UNICEF POLICY NOTE No.1/2024

Overcoming the Challenges of Education in Uganda

UNICEF POLICY NOTE NO.1/2024: OVERCOMING THE CHALLENGES OF EDUCATION IN UGANDA

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List of Abbreviations and Acronyms

ECD	Early Childhood Development
ECCE	Early Childhood Education
EMIS	Education Management Information System
ERP	Education Response Plan
GER	Gross Enrolment Rate
IATI	International Aid Transparency Initiative
ILO	International Labour Organization
ILOSTAT	International Labour Organization Statistics
NAPE	National Assessment of Progress in Education
NDP	National Development Plan
UBOS	Uganda Bureau of Statistics
ODA	Overseas Development Assistance
OECD	Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development
PLE	Primary Leaving Examination
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
TVET	Technical and Vocational Education Training
UACE	Uganda Advanced Certificate of Education
UCE	Uganda Certificate of Education
UDHS	Uganda Demographic and Health Survey
UGX	Uganda Shillings
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNHS	Uganda National Household Survey
UPE	Universal Primary Education
USE	Universal Secondary Education

Key achievements

332% increase
IN PRIMARY SCHOOL ENROLMENT

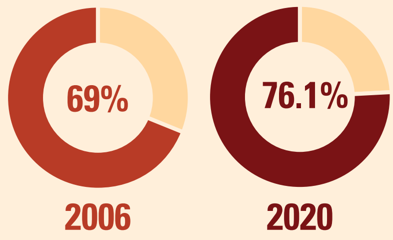
Primary School Enrolment increased from 2.5 million learners in 1996 before introduction of Universal Primary Education (UPE) to **10.8 million in 2019.**

146% increase
IN SECONDARY SCHOOL ENROLMENT

Secondary School Enrolment increased from 814,087 learners in 2006 before introduction of Universal Secondary Education to about **2 million learners in 2019.**

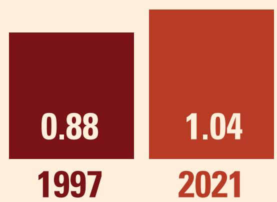
59%
INCREASE

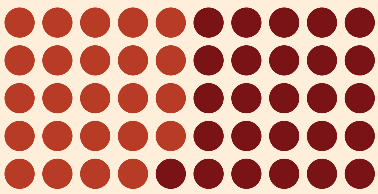
Mean years of schooling increased from 3.9 years in 2000 to 6.2 years in 2022.



Literacy rate increased
for people aged 10 years and above from 69% in 2006 to 76.1% in 2020.

Achievement of gender parity
post-UPE period witnessed a narrowing gap between the number of girls and boys enrolled in primary schools with the gender parity index **increasing from 0.88 in 1997 to 1.04 in 2021.**





THE NUMBER OF PRIMARY SCHOOL TEACHERS ALMOST DOUBLED

The Government has increased funding to the education sector which resulted to more classrooms being constructed and the number of primary school teachers **almost doubled in 25 years from 81,564 in 1996 to 136,819 in 2023.**

Government has provided funding for Special Needs & Inclusive Education which stands at **UGX 1.9 billion in 2024/25.**

Recruitment of District Special Needs Education Officers in all districts with **a budget of UGX 3 million per distrtict.**

Robust policy and regulatory framework, including the Education Act (2008) and Early Childhood Care and Education Policy (2024) and Digital Agenda Strategy(2023).

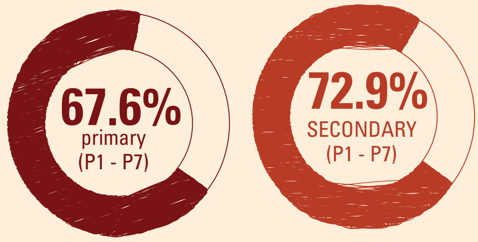
Uganda has a progressive policy framework to accommodate refugees with **two Education Response Plans implemented** i.e. Education Response Plan I(2018-2021) and Education Response Plan II(2021/22-2024/25).

Key challenges

Approximately 1 in every 4 children (6 to 18 years) are out of school either because they are engaged in child labour to help support their families or because they remain at home.

6.2 million (39.5%) **of the children (5 to 17 years) were involved in child labour** (excluding household chores).

On average 67.6 per cent of the primary school learners (P1 - P7) and 72.9 per cent of the secondary school learners (S1 - S6) **are over age due to delayed enrolment and repeating grades.**



Between 5% and 6% **of the children who begin P1 complete upper secondary education at S6.**

Secondary education plays a crucial role in equipping adolescents with the knowledge necessary to make informed decisions to avoid risky behaviour, ultimately fostering healthier and safer lives.

Each additional year of secondary education leads to **a 6 per centage point reduction in the risks of both child marriage and having a child before the age of 18 years.**

83 per cent of children **are unable to read and comprehend an age-appropriate text by the age of 10 (learning poverty).**

The challenges in education in Uganda are attributable to, among others,

- high population growth,
- high poverty levels,
- low social protection coverage,
- low government expenditure and Overseas Development Assistance (ODA) on education,
- policy of privatization of education and
- not investing in early childhood development (ECD)

Call to action

Urgently turn around the situation by **enrolling out-of-school children** in school and improving the quality of learning.

Increase public spending on education from the current 8.4 per cent of the national budget in the fiscal year 2023/24 to 13.2 per cent (low middle income level), the level Uganda achieved in 2015/16, with a further gradual increase to 20 per cent in alignment with the Dakar Declaration.

Implement policy and regulatory reforms to enhance access and improve quality, including

- Establishing multiple learning and skilling transition pathways for children at the post-primary level, including at formal and informal technical and vocational education and training (TVET) and other skills training in partnership with the private sector.
- Implementing compulsory **pre-primary education.**

Increase Overseas Development Assistance (ODA) for education from the current 5 per cent to 10 per cent of the total ODA.

Improve coordination of aid in line with the International Aid Transparency Initiative (IATI) for maximum impact, including establishing a pooled fund for education in Uganda to address specific challenges related to quality education, equity and inclusion, and education and skills development in refugee settings, and revamping the Aid Management Platform.

Increase coverage of child focused social protection to improve education outcomes for children from poor and vulnerable households.

01

Introduction

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The Government of Uganda attaches great importance to education as a catalyst for the transformation of society, national integration, and development. The government has put in place a robust policy and regulatory framework to guarantee the right to education for all. Fundamentally the right to education is guaranteed in the Constitution of Uganda (1995). The Education Act (2008) has been the main operational legal instrument while the government White Paper (1992) has been the main policy guide for education sector. There are also specific policy and regulatory instruments for the various levels such as Business, Technical Vocational Education and Training Act (2008), the Universities and Other Tertiary Institutions Act (2001) and the recently approved Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Policy (2024).

In 1997, the government launched Universal Primary Education (UPE), with the aim of providing free and compulsory primary education to all children in the country. In 2007 the government introduced Universal Secondary Education (USE) to take on learners who were graduating from the UPE but could not proceed to secondary due to lack of fees. The government has also made progress on re-enrolment of teenage mothers, revised/new lower secondary competence-based curriculum, abridged curriculum, competence-based assessment, and the digital agenda.

Uganda hosts 1.6 million refugees and asylum seekers as of 2024, the most of any country in Africa, and has a progressive policy framework that provides for free access to education and training for refugees. An Education Response Plan I (2018–2021) (ERP I) was launched in September 2018 as was a multi-year costed plan for provision of education in refugee-hosting areas. A Second Education Response Plan (ERP II) was launched in May 2023 (2021/22–2024/25) building on the successes of the ERP I.

The education sector is a key pillar of Uganda Vision 2040 and medium-term developments, including the National Development Plan III (2020/21–2024/25) (NDP III) in which the country set ambitious targets, aimed at increasing the average years of schooling to 11 years. Uganda has also adhered to regional and international development frameworks and conventions on education, including the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), Africa Agenda 2063 and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. These are main-streamed in Vision 2040 and medium-term development plans.

The country has also implemented national and sub-national education programmes by appropriating budgetary resources through annual national budgets, which are complemented by development partner support.

Through these efforts, Uganda has made tremendous progress in education development outcomes. The literacy rate for people aged 10 years and above increased from 69 per cent in 2006 to 76.1 per cent in 2020. The mean years of schooling increased from 3.9 years in 2000 to 6.2 years by 2022 (59 per cent growth). The total primary school enrolment has grown from 2.5 million pupils in 1996 to 10.8 million in 2019 while secondary enrolment increased from 814,087 in 2006 to 2 million learners by 2019.

However, despite the progress made, Uganda's education sector still faces challenges of access, equity, and quality, which are mainly attributed to high population growth, high poverty rates and inadequate funding.

This policy note provides a brief on selected issues regarding the challenges of the education sector in Uganda and provides some recommendations for improvement as well as a call to action for all stakeholders in sector. It builds on UNICEF's education programming, and other recent publications, including the World Bank Public Expenditure Review on Education (World Bank Economic Update 2023) and the UNESCO Uganda Education Country Brief (2024).

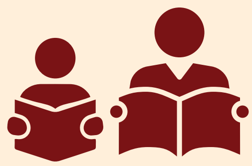
The rest of the policy note is organized as follows. Section 2 presents the high rates of exclusion of learners from the education system while section 3 presents the internal inefficiency of the education system. Section 4 presents the call to action for all stakeholders.

In 1997, the government launched **Universal Primary Education (UPE)**, with the aim of providing **free and compulsory primary education to all children in the country.**

Uganda hosts

1.6 million

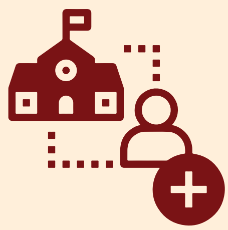
refugees & asylum seekers and has a progressive policy framework that provides for **free access to education and training for refugees.**



The literacy rate for people aged 10 years and above **increased from 69 per cent in 2006 to 76.1 per cent in 2020.**

59% growth

in the mean years of schooling from 3.9 years in 2000 to 6.2 years by 2022.



