

# Progress in getting all children to school stalls but some countries show the way forward

## POLICY PAPER 14 / FACT SHEET 28

June 2014

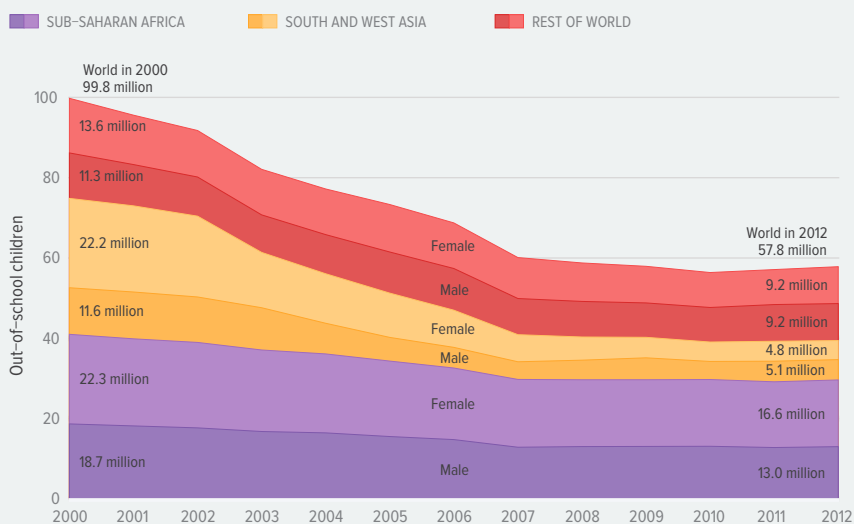
*This paper, jointly released by the Education for All Global Monitoring Report (GMR) and the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS), shows that global progress in reducing the number of children out of school has come to a virtual standstill. But many countries have made major progress since 2000 and offer examples to follow.*

## Global progress towards universal primary education has halted

As debate continues over the goals and targets of the post-2015 development agenda, new data show that the world will not fulfil one of the most basic commitments: to get every child in school by 2015. According to UIS data, nearly 58 million children of primary school age (typically between 6 and 11 years of age) were not enrolled in school in 2012 (see **Figure 1**). Many of them will probably never enter a classroom.

The momentum to reach out-of-school children has slowed considerably in recent years, with the global primary out-of-school rate stuck at 9% since 2007. This marks a stark contrast to progress at the start of the decade, when the international community pledged to achieve universal primary education

**FIGURE 1**  
Number of out-of-school children of primary school age by region and sex, 2000–2012



Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics database

(UPE) at the World Education Forum in 2000. The standstill at the global level is the result of opposing trends: a significant decline in the number of out-of-school children in certain countries due to important policy initiatives, and a rising school-age population in sub-Saharan Africa. In view of the most recent UIS data, it is certain that the world will not reach the goal of UPE by 2015.

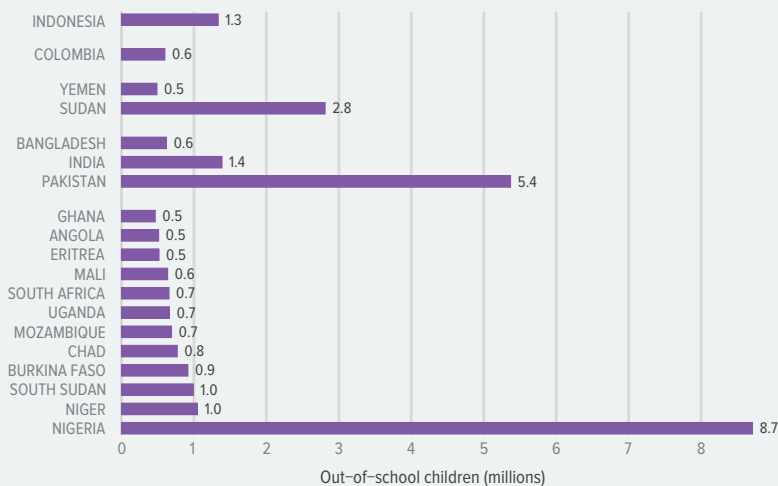
Progress has slowed mainly because the number of children out of school in sub-Saharan Africa remained at about 30 million between 2007 and 2012 (see Figure 1). As a result, the share of the world's out-of-school children living in sub-Saharan Africa has increased to more than one-half of the total in the most recent years with data. By contrast, South and West Asia has made considerable gains, reducing the number of out-of-school children by two-thirds from 34 million in 2000 to 10 million in 2012. The share of girls in the total number of out-of-school children in South and West Asia fell from

two-thirds in 2000 to less than one-half in 2012. In sub-Saharan Africa, on the other hand, the female proportion of the total out-of-school population increased slightly between 2000 and 2012, from 54% to 56%.

