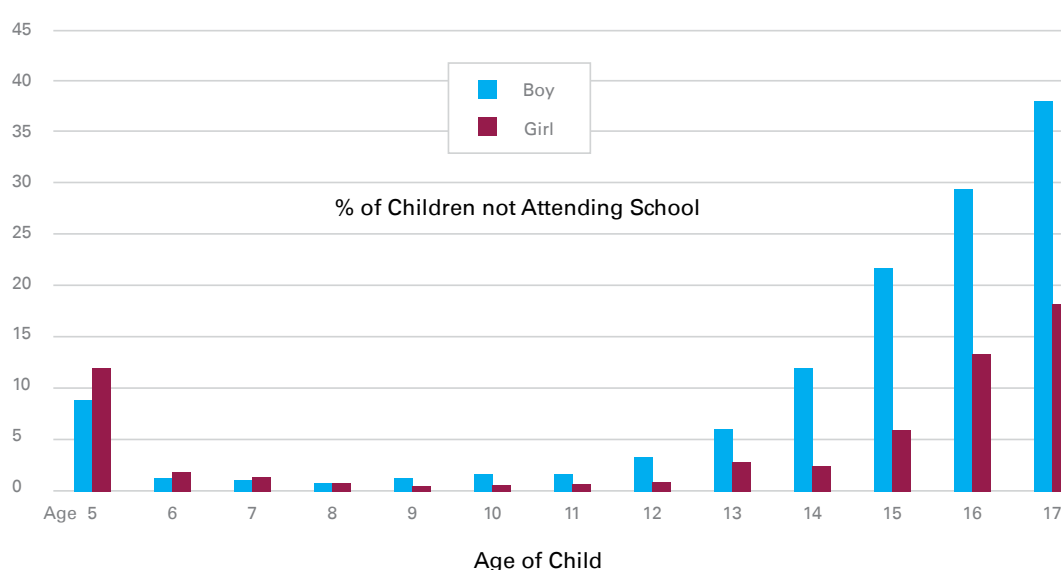
2 A J-shaped curve refers to a "J" shaped section of a time-series graph in which the values start at one level then drop down and then gradually rises to a higher level than before the decline.

Secondly, the profiles of children falling under the different dimensions of exclusion vary. Household vulnerability, as experienced in the form of deep poverty and unstable household composition, emerges as a constant factor across all five dimensions of exclusion from education. Children growing up in vulnerable households attend pre-primary education at lower rates, some drop out in the early grades of primary education, and they are more likely to face academic challenges, repeat grades and drop out at higher rates during lower secondary education. At the very extreme, children from some extremely vulnerable households never enrol in school. Similarly, across all five dimensions, children with disabilities – particularly those with multiple disabilities, a psychological or an intellectual disability – experience exclusion from and within education at much higher rates than their peers. Among 6-9-year-olds, for instance, about one out of three children with disabilities and about one out of two children with multiple disabilities do not attend school. 14-15-year-old boys also emerge as a particularly important group for Dimensions Three and Five, yet the scale of their exclusion is staggering. In fact, 14 and 15-year-old out-of-school boys represent almost half of all 5-15-year-old out-of-school children.

Barriers to Accessing and Completing Inclusive and Equitable Quality Education

The ultimate exclusion of a child from basic education often comes as a result of the interaction of various barriers related to the school, the child, the family, and the wider economic, political and security environment. The report prioritizes and groups a wide range of barriers into four categories based on their pertinence and importance for school drop-out rates, as well as their actionability.

1. The first group of barriers focuses primarily on the school and quality of education. Low academic achievement and lack of interest in education, all of which are closely related to the quality of education, are consistently identified as the primary reasons for the dropout of most children in recent survey-based studies. Therefore, this group of barriers focuses on the quality of education and the limited availability of tailored learning opportunities inside the schools. This leads to an exclusionary learning process and places many children at risk of dropping out due to low academic achievement. This group of barriers also highlights the gaps in providing different approaches to delivering education services delivered outside of schools.

2. The second group of barriers focuses primarily on the wellbeing of the child and the family. Recent survey-based on dropout show that for some children, deep poverty and the need to earn an income or external shocks such as health crises or deaths in family constitute the primary reason for their dropout. Preventive support services are therefore central to ensuring that such children with multiple disadvantages can continue attending and learning in school. The study recommends that such support services should include counselling services in schools, child protection services, and preventive health services.