Primary school enrolment has grown **from 2.5 million in 1996 to 10.8 million in 2019** while secondary enrolment increased **from 814,087 in 2006 to 2 million learners by 2019.**

02

High rates of exclusion of learners from the education system

2.1 GOVERNMENT EFFORTS TO REDUCE EXCLUSION

The government of Uganda has committed itself to promoting access to and retention in formal education for all children and learners, taking into account diverse circumstances such as geographical location, gender, age, disability, refugee status, cultural and linguistic background, socio-economic status, and related learning difficulties. This is in line with the Salamanca World Conference (1994) on Special Needs Education, which was restated at the Dakar World Education Forum (2000).

This commitment has been implemented by the government through several policies and programmes, notably the introduction of UPE in 1997 and USE in 2007 both of which resulted into enrolment of large number of learners, including those with special needs. Several sector-level policies to foster inclusivity have also been developed. These include the Special Needs and Inclusive Education (SNIE) Policy (2020) to increase enrolment, participation and completion of schooling by individuals with special learning needs; Non-Formal Education Policy (2011) to address the inclusion of out-of-school children who are often excluded because of the rigidity of the formal school system; and re-enrolment of teenage mothers, which has now been merged with the SNIE policy (2020); ERP I (2018) and ERP II (2021) for refugees.

2.2 HIGH RATES OF OUT-OF-SCHOOL CHILDREN

The inclusive education policies and interventions have led to an increase in enrolment in primary and secondary education levels of children/learners who would have been excluded from education. However, there are many children who are out of school and denied their right to education, safety, health, play and future opportunities. According to UNESCO, out-of-school children refers to any child/individual of official school/college age who is not enrolled in any formal education institution (pre-primary, primary, secondary or higher levels of education). Out-of-school children are among the most vulnerable and face a high risk of teenage pregnancy and forced child marriage, child labour, substance abuse and recruitment into crime and armed groups. There are two approaches that are often used to compute out-of-school children (UNESCO et al. 2014), namely education administrative data and survey data (such as the Labour Force Surveys and Uganda National Household Surveys – UNHS).

For administrative data to be useful for the computation of out-of-school children, it should report enrolments by grade/class and age. However, apart from Education Statistical Abstracts for the period 2011 to 2017, when the Education Management Information System (EMIS) was fully functional, most datasets do not report enrolment by class and age. Firstly, there is enrolment data by grade for pre-primary, primary, secondary and tertiary institutions in the Master List of Education Institutions in Uganda produced by Uganda Bureau of Statistics (UBOS) in 2019. However, this dataset does not report enrolment by age, which makes it inadequate for computing out-of-school children. Secondly, there is enrolment data for public primary and secondary schools as at 31 December 2023 from the updated EMIS system. However, this dataset lacks information on enrolments for private schools and other institutions. Additionally, information on grade/levels and ages for learners are missing.

Survey data such as the Labour Force Surveys and UNHS, produced by UBOS, are another source of information for computing out-of-school children. However, the challenge with survey data is that surveys are designed for other purposes and may not be ideal for computing out-of-school children. For instance, the Uganda Labour Force Survey has data for children who are out of school for ages 5 to 17 years instead of 6 to 18 years.

It is against this background that this policy note mainly uses administrative data for the period 2014 to 2017 when there was comprehensive education administrative data and population projections following the 2014 Population and Housing Census.

Using education administrative data and UBOS population projections for the period 2014 to 2017, approximately 1 in every 4 children (25 per cent) aged 6 to 18 years is out of school. Since Uganda's education system has very high levels of underage and overage children at various levels and cycles (Table 12), computing out-of-school children for a specific level or cycle of education, as done by UNESCO[1] may be misleading since it considers all underage and overage children as being out-of-school children. For instance, using this approach, all overage children in primary school level (i.e., above 13 years in table A2 and above 19 years in table A3) will be considered out-of-school children when in reality they are delayed in education due to either late enrolment or class repetition.

In light of the above challenges, out-of-school children for learners aged 6 to 18 years is computed in this policy note by directly subtracting (a) the total number of children aged 6 to 18 years age enrolled in primary and secondary education levels and (b) children enrolled in alternative education pathways in post-primary and non-formal education (such as Primary Teacher Colleges ad Business Technical Vocational Education Training) from the total number of children belonging to the same age group (6 to 18 years) (i.e., from UBOS population census and projections) (Table 1). This is done for the period 2014 to 2017 when EMIS was fully functioning.

The results show that approximately 25 per cent of the children aged 6 to 18 years were out of school. For instance, in 2017, there were 13,662,140 children aged 6 to 18 years in Uganda of which only 9,970,872 were in primary and secondary schools while 63,695 were in post primary and non-formal education. This implies that 3,627,573 (26.6 per cent) were out of school.

TABLE 1: OUT-OF-SCHOOL CHILDREN (6 TO 18 YEARS) FOR 2014 TO 2017

INDICATOR	2014	2015	2016	2017
Population projection	**12,609,085**	**12,898,850**	**13,283,300**	**13,662,140**
Total primary and secondary enrolments (government and private: 6–18 years)	9,944,968	9,337,943	9,868,066	9,970,872
Enrolment in alternative education pathways in post-primary and non-formal education	68,785	53,739	63,285	63,695
Number of out-of-school children	**2,595,332**	**3,507,168**	**3,351,949**	**3,627,573**
% out-of-school children	**20.6**	**27.2**	**25.2**	**26.6**

Source: Population projections are from UBOS while enrolments are from Education Statistical Abstracts from the Ministry of Education and Sports.

1 https://education-estimates.org/out-of-school/

The high rates of out-of-school children are confirmed by the fact that despite significant progress education achievement in Uganda is relatively low. According to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) (2023/24)[2], a significant discrepancy exists between the expected and actual years of schooling. While students are anticipated to receive 11.5 years of education (equivalent to the S4 level), **the average actual years of schooling stood at just 6.2 years in 2022 (i.e., at P6 level). The education achievement is particularly low in regions such as Karamoja and West Nile, as highlighted in Table 2.**

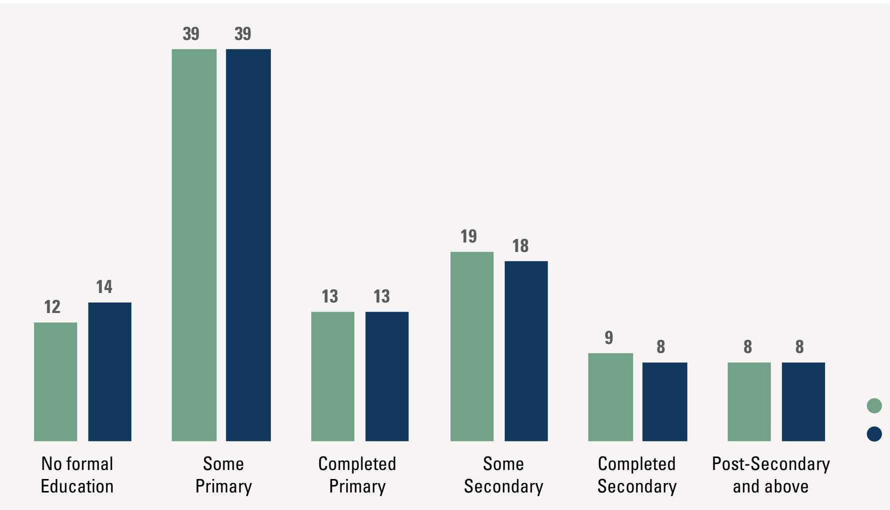
TABLE 2: MEAN YEARS OF SCHOOLING FOR THE PERIOD 1990 TO 2022

REGION	1990	2000	2012	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
National (Uganda)	**3.2**	**3.9**	**5.1**	**5.6**	**5.7**	**5.7**	**5.7**	**5.7**	**6.2**
Central 1 (Central South)	3.7	4.6	5.9	7.4	7.5	7.6	7.6	7.6	
Central 2 (Central North)	3.4	4.3	5.5	6.0	6.0	6.1	6.1	6.1	
East Central (Busoga)	3.2	4.0	5.0	5.5	5.6	5.7	5.7	5.7	
Eastern (Bukedi, Bugishu, Teso)	2.9	3.7	4.7	5.3	5.4	5.4	5.4	5.4	
Kampala	6.5	8.0	9.4	9.4	9.5	9.6	9.6	9.6	
North (Karamoja, Lango, Acholi)	2.4	3.0	4.0	4.4	4.5	4.5	4.5	4.5	
Southwest (Ankole, Kigezi)	2.8	3.5	4.2	5.0	5.1	5.1	5.1	5.1	
West Nile	2.8	3.5	4.3	4.8	4.8	4.9	4.9	4.9	
Western (Bunyoro, Tooro)	2.7	3.4	4.6	4.8	4.8	4.9	4.9	4.9	

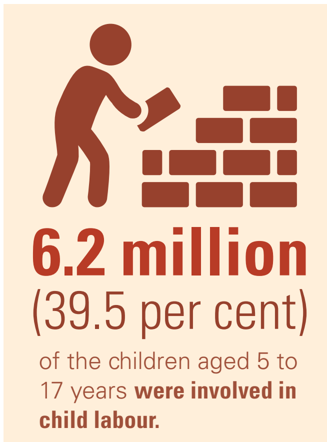
Source: Global Data Lab (https://globaldatalab.org/shdi/download/msch/) and UNDP HDI data.

UNHS 2019/20 showed that 14 per cent of the population 15 years and above had no formal education (i.e., never attended formal schooling) while 39 per cent attained some primary education (i.e., enrolled and dropped out) (Figure 1). 8 per cent of the population 15 years and above had completed secondary education.