India, Indonesia, Niger, Nigeria, Pakistan and Sudan each have more than 1 million children out of school. **Figure 2** presents data for countries facing the greatest challenges, although it is important to note that this list is not exhaustive. Countries such as Afghanistan and Somalia are also struggling to provide every child with a primary education but lack the data to provide accurate counts of their out-of-school populations.

**FIGURE 2**

Number of out-of-school children in selected countries, 2012 or latest year available



**Notes:** Data for Ghana refer to 2013. Data for Angola, Chad, India, South Sudan, Sudan and Uganda refer to 2011. Data for Bangladesh and Nigeria refer to 2010.

Source: *UNESCO Institute for Statistics* database

There is also a growing demand for secondary education as more countries approach UPE. UIS data provide information on educational exclusion among adolescents of lower secondary school age, typically between 12 and 15 years of age. In 2012, 63 million young adolescents around the world were not enrolled in primary or secondary school, compared with 97 million in 2000. South and West Asia has the biggest share of this population with 26 million out-of-school adolescents, although this represents a reduction by nearly one-third since 2000. Progress in the region has been especially notable for girls since 2000, when nearly three in five out-of-school children were female, compared to

less than one-half in 2012 (see **Figure 3**). The second-highest number is found in sub-Saharan Africa (21 million), where there has been almost no change

in gender parity since the beginning of the last decade. Across the region, girls account for 54% of the total adolescent out-of-school population compared with 57% in 2000.

*More than four out of ten out-of-school children will never enter a classroom*

While access to education has been improving globally, there has been little progress in reducing the rate at which children leave school before reaching the last grade of primary education. About 135 million children began primary school in 2012,

but if current trends continue 34 million children (some older than the official school age) will leave school before reaching the last grade of primary. The early school leaving rate of 25% has remained at the same level as in 2000. To achieve UPE, new interventions are required to reduce this rate.

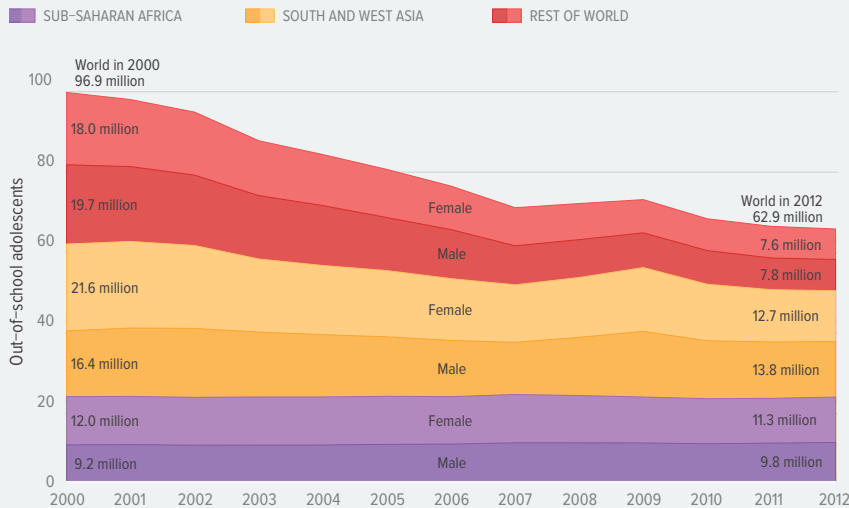
Sub-Saharan Africa and South and West Asia have the highest rates of early school leaving. Across these regions, more than one in every three students who started primary school in 2012 will not make it to the last grade.