3. The third group of barriers focuses primarily on economic barriers arising from the costs of education. Existing policies and practices concerning school donations; uniforms, textbooks and school stationary; school transportation; cash transfers and scholarships are reviewed to this end.

4. A fourth group of barriers are exclusionary administrative policies and practices that can push disadvantaged children towards dropping out of school. The report examines Palestine's repetition policy, policy on inter-school transfers, procedures for enrolment in first grade, and practices concerning the integration of over-age children who are returning to school after previously dropping out.

Building on these four groups of barriers, the report also discusses a fifth group of barriers related to education data and information collection in Palestine. Current data collection systems and administrative practices are unable to adequately identify children at risk of exclusion, and take preventative action in a timely manner. To this end, current administrative policies and practices are analyzed to understand how addressing design weaknesses and implementation inconsistencies in data collection can help reduce exclusion from education. Particular attention is given to ensuring enrolment in first grade and effectively monitoring absenteeism to prevent truancy.

Suggestions for Furthering Efforts in Provision of Inclusive and Equitable Quality Education

The report puts forward various suggestions to contribute to the ongoing conversation about improving the provision of inclusive and equitable quality education in the State of Palestine to ensure that no child is excluded from and within basic education. These suggestions are presented in detail in Chapter Three against the five aforementioned groups of barriers to education, and summarized in the table below. Increasing the expenditures allocated to the Ministry of Education from the state budget and developing techniques of financial programming and successful methods of budget implementation.

Quality of Education: Targeting Children with Low Academic Performance

Possible interventions to improve the quality of education include:

- Focusing quality improvement efforts on low performing schools (e.g. introducing incentives for high performing teachers to work in low performing schools, paying teachers in low performing schools for hours worked with low performing students beyond their core teaching time)

- Focusing quality improvement efforts on grades 1-4 (e.g. developing integrated literacy interventions, having classrooms teachers instead of subject teachers)

- Prioritizing children with low academic performance in teacher training programs, teacher assessments, teacher supervision, and school assessments

Quality of Education: Tailoring Education Services Inside Schools

Possible interventions include:

- Improving the implementation of remedial education plans

- Enhancing the availability and intensity of technical support to teachers for inclusive education in classrooms and integrated education in resource rooms

- Making resource rooms staffed with qualified teachers available in more schools

- Introducing year-round remedial education programs for children with low academic performance

Quality of Education: Tailoring Education Services Outside Schools

Possible interventions include delivered ideally as a comprehensive package of services:

- Improving quality and availability of second-chance education programs

- Providing second-chance education programs for children younger than 15

- Ensuring the effective implementation of the ongoing comprehensive reform of technical and vocational education and training

- Introducing different models of education for children in pastoralist communities

- Developing and implementing distance learning programs

- Facilitating and supporting the provision of education programs for children with severe cognitive disabilities by specialized education providers

Preventive Support Services

Possible interventions delivered ideally as a comprehensive package of services include:

- Provision of effective counselling services in all schools

- Equipping counsellors with the skills and tools to intervene in individual cases of children who are at imminent risk of leaving school

- Enabling effective follow-up by school level actors for the treatment of children diagnosed with vision and hearing problems

- Improving the implementation of existing violence prevention programs

- Reintroducing nutritional support programs for school-age children

Cost of Schooling

Possible interventions include:

- Revising the policy and practice of collecting donations by schools (e.g. collecting donations on a sliding scale, taking measures to ensure donations are collected on a voluntary basis and spent transparently)

- Providing school grants for prioritized schools that predominantly serve children from poorest households

- Revising PNCTP benefits to increase its impact on educational attainment and strengthening its education related communication efforts

- Expanding school bus services

- Introducing need and merit based scholarships in targeted schools and targeted grades

Administrative Regulations and Practices

- MOEHE to undertake a comprehensive review of administrative regulations and practices as appropriate with a view to revise those practices that contribute to exclusion from education, including grade repetition, inter-school transfers, enrolment in first grade, integration of over-age children into school

Identification of Children at Risk of Exclusion

Possible interventions include:

- Improving data systems to ensure all children are enrolled in first grade

- Improving monitoring of absenteeism at the school level by introducing early warning systems with follow-up and response protocols

- Improving administrative data collection systems by enhancing data sharing arrangements, the quality of administrative data on dropout, and the availability and quality of administrative data.