FIGURE 1: HIGHEST LEVEL OF EDUCATION ATTAINED BY INDIVIDUALS AGED 15 YEARS AND ABOVE (%)



Source: UNHS 2019/2020



2.3 MANY CHILDREN ARE ENGAGED IN CHILD LABOUR

Uganda has made progress in reducing child labour in line with the International Labour Organization (ILO) Convention No.182 and ILO Convention Number 138 for Minimum Age for Admission to Employment or Work (1973), which Uganda ratified in 2001 and 2003, respectively. However, according to the Uganda Labour Force Survey (2020/21) 6.2 million (39.5 per cent) of the children aged

2 UNDP Human Development Report (2023/24): https://hdr.undp.org/data-center/human-development-index#/indicies/HDI

5 to 17 years were involved in child labour (excluding household chores). This is similar to 38.5 per cent found in UNHS 2019/20 but much higher than 15.1 per cent in 2016/17 and 23 per cent in 2011/2012 Labour Force Surveys (Table 3). These children are compelled to leave school for labour or juggle work during school hours to support their families financially. As a result, they miss out on acquiring the essential knowledge and skills necessary for better future employment, perpetuating a vicious cycle of poverty.

TABLE 3: CHILD LABOUR EXCLUDING HOUSEHOLD CHORES (2011/12 TO 2020/21)

SURVEY	CHILDREN AGED 5–11 YEARS IN ECONOMIC ACTIVITIES	CHILDREN AGED 12–13 YEARS IN ECONOMIC ACTIVITY EXCLUDING THOSE IN LIGHT WORK	CHILDREN AGED 14–17 YEARS IN HAZARDOUS WORK OR WORKING EXCESSIVE HOURS	TOTAL CHILD LABOUR, 5–17 YEARS
Labour Force Survey 2011/12	1,449,800 *(21.3%)*	252,200 *(11.9%)*	307,300 *(8.9%)*	2,009,300 *(16.3%)*
Labour Force Survey 2016/17	1,031,000 *(12.6%)*	476,000 *(21.8%)*	550,000 *(16.8%)*	2,057,000 *(15.1%)*
UNHS 2019/20	4,878,000 *(54.5%)*	666,000 *(26.7%)*	415,000 *(10.3%)*	5,959,000 *(38.5%)*
Labour Force Survey 2020/21	4,965,000 *(55.7%)*	401,000 *(15.9%)*	834,000 *(19.5%)*	6,200,000 *(39.5%)*

Source: Labour Force Surveys for various years, UBOS

Even for those children in labour who get to attend school, most struggle to balance the demands of education and their work. They generally do not attend school full time and lag behind their peers in grade progression and learning achievement and are more likely to drop out prematurely. Hazardous child labour constitutes an even greater barrier to school attendance.

2.4 MANY CHILDREN ARE OUT OF SCHOOL AS REFLECTED IN GROSS ENROLMENT RATES

The gross enrolment ratio (GER) is the ratio of total enrolment, regardless of age, to the population of the age group that officially corresponds to the level of education. The low GER for pre-primary reflects low rates of participation of children in early child education (Table 4 and Figure 2). This is also consistent with the results of Uganda Demographic and Health Survey – UDHS (2022), which shows that 29.1 per cent of the children aged 36 to 59 months attend early childhood education. According to UDHS (2022) the situation is worse for a child whose mother has no education (11.7 per cent attend ECD) and families in the lowest wealth quintile (10.7 per cent attend ECD).

Primary GER in Uganda was 118 in 2020, which is one of the highest in East African. This indicates a notable proportion of students are enrolled in grades not necessarily corresponding to their age, suggesting either early enrolments or grade repetitions rather than a successful education system (Table 12).

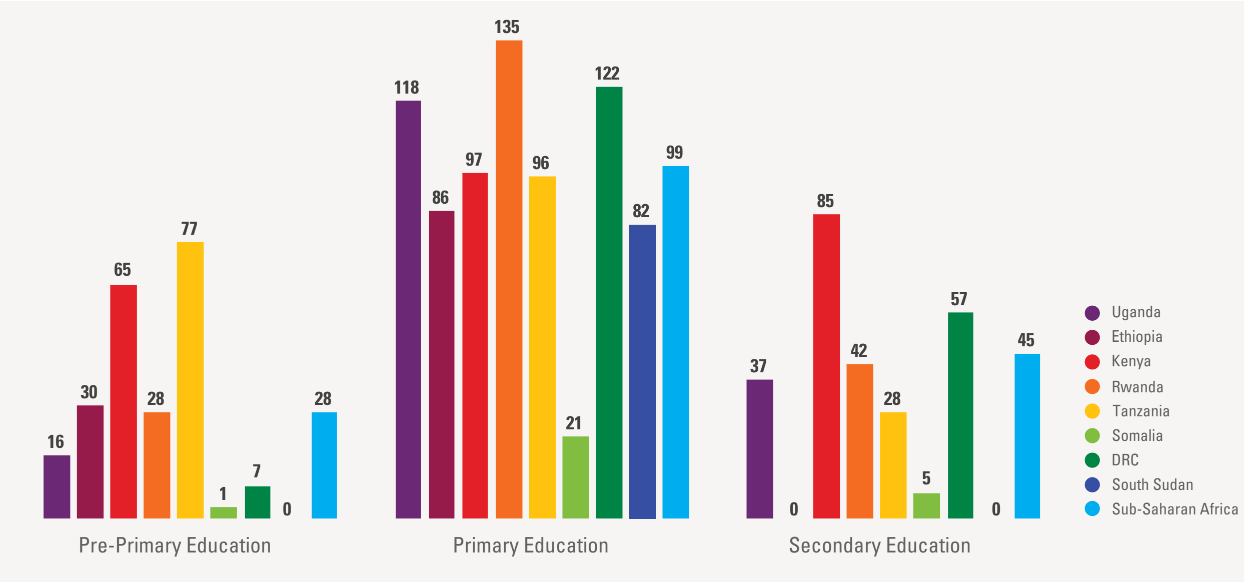
The situation in secondary education is similar to pre-primary with GER at 37 per cent in 2020, which shows very few children (irrespective of age) enrolled in secondary schools.

TABLE 4: GER FOR PRE-PRIMARY, PRIMARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION LEVELS FOR THE PERIOD 2014 TO 2017

INDICATOR	2014	2015	2016	2017	2020
Pre-primary	12	13	15	16	
Primary	119	109	112	111	118
Secondary	27	24	26	24	37

Source: Computed from Education Statistical Abstracts and UDHS (2019/20)

FIGURE 2: GROSS ENROLMENT RATES (%), 2022



Source: *World Bank, UNHS (2019/20) and computations from Education Statistical Abstracts.*

2.5 KEY DRIVERS OF HIGH NUMBERS OF OUT-OF-SCHOOL CHILDREN

The immediate causes of high numbers of out-of-school children are children who were never enrolled in school and those who dropped out. The root causes underlying these immediate factors include:

2.5.1 High poverty and low social protection coverage

Many households in Uganda face high levels of poverty and vulnerability driven by recurrent shocks and high levels of informality, amidst very limited social protection coverage. According UNHS (2019/20) 20.3 per cent of the population lives in income poverty with the percentage rising to 23.4 per cent in rural areas compared to 11.7 per cent in urban areas. The incidence of multidimensional poverty[3] in the population (those that face multiple deprivations) declined from 44.3 per cent in 2016/17 to 42.1 per cent in 2019/20. However, the multidimensional poverty level remains high in rural areas (50.2 per cent) compared to urban areas (19.7 per cent) (UBOS Multidimensional Poverty Index Report, 2022). The incidence of multidimensional poverty is also much higher for those with no formal education (69.4 per cent) compared with those with secondary (18.7 per cent) and post-secondary education (7.5 per cent), highlighting the importance of education in poverty eradication.

In 2019/20, the overall rate of monetary child poverty stood at 23 per cent. However, this prevalence exhibited regional disparities. Specifically, rural areas experienced a higher incidence of child poverty at 26 per cent, in contrast to a significantly lower rate of 14 per cent observed in urban areas (UBOS Multidimensional Child Poverty in Uganda 2024). Additionally, 44 per cent of children live in multidimensional poverty reflecting multiple deprivations in several areas, including education, health, nutrition etc. The figure is much higher in areas that have been severely affected by conflict (71 per cent) compared to the rest of Uganda (38 per cent). The World Bank Economic Update (2023) also noted that grade repetition in P1 is especially common among the most socio-economically vulnerable children, including those in the poorest income quintile (27 per cent) and those living in the northern parts of the country (29 per cent).

Informality is high in Uganda with the share of informal employment at 95.2 per cent in 2022 (ILOSTAT)[4]. Around 72 per cent of businesses and 51 per cent per cent of gross domestic product (GDP) are generated from the informal economy according to the World Bank and ILOSTAT (2022). The informal sector is an important source of livelihood for the vulnerable, especially the less educated, youth and women who would otherwise not find

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3 Multidimensional poverty measures multiple deprivations that poor people face in different areas, including education, health, nutrition, water, sanitation and hygiene, etc.

4 https://ilostat.ilo.org/data/country-profiles/

employment in the formal economy. Indeed, vulnerable employment (i.e., inadequate earnings, low productivity and difficult work conditions that undermine workers' fundamental rights) as a proportion of total employment was 75 per cent in 2022[5]. According to ILOSTAT (2023), only 1.3 per cent of the employers are compliant with labour rights.

The rapid increase in the school-age population, as indicated in Table 5, coupled with the stagnation of public funding for the education sector, has resulted in a substantial portion of the financial burden of the education system being transferred to households. According to the World Bank (2023), out-of-pocket spending in government-funded schools is very high despite public resources devoted to UPE and USE policies aimed at compulsory and free primary and secondary education. Household expenditures include direct payment to schools and spending on goods and services required for school attendance. Although households should not have to pay tuition fees at government-funded primary schools, such fees remain common, and they represent a large share of household education spending at all levels of the school system. UNHS 2019/20 identified insufficient funding as the primary reason for leaving school among individuals aged 6 to 24, with 67.1 per cent of boys and 62.1 per cent of girls citing this challenge.

In 2022, only 3.1 per cent of the population experiencing high levels of poverty and vulnerability were covered by at least one form of social protection, while a mere 0.9 per cent of vulnerable individuals received social assistance (ILOSTAT, 2023). At the same time government spending on social protection is less than 1 per cent of GDP (UNICEF Social Protection Budget Brief, 2023/24). Consequently, 6.2 million children (5 to 17 years) are engaged in child labour (Table 3).