To better gauge how the out-of-school numbers are related to early school leaving, the UIS identifies three groups of out-of-school children of primary school age according to their exposure to education: those who have left school early, those who are expected to enter school in the future and those who are expected to never attend school.

Of the 58 million out-of-school children of primary age, 23% have some schooling but dropped out. A further 34% are expected to enter school in the near future, and a full 43% will probably never enter school (see **Figure 4**). Data show large variations in regional patterns. In Central Asia, South and West Asia, and sub-Saharan Africa, most out-of-school children will probably never receive any formal education. This is the case for 43% of children out of

**FIGURE 3**

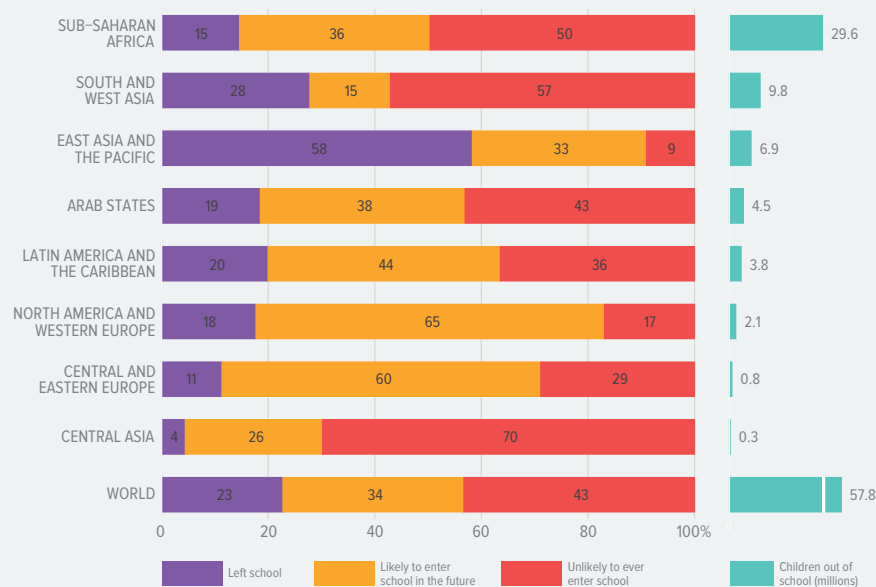
Number of out-of-school adolescents of lower secondary school age by region and sex, 2000-2012



Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics database

**FIGURE 4**

School exposure of out-of-school children of primary school age by region, 2012



Source: [UNESCO Institute for Statistics database](#)

school in the Arab States. In Central and Eastern Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean, and North America and Western Europe, most out-of-school children will start school late. East Asia and the Pacific and South and West Asia have large shares of early school leavers.

The classification of out-of-school children by past and possible future school attendance yields important insights for policymakers. If the majority of out-of-school children in a country attended but left school, demand-oriented programmes and interventions should focus

**BOX 1**

**Global Report on Out-of-School Children**

The UIS has joined forces with UNICEF in a global initiative to better identify which children are excluded from school and why in order to develop the policies needed to reach them. In late 2014, a global report will present the latest statistical evidence from administrative data and household surveys, as well as policy analysis from leading experts. Based on a series of studies in different regions and countries, the report proposes a new approach to using data to overcome the educational barriers facing children and adolescents of primary and lower secondary school age, by identifying the policies and financial resources needed to get them in classrooms. The report will also explore the compounding effects of disadvantage faced by children with disabilities, minorities, working children and those affected by armed conflict. The central goal is to provide the data and analysis needed to catalyse action for out-of-school children worldwide at a critical moment for international development.

on reducing the dropout rate by improving the quality of education and addressing issues such as the direct and indirect costs of education. For children who are likely to attend school in the future, the goal is to ensure earlier entry into the education system.