In Chapter Four and below, these policy suggestions are presented with a focus on their implementation. Implementing some of these suggestions would involve relatively easy changes to administrative procedures, while others would require introducing new procedures to bolster efforts for early detection and prevention of exclusion from education. Implementing some other suggestions would involve tagging on to existing policies and reform efforts in ways that maximize their positive impact for children at risk of exclusion from education. Finally, some of the suggestions put forward would require introducing new programs and interventions for preventing and reversing exclusion from basic education.

1. **Quick Fixes:** While addressing structural and systemic barriers is paramount to ensuring all children complete basic education, there are also several 'quick fixes' targeting small administrative practices that make or break some children's continuation in school. These children live in vulnerable households and lead particularly precarious lives. Thus, being faced with facilitating administrative procedures as opposed to administrative barriers could, at times, make the difference between keeping these children in school versus

pushing them out. The report presents several ideas for eliminating these administrative barriers and instead introducing facilitating procedures in areas such as enrolment in school, collection of donations by schools, inter-school transfers, and truancy policies. These ideas are not meant to be a comprehensive list, but instead they are meant to underscore the need for a comprehensive review of existing administrative practices with a view to identifying and acting on quick fixes.

2. **Bolstering Existing Efforts**: Various efforts are already underway for identifying children who are at risk of dropping out of school with a view to preventing or reversing their exclusion from education. These efforts include but are not limited to school counsellors, remedial education plans, inclusive education, resource rooms, free or subsidized school bus services, monitoring and following up on truancy. Bolstering these existing efforts for early detection and prevention of dropout by improving the quality and coverage of their implementation is crucial to reducing the number of children excluded from education. Recognizing the challenge of implementing such efforts nationwide, the report suggests identifying schools with the highest drop-out rates in each district and focusing these efforts, at least initially, on these schools.

3. **Mainstreaming**: Commendable efforts are underway in the State of Palestine to improve services in education, health, social protection, and child protection. Some of these efforts, such as the child protection network, Palestinian National Cash Transfer Program (PNCTP), curriculum reform, and teacher trainings, will indirectly benefit children who are out of school or at risk of dropping out of school. The report suggests mainstreaming out-of-school children into these ongoing efforts to maximize their positive effect on these children. Some of the suggestions presented in the report include: 1) revising the PNCTP benefits to help vulnerable families meet the indirect costs of education as well as incentivizing completion of basic education and transition to upper secondary school; 2) strengthening the child protection network's referral system for out-of-school children and children who are at risk of dropping out; and 3) targeting the MoEHE's system-wide efforts for improving teacher competencies and curricula in ways that increase their benefits for children who have low academic achievement.

4. **New Programs**: Despite various commendable efforts already underway, in certain areas the need for new interventions remains. Some of these areas presented in the report are: 1) development of distance learning programs; 2) new programs for children with multiple disabilities and severe cognitive disabilities; 3) high quality and widely available second-chance education programs, back-to-school programs, and programs for the integration of over-age children back to school; 4) school or community-based remedial education programs targeting children with low academic achievement; 5) alternative education programs for children living in pastoralist communities; 6) grants for schools serving the poorest and most vulnerable communities. While new interventions are a crucial aspect of effectively addressing the exclusion of children from education, given the fiscal constraints facing the MoEHE, financing these new interventions in a sustainable and comprehensive manner requires looking beyond fragmented donor-funded programs and integrating these efforts into future Education Development Strategic Plans (EDSPs). In the short-term, donor-funded programs in these areas could be utilized as an opportunity for piloting these efforts. Furthermore, alternative financing models such as public-private partnerships could be explored to this end.

This report on out-of-school children in the State of Palestine represents a milestone in the MoEHE and UNICEF's efforts to provide inclusive and equitable quality education for all 5-15-year-old children in the State of Palestine. The analyses on out-of-school children and the policy landscape presented in this report aims to take stock of past achievements, while the policy suggestions hope to inspire future efforts.