2.5.2 Rapid population growth and refugee influx putting pressure on limited resources to deliver quality education services

The population in Uganda has been growing at an average rate of 3.1 per cent and thus putting pressure on education services. Uganda's population growth is higher than many of its peer countries (Table A1) and projected to be 71.4 million by 2040. There are many factors fueling this high growth rate, including persistent high fertility coupled with a high unmet need for family planning services, teenage pregnancies and child marriages[6].

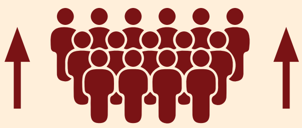
Considering Uganda's youthful demographic, driven by high fertility rates and relatively low mortality rates, it is imperative that the expansion of educational services keeps pace with the growing number of learners at various educational levels (Tables 5 and table A1).

44%
of children live in multidimensional poverty.

Informality is high in Uganda with the share of **informal employment at 95.2%.**

75% of the population is in vulnerable employment.

ONLY 3.1%
eligible population are covered by at least **1 form of social protection.**



The population has been **growing at an average rate of 3.1%** and thus putting pressure on education services.

5 World Bank (https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SL.EMP.VULN.ZS)
6 National Population Council Issue Paper 2021 titled 'Population Growth in Uganda: Challenges and Opportunities'.

TABLE 5: NUMBER OF SCHOOL-AGE POPULATION BY AGE GROUP

EDUCATION LEVEL (AGE GROUP)	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Pre-Primary Education (3-5 Years):	3,990,370	4,127,350	4,251,210	4,367,340	4,484,360	4,602,550	4,721,820
of which 3 years	*1,393,810*	*1,432,660*	*1,472,200*	*1,512,330*	*1,552,550*	*1,593,270*	*1,634,850*
Primary Education (6-12 Years):	8,120,560	8,319,590	8,541,190	8,778,860	9,022,180	9,279,330	9,547,660
of which P1 (6 Years)	*1,267,020*	*1,303,820*	*1,356,280*	*1,403,510*	*1,441,680*	*1,480,540*	*1,519,590*
Secondary Education (13-18 Years)	5,914,560	6,089,470	6,258,220	6,423,920	6,589,480	6,750,320	6,908,490
of which S1 (13 Years)	*1,037,640*	*1,063,730*	*1,090,870*	*1,119,230*	*1,148,130*	*1,170,000*	*1,193,670*
University/ Tertiary Education (19-21 Years)	2,379,870	2,472,130	2,566,860	2,660,230	2,749,010	2,830,900	2,906,960
Total School Age Population (3-21 Years)	20,404,870	21,008,540	21,617,480	22,230,440	22,845,030	23,463,100	24,084,930
Total Population (0-80+ Years)	**39,059,000**	**40,308,000**	**41,583,600**	**42,886,000**	**44,212,900**	**45,562,100**	**46,930,800**

Source: *Data from UBOS Population Estimates.*
Note: *Although the Education Act (2008) talks about 2 to 5 years for pre-primary education, education statistics use 3 to 5 years for ECCE.*

The refugee influx has put additional pressure on the government to provide education to children. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) Uganda is Africa' s largest refugee host, providing refuge to over 1.6 million people, including children (Table 6). As of March 2024, Uganda hosted 1,660,524 refugees and asylum seekers, the most of any country in Africa, putting additional pressure on already stretched education system. Most refugees come from South Sudan (57 per cent), the Democratic Republic of the Congo (32 per cent), Somalia (3 per cent), and Burundi (3 per cent). Refugees primarily live in settlements in 12 districts, alongside host communities, resulting in economic and environmental challenges. An additional 8 per cent resides in Kampala.

TABLE 6: REFUGEES AND ASYLUM SEEKERS

YEAR	NUMBER OF REFUGEES AND ASYLUM SEEKERS	PERCENTAGE OF CHILDREN (0–17 YEARS)
2021	1,563,604	58%
2022	1,495,688	58%
2023	1,600,000	57%
2024	1,660,524	57%

Source: *UNHCR data*

TABLE 7: SUMMARY OF REFUGEE STUDENT ENROLMENT FOR TERM III, 2023

LEVEL	REFUGEES (R)			NATIONAL(N)			TOTAL (R+N)		
	M	F	TOTAL	M	F	TOTAL	M	F	TOTAL
ECD	35,259	36,146	71,405	13,353	14,043	27,396	48,612	50,189	98,801
P1–P7	172,427	149,813	322,240	77,784	78,615	156,399	250,211	228,428	478,639
S1–S6	16,941	7,980	24,921	10,580	9,485	20,065	27,521	17,465	44,986
TVET	366	397	763	426	356	782	792	753	1,545
AEP P1-P7	9,881	9,635	19,516	4,582	4,236	8,818	14,463	13,871	28,334
AEP S1–S6	442	263	705	80	61	141	522	324	846
Total	**235,316**	**204,234**	**439,550**	**106,805**	**106,796**	**213,601**	**342,121**	**311,030**	**653,151**

Source: *Data from ERP secretariat, MoES 2023*

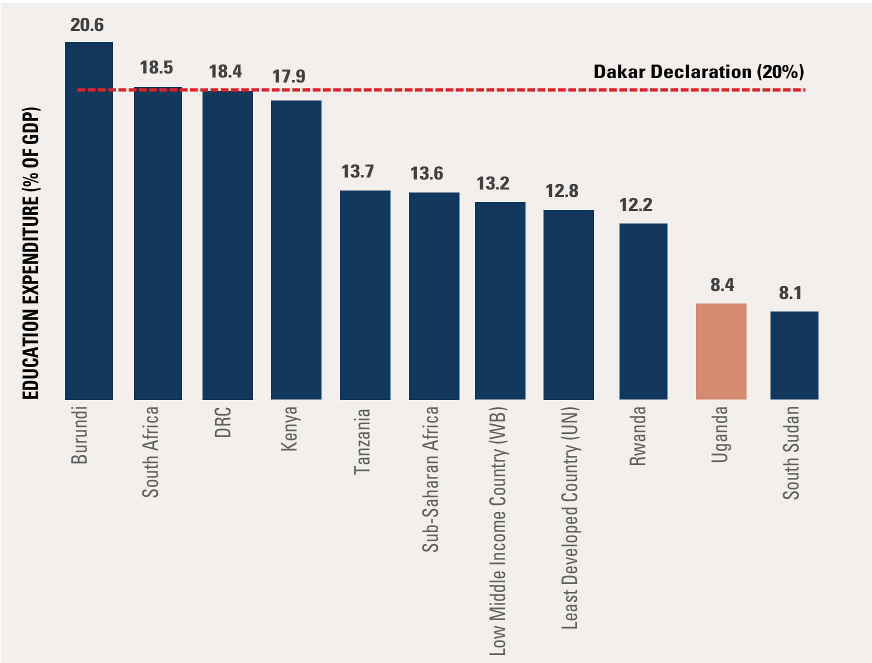
Uganda's progressive policy framework provides for free access to education and training for refugees, but it has been a challenge to fulfill that promise. However, refugees encounter additional challenges, such as language barriers. Many arrive in Uganda speaking a diverse range of native languages but possessing limited or no proficiency in English. Many refugee children are also already past the typical school-entry age when they arrive in

Uganda. Refugees also face additional costs which discourage enrolment at all levels of education. According to ERP II, 88 per cent of secondary-age refugee children are not in school, and only 8 per cent of refugees have received vocational education or skills training.

2.5.3 Low government spending on education that is inequitably distributed between basic and higher education

The Ugandan government's spending on education is not only low but among the lowest in East and Southern Africa (Figure 3). Government spending on education in 2023/24 stood at 8.4 per cent of the total national budget, which is well below most East African Member States and the average for Sub-Saharan Africa (13.6 per cent), low middle income countries (13.2 per cent), least developed countries (12.8) and the Dakar Declaration of 2000 (20 per cent).

FIGURE 3: EDUCATION AS A PERCENTAGE OF THE TOTAL NATIONAL BUDGET FOR UGANDA AND OTHER COUNTRIES, 2022



Source: *World Bank (https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SE.XPD.TOTL.GB.ZS)*

Additionally, the budget allocated to education sector as a proportion of national budget has been on a declining trend in general, which implies that the growth in the education budget has been increasing at a slower rate than the total budget (Figure 4). As of 2015/16, the education budget as a proportion of the total budget had risen to a high of 13.2 per cent. However, a concerning trend has been observed, with the sector's share of the total budget consistently decreasing, reaching 8.4 per cent by the 2023/24 fiscal year. The allocation for the education sector as a proportion of the total national budget is projected to drop to 6 per cent in the 2024/25 budget. This significant decline is caused by a rise of the total national budget from about UGX 52 trillion to UGX 72.13 trillion.

Uganda hosts
1.6 million
refugees & asylum seekers
the most of any country in Africa, **putting additional pressure on already stretched education system.**

Government spending on education in 2023/24
stood at 8.4 per cent
which is well below most East African Member States.

AVERAGE FOR SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA
13.6 PER CENT
LOW MIDDLE INCOME COUNTRIES
3.2 PER CENT
LEAST DEVELOPED COUNTRIES
12.8 PER CENT
DAKAR DECLARATION OF 2000
20 PER CENT

FIGURE 4: EDUCATION AS PERCENTAGE OF TOTAL NATIONAL BUDGET IN THE PERIOD 2015/16 TO 2024/25

Source: Ministry of Finance data

The education budget has been rising in both nominal and real terms (i.e., adjusted for inflationary factors). However, the increase in the education budget in real terms has not kept pace with the rise in the number of school-age children (3 to 21 years) for some years (2019/20, 2021/22, 2023/24-areas shaded in brown in table 8). This means that the increase in the education budget is insufficient to cover the needs for the rapidly growing population of school going age (3 to 21 years), which is likely to lead to reduced access and challenges to improve quality.