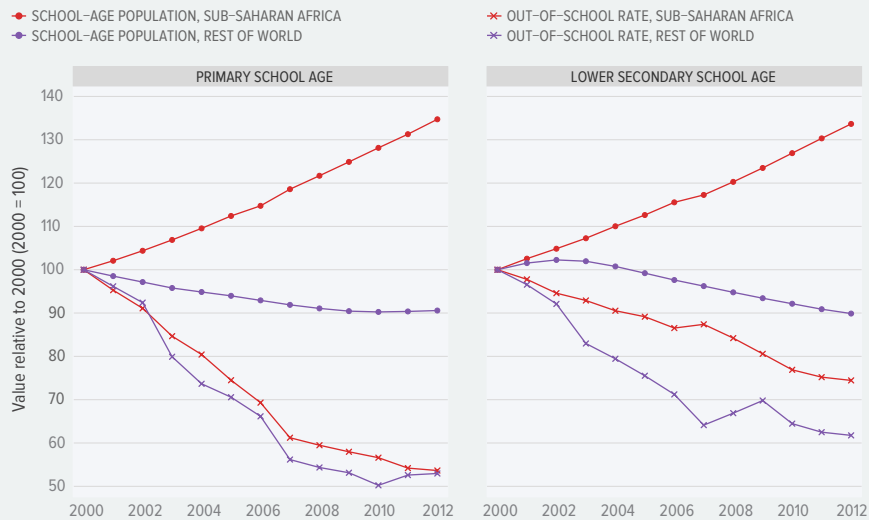
Children who are expected to never gain access to schooling – roughly 15 million girls and 10 million boys – pose serious challenges to policymakers. Addressing the issue of out-of-school children means improving both demand and supply of education provision and requires a robust base of evidence derived from the latest data and research on out-of-school children (see **Box 1**).

*Sub-Saharan Africa struggles to enrol growing numbers of children*

As shown in Figures 1 and 2, the number of out-of-school children of primary school age in sub-Saharan Africa fell by less than 30% between 2000 and 2012, compared with a decrease of more than 50% in the rest of the world. In addition, the

**FIGURE 5**

School-age population and out-of-school rate in sub-Saharan Africa and rest of the world relative to 2000



Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics database

number of out-of-school adolescents of lower secondary school age in sub-Saharan Africa remained almost the same, while it fell by about 45% in the rest of the world. The development in sub-Saharan Africa compared with the rest of the world is tightly linked to regional trends in the school-age population. **Figure 5** plots trends for the school-age population and the out-of-school rate in sub-Saharan Africa and the rest of the world between 2000 and 2012, with the respective values in 2000 set to 100.

A comparison of Figures 1, 2 and 5 shows that although the numbers of out-of-school children and adolescents in sub-Saharan Africa have remained nearly constant since 2007 and 2000, respectively, the out-of-school rate continues to fall for both age groups but not enough to counterbalance the steady population increase.

In sub-Saharan Africa, the number of children and adolescents of primary and lower secondary school age has grown by one-third since 2000, while the rest of the world saw a 10% decrease in the school-age population over the same period. In 2012, sub-Saharan Africa was home to 36 million more children of primary school age and 16 million more adolescents of lower secondary school age than in 2000. No other region is faced with such a large increase in the school-age population.

Despite high population growth, sub-Saharan Africa as a whole managed to achieve the same relative decline in the primary out-of-school rate as the rest of the world, reducing the percentage by nearly one-half from 39% to 21% between 2000 and 2012, while it fell from 10.5% to 5.5% in the rest of the world (see Figure 5). Sub-Saharan African countries also made significant progress in reducing the lower secondary out-of-school rate, which fell by 25% from 2000 to 2012, whereas the rest of world saw a decrease of nearly 40%. Nevertheless, out-of-school rates in sub-Saharan Africa remain much higher than in all other regions.

To reduce the out-of-school population further, countries in sub-Saharan Africa face a double challenge: not only do they have to ensure that today's

out-of-school children enter and complete at least primary education, they also have to accommodate an ever larger number of children who reach school-going age over the coming years. Between 2012 and 2015 alone, the regional population of primary school-age children and lower secondary school-age adolescents is expected to grow by a further 19 million, from 205 million to 224 million.

### *Some countries have shown the way forward*

While the world on average appears to have lost steam in its effort to ensure that all children are in school, some countries have demonstrated that rapid progress is possible within a relatively short period of time. **Figure 6** shows countries that had at least 100,000 out-of-school children in 2000 and managed

to reduce those populations by at least 50% by 2012 or the latest year available with data. Together these 17 countries, which accounted for about one-quarter of the global out-of-school population in 2000, managed to reduce their out-of-school numbers by 86%, from 27 million to less than 4 million, in little over a decade.