TABLE 8: EDUCATION BUDGET AND SCHOOL-AGE CHILDREN (3 TO 21 YEARS) FOR THE PERIOD 2017/18 TO 2024/25

INDICATOR	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25*
Education Budget - Nominal (UGX BN)	2,614	3,087	3,177	3,484	3,732	4,170	4,447	4,602
Education Budget - Real (UGX BN)	2,545	2,942	2,928	3,149	3,158	3,364	3,394	3,609
Total School Age Population (3-21 Years)	19,808,720	20,404,870	21,008,540	21,617,480	22,230,440	22,845,030	23,463,100	24,084,930
% ANNUAL CHANGES								
Education Budget - Nominal (%)	7.26	18.09	2.92	9.66	7.12	11.74	6.64	3.48
Education Budget - Real (%)	4.43	15.6	-0.48	7.55	0.29	6.52	0.89	6.33
Growth of school going age population (%)	3	3.01	2.96	2.9	2.84	2.76	2.71	2.65
GAP BETWEEN GROWTH IN EDUCATION EXPENDITURE AND POPULATION OF SCHOOL GOING AGE (%)								
Education Budget - Nominal (%)	4.27	15.09	-0.04	6.76	4.28	8.97	3.94	0.83
Education Budget - Real (%)	1.44	12.59	-3.43	4.65	-2.55	3.76	-1.81	3.68

Source: Data from Ministry of Finance and UBOS Population Projections.
*Note: * Fiscal year 2024/25 shows that these are based on budgetary estimates for the budget to be implemented in July 2024 to June 2025.*

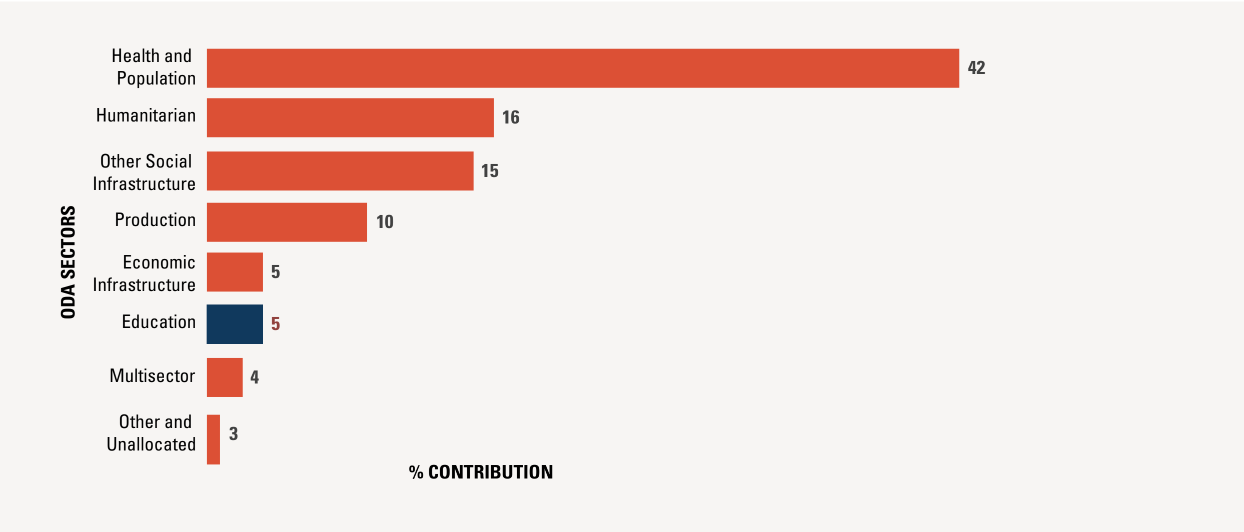
According to the World Bank (2023) under a "business as usual" scenario in which the system merely keeps pace with population growth, by 2040, Uganda will need 48,000 more primary teachers, 35,000 more primary classrooms, and 6.2 million more primary textbooks over that period. This would cost an additional US$89 million at the primary level and US$50 million at the secondary level each year. Similarly, the country will need US$1.1 billion by 2040 to increase investments to improve quality in line with Education Sector Strategic Plan.

Another worrying trend is that the education budget increases have primarily favored tertiary education as opposed to primary and secondary education.

2.5.4 Low ODA to the education sector that is not efficiently coordinated

External aid flows form an important source of financing for Uganda, where ODA supports several projects and programmes across various sectors, including education. While it is not possible to see a complete picture of the aid situation in Uganda due to challenges in reporting, especially off-budget support, data from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) shows that gross ODA to Uganda increased from US$2,139.8 million in 2019 to US$2,692.6 million in 2021. However, the flows to education sector contributes to only 5 per cent of the total ODA to Uganda (Figure 5).

FIGURE 5: ODA TO UGANDA BY SECTOR (%)



Source: *OECD-DAC https://public.tableau.com/views/OECDDACAidataglancebyrecipient_new/Recipients?:embed=y&:display_count=yes&:showTabs=y&:toolbar=no?&:showVizHome=no*

While on-budget support can be tracked, off-budget support to education is a challenge due to the fact that the Aid Management Platform has not been fully functional. There are structures for coordinating development partner support through the Education Development Partner Group under the Local Development Partner Group. However, this only represents a small group of the stakeholders in education. Most of the stakeholders at the grassroot level are not members.

The flows to education sector contributes to only **5% of the total ODA to Uganda.**

2.5.5 Policy of privatization of education and high household out-of-pocket expenditure

The government White Paper on Education (1992) liberalized the education sector to allow private actors to supplement government efforts in providing education. The privatization was aimed at increasing access to education and improving the quality of teaching and learning. While it achieved some success, it also resulted in unintended costs. For instance, currently students in Uganda are significantly more likely to attend private institutions than their counterparts in peer countries. About 62 per cent of the primary students in 2019/20 attended government-supported institutions (Table 9), which is well below the average of 92 per cent for Ethiopia, Kenya, Rwanda, and Tanzania (World Bank 2023). At the secondary level, 43 per cent of student attended government-supported institutions, almost half the regional average of 85 per cent. Among pre-primary-aged children, public schools account for 20 per cent of attendance, far below the regional average of 76 per cent. Since pre-primary education is not formally provided in government schools, the 20 per cent enrolment in government-supported schools mainly represents the underage enrolment of pre-primary-aged

Students in Uganda are more likely **to attend private institutions** than their counterparts in peer countries.

children in primary schools. The Ministry of Education and Sports has undertaken initiatives to leverage higher-performing private schools to help improve government schools. These initiatives include school twinning with mentoring for school leaders, as well including private schools in quality enhancement projects. This situation is indeed a huge problem given the high levels of poverty and vulnerability.

TABLE 9: PERCENTAGE DISTRIBUTION OF SCHOOL ATTENDANCE BY EDUCATIONAL LEVEL AND OWNERSHIP OF EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS, 2019/20

SCHOOL OWNERSHIP/ LEVEL OF EDUCATION	PRE-PRIMARY EDUCATION	PRIMARY EDUCATION	SECONDARY EDUCATION	POST-PRIMARY VOCATIONAL EDUCATION	POST-SECONDARY AND ABOVE	TOTAL
Government	20	62	43	20	45	53
Private	76	36	55	73	51	45
NGO /religious/ other	3	1	2	7	4	2
Number of students	**2,360,102**	**10,647,073**	**2,216,000**	**152,004**	**289,135**	**15,587,730**

Source: *World Bank (2023).*

According to the World Bank (2023), out-of-pocket spending in government-funded schools is very high despite public resources devoted to UPE and USE policies. Although households should not have to pay tuition fees at government-funded primary schools, such fees remain common, and they represent a large share of household education spending at all levels of the school system. According to UNHS 2019/20, the lack of funding was the main reason given by individuals aged 6 to 24 for leaving school (67.1 per cent of boys and 62.1 per cent of girls).

2.5.6 Delegating pre-primary education to the private sector and parents forces the cost onto households, rendering it unaffordable for low-income families

There is established evidence from the seminal work of Heckman (2008)7 demonstrating that investment in early years of life, especially in the first 1,000 days achieve significantly higher returns than investments made later. This was further re-emphasized by Heckman in 2012,8 in which he noted that investing in early childhood education is a cost-effective strategy—even during a budget crisis.

Despite this evidence, the Education Act (2008) specifies that pre-primary education is the first level of education, but is the responsibility of the private sector, parents and guardians, while government retains a role in regulation, quality assurance, and teacher training. This has meant that there is inadequate public funding for ECD services, and this results in low internal efficiency of primary education. For example, many P1 classes in government-funded schools are overcrowded, predominantly with underage students, and exhibit high repetition rates. Nonetheless, the government persists in allocating capitation grants for these children. Most children (76 per cent) attend private ECD centres, which many poor and vulnerable households cannot afford (Table 8).

2.5.7 Inadequate inclusion of children living with disabilities

Children living with disabilities are underrepresented in education institutions. For instance, in 2017, out of 8,840,589 primary school learners accessing education, only 172,846 (2 per cent) were learners with disabilities. At the secondary education level, this proportion was 1 per cent. Only 21.2 per cent (8,945: 4,440 male, 4,505 female) of learners with disabilities progress to secondary school compared to 56 per cent of learners without disabilities (Ministry of Education and Sports Statistical Abstract 2017). Despite the efforts under UPE and USE, many schools remain hesitant to admit children with disabilities. This hesitancy often arises from a perceived incapacity to meet the specific needs of these students, coupled with a lack of adequately trained teachers who can provide effective and inclusive education.

There is a draft National Special Needs and Inclusive Education Policy awaiting Cabinet approval to provide a strategic direction and guidance on the education of children with disabilities in Uganda. There are Basic Requirements and Minimum Standards for schools, but they lack explicit guidance on the needs of children with disabil-

7 Early Childhood Education and Care: The Case of Investing in Disadvantaged Children (2008). https://www.econstor.eu/bitstream/10419/166932/1/ifo-dice-report-v06--y2008-i2-p03-08.pdf

8 https://heckmanequation.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/07/F_HeckmanDeficitPieceCUSTOM-Generic_052714-3-1.pdf

ities. Negative attitudes among parents and communities, who often perceive children with disabilities as a burden and incapable of achieving educational success, lead to many children either not being enrolled at the appropriate age or not being enrolled at all. Additionally, the absence of assistive devices and learning materials, combined with long distances and poor road conditions between home and school, significantly hinders regular attendance, retention, and contributes to higher dropout rates among these children.

2.5.8 Teenage pregnancy and early marriage lead to high dropout rates among girls

Despite policies and interventions that have been implemented to prevent teenage pregnancies, it continues to be a challenge. According to UDHS 2022, the rate of teenage pregnancy among girls aged 15 to 19 years decreased marginally from 25 per cent in 2016 to 24 per cent in 2022 (Table 10). Teenage pregnancy and early marriage are significant factors contributing to high school dropout rates among girls. Given the projected population of 2,641,490 females aged 15 to 19 in 2023, applying the 24 per cent teenage pregnancy rate suggests that approximately 633,957 girls might experience teenage pregnancy and are likely to be out of school.

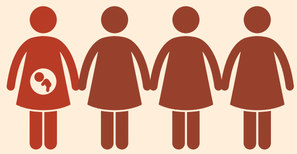
TABLE 10: TEENAGE PREGNANCY AND MOTHERHOOD FOR GIRLS AND WOMEN AGED 15 TO 19

BACKGROUND CHARACTERISTICS	%
Uganda	23.5
Residence:	
Urban	20.5
Rural	24.9
Education	
No Education:	**27.1**
Primary	26.5
Secondary	17.4
More than Secondary	7.5
Wealth Quintile	
Lowest	33.3
Second	27.9
Middle	23.8
Fourth	20.6
Highest	15.3

Source: UDHS 2022

There is inadequate public funding for ECD.

2% of learners in primary
1% of learners in secondary
are living with disabilities.



Aproximately
1 in 4
girls aged 15 - 19 years experience teenage pregnancy.

2.5.9 Negative parental and student attitudes towards education

Many parents in Uganda grew up under a generational narrative that education is the only route to a successful life. Historically, a significant number of Ugandans who achieved middle and high-income status did so through educational attainment. However, a qualitative poverty report by UBOS[9] highlights that many **young people now perceive education as insufficient for escaping poverty, given the scarcity and competitive nature of jobs, along with the prevalence of bribery in the hiring process.** Additionally, entrenched gender norms continue to disadvantage girls in accessing education.

9 Multidimensional Child Poverty in Uganda: Volume 2 Views of the Public (2024).

2.6 KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Increase the resources devoted to the education sector to keep up with rising numbers of school-going age.

2. Finalize and approve the Special Needs and Inclusive Education Policy to strategically guide and promote access to and retention in the formal education system for all children with special needs. This includes addressing challenges related to geographical, cultural, linguistic, gender, age, health, socio-economic factors, and other learning difficulties.

3. Implement low-cost and demand-side interventions to reduce dropouts and improve learning. These interventions may include addressing high household out-of-pocket expenditure and implementing school feeding programmes.

4. Ensure that EMIS is fully functional to provide comprehensive timely, accurate statistics and information for policy development, planning budgeting and evidence-based management of the education sector.

5. Invest in social protection and other initiatives to raise household income.

6. Invest in programmes focused on transforming societal attitudes and perceptions regarding the value of education for both girls and boys by fostering behavioural and mindset shifts.

7. Address teenage pregnancy and early marriages.

03

An internally inefficient education system

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An efficient education system ensures that all learners move through years of schooling at an appropriate rate and exit the system with the skills needed to either actively engage in the workforce or pursue further academic opportunities.

3.1. LOW SURVIVAL RATES IN EDUCATION CYCLES

The objective of an education system extends beyond merely increasing student enrollment. It also crucially encompasses ensuring that students who start an educational cycle are able to complete it without dropping out and do so within the expected time frame, avoiding grade repetition. The pedagogical programmes for each educational cycle are meticulously designed to impart a progressively cohesive and reinforcing set of knowledge and skills to learners. A premature exit from a cycle often leads to a partial or complete loss of the knowledge and skills gained during the attended years. In this policy note survival rates are calculated by comparing the number of students entering the first grade of the cycle (e.g., P1) with those who complete the last grade within the designated timeframe (e.g., P7, S4, S6). The smaller the difference the more continuous and efficient the education system.

In Uganda many children who begin an education cycle do not complete it (Table 11). For instance, in 2007, 1,832,129 pupils enrolled in P1 nationwide. By the time these pupils reached P7 and sat the Primary Leaving Examination (PLE) in 2013, the number had dropped to 560,784, which represents a survival rate of 30.61 per cent. The number further decreased for those continuing to lower secondary education, with only 316,624 pupils (17.28 per cent) reaching S4 and sitting the Uganda Certificate of Education (UCE) in 2017. Finally, the cohort reduced further in higher secondary education, with just 103,429 pupils (5.64 per cent) making it to S6 and sitting for the Uganda Advanced Certificate of Education (UACE) in 2019. These patterns are consistent across other years as well.

However, it is important to note that if a cohort from P1 is not reflected by end of S6 cycle, it doesn't necessarily mean that they are completely out of the education system. Some of them could have transitioned to other education pathways, including joining Primary Teacher Colleges and Business Technical Vocational Education and Training.

While primary schooling is necessary, it is not sufficient. For many indicators, having a primary education does not make a large difference versus having no education at all. According to World Bank (2018),[10] the gains associated with educational attainment tend to be substantial only with a secondary education. Secondary education prepares young people for the world of work and equips adolescents with the skills, aptitudes, and social values for a productive and healthy adult life (Jacob & Lehner, 2012).[11] Additionally, as noted by UNESCO (2010),[12] secondary education contributes towards the development of the knowledge necessary to avoid risky behavior for better and healthy lives, particularly for the adolescents.

The World Bank (2018) reports that each additional year of secondary education reduces the risk of child marriage and early childbirth—before age 18—by an average of 6 percentage points. Furthermore, the report suggests that achieving universal secondary education could nearly eliminate child marriage and reduce early childbearing by up to 75 per cent.

Between 5% and 6%

of the children who begin P1 complete upper secondary education at S6.

Universal secondary education could nearly **eliminate child marriage and reduce early childbearing by**

up to 75%.

Each additional year of secondary education leads to **a 6-percentage point reduction in the risks of both child marriage and having a child before the age of 18 years.**

10 World Bank (2018). Missed Opportunities: The cost of not educating girls. https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/775261531234655903/pdf/128171-replacement-HighCostOfNotEducatingGirls-Web.pdf

11 Jacob, W. J. & Lehner, S. (2012). EQUIP2 State-of-the-Art Knowledge in Education; Secondary Education: A Guide to Education Project Design Based on a Comprehensive Literature and Project Review. EQUIP2 State-of-the-Art Knowledge Series.

12 UNESCO. (2010). Sustainable development begins with education: How education can contribute to the proposed post-2015 goals.

TABLE 11: SURVIVAL MATRIX FROM P1 TO P7 (PLE), S4 (UCE) AND S6 (UACE)

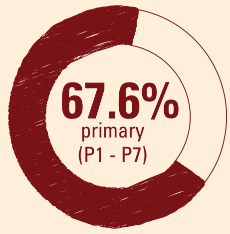
P1 YEAR OF ENROLMENT

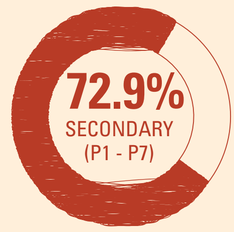
		PLE, UCE AND UACE EXAMINATIONS AND YEAR										
		REACHED P7 AND SAT UCE				REACHED S6 AND SAT UCE		REACHED S6 AND SAT UACE				
Year	P1 Enrolment	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
2007	1,832,129	560,784 (30.61%)				316,624 (17.28%)		103,429 (5.64%)				
2008	1,897,114		585,622 (30.87%)				320,119 (16.87%)		97,440 (5.14%)			
2009	1,946,318			620,482 (31.88%)				330,060 (16.96%)		No exam		
2010	1,943,552				623,540 (32.08%)				330,592 (17.01%)		96,557 (4.97%)	
2011	1,839,714					631,282 (34.21%)				No exam		109,488 (5.95%)
2012	1,877,801						659,633 (35.13%)				345,695 (18.41%)	
2013	1,883,803							683,302 (36.27%)				361,695 (19.20%)
2014	1,932,489								736,942 (38.13%)			
2015	1,842,006									No exam		
2016	1,888,847										811,810 (42.97%)	
2017	1,965,606											736,931 (37.54%)

Source: *Data from Education Statistical Abstracts and UNEB results for various years.*

3.2. HIGH PERCENTAGE OF OVERAGE CHILDREN DUE TO LATE ENTRY AND GRADE REPETITIONS

Uganda's education system has many overage children, which is attributed to late entry into primary school and grade repetition. Late entry and grade repetition contribute to overcrowded classrooms and increase pressure on limited learning resources in the early primary grades. While recent data is unavailable due to challenges with EMIS, Table 12 provides overage data for primary and secondary students from 2012 to 2017. The findings indicate that, on average, 67.6 per cent of primary students (P1 to P7) are overage for their class, while 72.9 per cent of secondary students (S1 to S6) are overage (Table 11). The significant overage enrolment in P1 highlights a lack of school readiness and weak foundational skills, impeding students' academic progression.





On average 67.6 per cent of the primary school learners (P1 - P7) and 72.9 per cent of the secondary school learners (S1 - S6) **are over age due to delayed enrolment and repeating grades.**

TABLE 12: OVERAGE FOR CLASS IN PRIMARY AND SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN THE PERIOD 2012 TO 2017

LEVEL	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	AVERAGE
Primary 1	52.4	51.3	52.7	53.7	53.1	52.9	**52.7**
Primary 2	60.8	59.6	62.0	62.3	61.6	61.4	**61.3**
Primary 3	68.5	67.4	70.0	69.7	68.7	68.2	**68.8**
Primary 4	72.7	70.2	73.0	72.8	71.8	71.1	**71.9**
Primary 5	73.3	71.4	73.6	73.8	73.0	72.0	**72.8**
Primary 6	74.9	71.6	73.7	73.8	73.3	72.0	**73.2**
Primary 7	**77.9**	**70.9**	**71.1**	**72.2**	**71.6**	**70.8**	**72.4**
Senior 1	80.8	78.4	79.0	79.9	78.6	78.2	**79.1**
Senior 2	78.3	76.7	77.0	77.9	76.9	76.2	**77.2**
Senior 3	78.4	76.3	76.3	77.6	77.4	76.7	**77.1**
Senior 4	**81.1**	**77.8**	**77.4**	**78.4**	**79.1**	**77.7**	**78.6**
Senior 5	75.9	67.6	68.3	69.6	69.4	65.9	**69.4**
Senior 6	**69.1**	**55.1**	**53.8**	**52.8**	**54.1**	**51.5**	**56.1**

Source: Data from Education Statistical Abstracts 2012 to 2017

3.3. A NUMBER OF STUDENTS DO NOT LEAVE THE EDUCATION SYSTEM WITH BASIC COMPETENCIES IN LITERACY AND NUMERACY

Despite of the country's remarkable progress in increasing primary and secondary enrolment rates, many students do not leave the system with basic competencies in literacy and numeracy. According to UNESCO (2024)[13] learning poverty in Uganda, defined as the percentage of children unable to read and comprehend age-appropriate text by age 10, was estimated at 83 per cent in 2022 by the World Bank, UNESCO, and other organizations. Contributing to this issue are the out-of-school children who are unlikely to reach the required reading proficiency.

83% of children are unable read and comprehend an age-appropriate text by the age of 10 (learning poverty).

Based on data from National Assessment of Progress in Education (NAPE) in 2018 and 2023, there have been improvements in both literacy and numeracy proficiency levels, though they remain relatively low (see Table 13). Specifically, proficiency in literacy in English at the P3 level increased from 49.9 per cent in 2018 to 53.9 per cent in 2023. Similarly, proficiency in numeracy at the P3

13 https://www.iicba.unesco.org/en/node/112

level rose from 55.2 per cent in 2018 to 57.5 per cent in 2023. However, there was a decline in proficiency at the P6 level between these years; literacy in English decreased from 53.1 per cent in 2018 to 42.7 per cent in 2023, while numeracy saw an improvement from 50.9 per cent in 2018 to 58 per cent in 2023. This indicates that although there have been some gains in the early years, literacy in English at the P6 level has suffered a notable decrease.

TABLE 13: RESULTS FOR NAPE 2018 AND 2023

AREAS OF NAPE PROFICIENCY	NAPE 2018 (%)	NAPE 2023 (%)
P3 learners:		
Proficiency in literacy in English	49.9	53.9
Proficiency in numeracy	55.2	57.5
P6 learners:		
Proficiency in literacy in English	53.1	42.7
Proficiency in numeracy	50.9	58.0

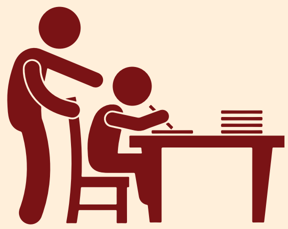
Source: *National Assessment of Progress in Education 2018 and 2023.*

3.4. CHALLENGES WITH TEACHERS

The effectiveness of education significantly hinges on the quality of its teachers. Indeed, the calibre of an education system is fundamentally enhanced by the quality of its educators (Mckinsey, 2007)[14]. Both the African Agenda 2063 and the Continental Education Strategy for Africa (2016–2025) (CESA 16–25) emphasize this point. Despite the existence of the National Teacher Policy (2028), there are several challenges with teachers in Uganda.

3.4.1 Not enough teachers

Uganda's recent education sector reforms have led to an increase in the number of trained teachers. However, the surge in primary school enrolments and the expanding number of secondary schools have outpaced efforts to establish a sufficient teaching workforce, resulting in declining learning conditions, particularly in rural areas. Attracting qualified and motivated teachers to rural regions remains challenging, as most prefer urban settings offering better access to services like healthcare, banking, and adequate housing.



The teacher-pupil ratio is currently **1:65 significantly higher than the UNESCO benchmark of 1:40.**

The teacher-pupil ratio is currently 1:65, significantly exceeding the UNESCO Institute for Statistics' recommended benchmark of 40 students per teacher, which is essential for achieving SDG 4. This shortage of teachers is primarily due to limited financial resources allocated to the education sector, constrained by a tight fiscal budget.

3.4.2 Inequitable allocation of teachers between and within districts

Guidelines for identifying teacher needs and assigning postings are in place, but education officers encounter substantial difficulties in executing teacher deployment. A common issue is the strong preference among teachers to work in urban areas, resulting in an imbalance where some schools have a surplus of teachers, while others, particularly in rural or less desirable locations, experience significant shortages.

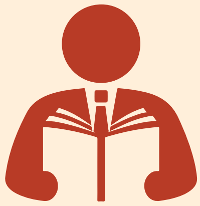
3.4.3 Low salaries for teachers

The teacher wage bill constitutes a significant portion of recurrent public education expenditure, thereby constraining potential increases unless the overall budget is expanded. Despite this, teacher salaries remain relatively low, falling below the national average for other professionals and failing to provide a sustainable living or sufficient motivation. Consequently, the teaching profession struggles to attract high-calibre candidates.

14 Mckinsey, (2007). How the World's Best performance School Systems come out on top. OECD Publications.

3.4.4 Teacher absenteeism

Teachers' absenteeism undermines the provision of a high quality of education. According to the World Bank (2023) chronic teacher absenteeism compromises education quality and reduces spending efficiency. According to Inspectorate of Government Report (2021)[15] the cost of teacher absenteeism in terms of lost instructional time amounts to almost UGX 1.5 trillion. Moreover, teachers' absence and lack of engagement in their responsibilities exacerbate student absenteeism and undermine learning outcomes. One significant factor contributing to teacher absenteeism is moonlighting, where teachers undertake additional employment to augment their income.



2018 NAPE revealed that teachers struggled with English literacy at P3 learners level.

3.4.5 Poor quality of teachers

According to the Uganda National Examinations Board (UNEB) 2015, only 21.8 per cent of the pre-service teachers were proficient in numeracy while 38.8 per cent reached the desired minimum proficiency level in literacy in English. The 2018 NAPE revealed that teachers struggled with English literacy at the P3 learners' level. Specifically, teachers demonstrated difficulty in drawing inferences from short texts that were read aloud to them.

3.4.6 Weak inspection and monitoring to enforce standards and delivery of quality education

Governments use school inspections as a mechanism to ensure accountability to the public for the financial investments in education systems, as well as to enhance the quality of education in schools. However, the effectiveness of these inspections is often compromised by insufficient financial and human resources. Additionally, inadequate infrastructure, such as poor road and transportation facilities, further impedes the ability to conduct regular school inspections.

Elimination of corruption in Uganda's education sector **could result in UGX 1.8 trillion in savings.**

3.5. CORRUPTION IN THE EDUCATION SECTOR CAUSES SYSTEM INEFFICIENCY

The elimination of corruption in Uganda's education sector could result in substantial annual savings of nearly UGX 1.8 trillion, which is equal to 51 per cent of 2019 government spending on education[16]. Corruption within the education sector manifests in several ways: the misappropriation of funds or resources designated for public education, the hiring of unqualified teachers, and the creation of 'ghost accounts'– phantom schools, teachers, or students that receive financial allocations despite being nonexistent, redundant, or inactive in service provision.

3.6. LACK OF A FULLY FUNCTIONAL EDUCATION MANAGEMENT INFORMATION SYSYEM (EMIS)

EMIS was operational until 2017, which explains the paucity of high-quality educational statistics since then. Presently, the system is undergoing an upgrade to enhance overall sector management. The improvements will enable more effective tracking of enrolment, dropout, and retention rates and facilitate the unique identification of students, teachers, and institutions. This will also mitigate management challenges such as ghost accounts.

15 Inspectorate of Government (2021): Cost and Extent of Corruption in Education Sector in Uganda. https://www.igg.go.ug/media/files/publications/The_cost_and_extent_of_corruption_in_the_Education_Sector_in_Uganda_2_8pMy4nd.pdf

16 Inspectorate of Government (2021): Costs and Extent of Corruption in Education sector in Uganda.

3.7. KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **Increase the budget** to the education sector through a phased-in approach to reach 20 per cent by 2030 and prioritize the budget to provide for pre-primary and primary over further increases in tertiary education.

2. **Increase and review the financing modalities** of education across all levels and exploit innovative financing mechanisms in education (e.g., capitation grants, social protection pathways, school facilities grants, scholarships; endowment funds, public-private partnerships).

3. **Enhance EMIS** to comprehensively track each child's educational journey from pre-school through S6. This system should be capable of monitoring transitions between different learning pathways, identifying cases of grade repetition, dropouts, and students who join the workforce directly.

4. Improve **learning outcome assessment** by joining internationally recognized assessment programmes: As recommended by Jeffrey Sachs when he visited Uganda in early 2024, Uganda should consider joining the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) to supplement NAPE assessments. PISA is recognized globally and reviews the extent to which students near the end of compulsory education have acquired some of the knowledge and skills that are essential for full participation in modern society, particularly in mathematics, reading and science.

5. **Increasing access to integrated ECD** services through implementation of ECCE and achieving compulsory one-year pre-primary education.

6. **Professionalize and incentivize teachers:**
   a) Create an enabling environment to attract good candidates to the teaching profession.
   b) Review teacher salaries taking into account fiscal space and need for equity as part of a comprehensive reform of the teaching profession, including recruitment, career incentives, and support.
   c) Create additional incentives for qualified teachers, especially female teachers, to accept work in schools in rural/remote areas.

7. Enhance **quality assurance measures,** including school inspection, monitoring, and support supervision to reduce absenteeism, improve accountability, and improve quality of learning.

8. **Improve school governance and oversight of education institutions** through strengthened community monitoring of schools by parents, civil society organizations and traditional leaders and parent-teacher associations to supplement the work of inspectors and auditors.

9. Establish **multiple learning and skilling transition pathways** for children at the post-primary level, including at formal and informal TVET and other skills training, in partnership with the private sector.

10. Integrate **ICT into education systems** to improve access to quality education, enhance learning outcomes, and prepare students for the digital economy.

11. **Decongest classrooms** by reducing the pupil-teacher ratio from 1:54 in 2022 to 1:40 in all public primary schools. Additionally, gradually lower the pupil-classroom ratio in public primary and secondary schools, which stood at 69 and 53, respectively, in 2022. This can be achieved by constructing more classrooms to address overcrowding and reviewing staff housing, thus enhancing the quality of learner achievement.

04

Call to action on education

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Considering the above, this call to action seeks to redouble efforts in Uganda. This is in line with several national, regional and continental efforts call to action on education.

In July 2023, Uganda joined other African countries in making new bold commitments to human capital developments through the Dar es Salaam Declaration, including increasing the accessibility, affordability, and quality of education; reducing learning poverty by at least 25 per cent; boosting literacy rates to at least 75 per cent; and increasing access to secondary and tertiary education among adolescent girls. In September 2023, the United Nations came up with six key transitions[17], including education, which can have catalytic and multiplier effects across the SDGs.

In February 2024, the African Union Summit of Heads of State and Government in Addis Ababa officially declared 2024 the Year of Education with the theme "Educate and Skill Africa for the 21st Century", calling on all governments to accelerate progress towards achieving quality education for all.

17 The six transitions are (1) food systems; (2) energy access and affordability; (3) digital connectivity; (4) education; (5) jobs and social protection; and (6) climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution.

4.1. BUILD ON CURRENT NATIONAL AND REGIONAL MOMENTUM ON EDUCATION TO COME UP WITH A RESCUE PLAN FOR FINANCING EDUCATION

With the current population growth, levels of poverty and vulnerability, and public investment in education of 2.5 per cent of GDP, the percentage of out-of-school children will continue to increase and the quality of learning for those in school will continue to decline unless action is taken to reverse the trend. To address the situation, it is essential to allocate additional resources and implement critical reforms aimed at increasing school enrolment, including for refugee children, and improving the quality of education in Uganda. Such investments will bolster pre-primary learning opportunities, ensure all children complete primary education with proficiency in literacy, numeracy, and essential skills, and eliminate repetition and dropout rates. Furthermore, these measures will reduce out-of-pocket educational costs for households, remove other barriers to participation, and ensure a functional EMIS.

In order to achieve the above, there is need for the following measures:

1. **Government:**

   a) **Increase allocations to education** from 8.4 per cent of the national budget in the fiscal year 2023/24 to ally to 20 per cent by 2030 in line with the Dakar Declaration.

   b) Implement **policy and regulatory reforms** to enhance access and improve quality, including:

      – Establishing multiple learning and skilling transition pathways for children at the post-primary level, including at formal and informal TVET and other skills training in partnership with the private sector.

      – Implement compulsory pre-primary education and an increase in the coverage of child-focused social protection to support poor and vulnerable households.

2. **Development partners**

   a) **Increase ODA for education from the current 5 per cent at least 10 per cent,** including the unblocking of the Global Partnership for Education funding for the U-Learn Project.

   b) Work with the government to **improve aid coordination** in line IATI principles for maximum impact, including revamping the Aid Management Platform.

   c) **Establish a pooled fund for education** in Uganda to address specific challenges related to quality education, equity and inclusion, and education and skills development in refugee settings.

4.2. EXPANDING SOCIAL PROTECTION TO IMPROVE EDUCATION OUTCOMES FOR THE POOR

It is imperative to expand social protection coverage beyond the current 3.1 per cent to enhance educational outcomes for poor people. Addressing the underlying issues of poverty and vulnerability is crucial, as these factors often force children to work to sustain their families or hinder their ability to benefit from education due to hunger or malnutrition. Such interventions in social protection not only mitigate direct and indirect costs associated with accessing educational services but also invigorate the demand for education. The government must significantly increase its social protection spending from the current allocation of less than 1 per cent of the national budget to at least 5 per cent. Additionally, development partners should increase their support by providing additional ODA to bolster the social protection sector.

Annexures

TABLE A1: ANNUAL PERCENTAGE OF POPULATION GROWTH AND COMPARATOR COUNTRIES AND REGION

COUNTRY/REGION	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Uganda*	**3.2**	**3.2**	**3.2**	**3.1**	**3.1**
Tanzania	3.2	3.1	3.1	3.1	3.0
Kenya	2.1	2.0	2.0	2.0	1.9
Burundi	3.0	3.3	2.9	2.7	2.7
Rwanda	2.5	2.4	2.4	2.4	2.3
South Sudan	-2.5	0.5	1.5	1.3	1.5
Congo, Dem. Rep.	3.3	3.2	3.3	3.3	3.2
Somalia	3.7	3.7	3.5	3.2	3.1
East African Community (8)	**2.3**	**2.7**	**2.7**	**2.6**	**2.6**
Sub-Saharan Africa	2.7	2.7	2.7	2.6	2.5
Lower middle income: World Bank Classification	1.4	1.4	1.4	1.3	1.0
Low income: World Bank Classification	2.8	2.8	2.8	2.7	2.7
Least developed countries: UN classification	2.4	2.4	2.4	2.4	2.3
Eastern and Southern Africa	2.7	2.7	2.7	2.6	2.5

Source: *World Bank and Uganda Bureau of Statistics (UBOS)*
Note: **Collected from UBOS*

TABLE A2: UNDERAGE AND OVERAGE IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS IN 2017

PRIMARY LEVEL	5 YEARS OR LESS	6 YEARS	7 YEARS	8 YEARS	9 YEARS	10 YEARS	11 YEARS	12 YEARS	13 YEARS AND ABOVE	TOTAL	% UNDERAGE	% OVERAGE	% BOTH UNDERAGE AND OVERAGE
Primary 1	100,909	824,552	574,808	274,892	110,601	50,562	17,656	7,965	3,661	1,965,606	5.1	52.9	58.1
Primary 2	-	53,604	474,085	400,656	232,535	122,260	49,003	22,529	10,639	1,365,311	3.9	61.4	65.3
Primary 3	-	-	46,398	391,294	386,601	281,949	146,184	78,781	46,740	1,377,947	3.4	68.2	71.6
Primary 4	-	-	-	45,507	349,036	375,583	269,963	181,134	144,685	1,365,908	3.3	71.1	74.4
Primary 5	-	-	-	-	39,990	287,224	307,396	256,756	279,274	1,170,640	3.4	72	75.5
Primary 6	-	-	-	-	-	36,793	235,150	286,808	412,480	971,231	3.8	72	75.8
Primary 7	-	-	-	-	-	-	26,436	155,623	441,887	623,946	4.2	70.8	75.1
Total	**100,909**	**878,156**	**1,095,291**	**1,112,349**	**1,118,763**	**11,543,717**	**1,051,788**	**989,596**	**1,339,366**	**8,840,589**	**4**	**65.3**	**69.3**

Source: *Data from Education Statistical Abstract 2017*

Note: *The areas shaded green indicate the number of students who are in their appropriate year of school.*

TABLE A3: UNDERAGE AND OVERAGE IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN 2017

SECONDARY LEVEL	12 YEARS	13 YEARS	14 YEARS	15 YEARS	16 YEARS	17 YEARS	18 YEARS	19 YEARS	TOTAL	% UNDERAGE	% OVERAGE	% BOTH UNDERAGE AND OVERAGE
Senior 1	10,521	65,339	97,950	83,960	50,883	25,940	9,163	3,773	347,529	3	78.2	81.2
Senior 2		12,043	63,876	91,015	76,151	47,471	19,654	8,585	318,795	3.8	76.2	80.0
Senior 3			12,069	58,508	89,132	78,344	42,872	21,397	302,322	4	76.7	80.6
Senior 4				9,570	49,723	83,543	72,618	51,029	266,483	3.6	77.7	81.3
Senior 5					3,705	19,436	24,928	19,774	67,843	5.5	65.9	71.4
Senior 6						6,787	25,991	34,833	67,611	10	51.5	61.6
Total	**10,521**	**77,382**	**173,895**	**243,053**	**269,594**	**261,521**	**195,226**	**139,391**	**1,370,583**	**4**	**75.4**	**79.4**

Source: *Data from Education Statistical Abstract 2017*

Note: *The areas shaded green indicate the number of students who are in their appropriate year of school.*

TABLE A4: UNDERAGE FOR CLASS FOR THE PERIOD 2012 TO 2017

CLASS/LEVEL	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	AVERAGE
Primary 1	3.8	3.9	4.2	4.3	4.6	5.1	4.3
Primary 2	3.7	3.9	4.0	3.7	3.7	3.9	3.8
Primary 3	3.4	3.5	3.3	3.3	3.3	3.4	3.4
Primary 4	3.0	3.6	3.3	3.2	3.3	3.3	3.3
Primary 5	3.9	3.6	3.4	3.3	3.2	3.4	3.5
Primary 6	4.2	4.0	3.8	3.5	3.5	3.8	3.8
Primary 7	**3.7**	**4.4**	**4.3**	**3.9**	**4.0**	**4.2**	**4.1**
Senior 1	2.4	3.3	3.0	2.9	3.1	3.0	3.0
Senior 2	3.2	3.9	3.7	3.7	3.8	3.8	3.7
Senior 3	3.3	4.0	4.1	3.8	4.2	4.0	3.9
Senior 4	**2.7**	**3.8**	**3.7**	**3.8**	**3.3**	**3.6**	**3.5**
Senior 5	3.3	5.8	5.8	5.2	5.2	5.5	5.1
Senior 6	**5.3**	**9.2**	**8.7**	**9.6**	**8.8**	**10.0**	**8.6**

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