For example, 24% of children of primary school age were out of school in Nepal in 2000; by 2013, the rate had fallen to just 1% with the out-of-school population falling by 660,000. Likewise in Morocco, the out-of-school population fell by 96%, or more than 930,000, between 2000 and 2013. How did they achieve this remarkable feat? What policies were used to translate political will into effective action?

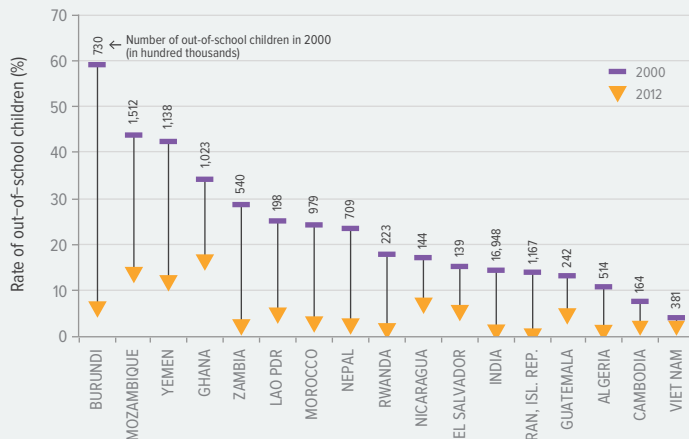
The remainder of this paper looks at the paths followed in 11 of these countries from five regions, for which complementary survey data are available. These survey data show that the percentage of children who had never been to school<sup>1</sup> also fell by at least 50% roughly between 2000 and 2010 in 8 of these 11 countries.

### *Which policies led to success?*

Countries face different challenges and need different policies depending on their circumstances. However, the 11 selected countries all share a strong political will to improve access to education.

**FIGURE 6**

Rate of out-of-school children, selected countries, 2000 and 2012 or latest year available



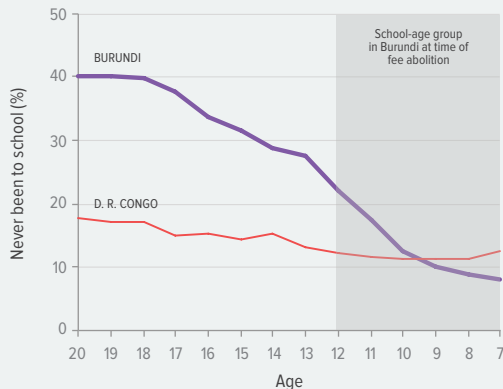
**Note:** The figure presents countries with at least 100,000 children out of school in 2000 that reduced their out-of-school populations by more than one-half by 2012 or the latest year available with data.

Source: [UNESCO Institute for Statistics database](#)

**Fee abolition.** Many countries eliminated official school fees in line with the Dakar Framework commitment that primary education should be “free of tuition and other fees”. Fee abolition had a strong positive impact on enrolment either during the year of abolition or in subsequent years.

**FIGURE 7**

Percentage of children who had never been to school by age, Burundi and the Democratic Republic of the Congo



**Note:** The horizontal axis shows the age of the children in 2005, the year when school fees were abolished in Burundi.

Source: World Inequality Database in Education (2014) based on the 2010 Burundi Demographic and Health Survey and the 2010 D.R. Congo Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey

In Burundi, for example, the adjusted primary net enrolment rate was 54% in 2004, the year preceding fee abolition; it increased to 74% in the year after fees were abolished as part of the post-conflict election promise, and by 2010 reached 94%. **Figure 7** shows how fee abolition in 2005 is associated with a sharp reduction in the percentage of children of primary school age (7 to 12 years) who had never been to school. By contrast, in the neighbouring Democratic Republic of the Congo there was no progress in reducing the percentage of children who had never been to school, as fees were only formally abolished in 2010 and the effect of this policy has not yet been captured.

However, fee abolition needs to be counterbalanced by supplementary measures, notably school grants, otherwise schools risk losing resources that they need to deliver education services. In Mozambique, the Direct Support to Schools (*Apoio Directo às Escolas*) programme provided primary schools with grants to purchase learning materials, such as textbooks and stationery. The percentage of children who had never been to school fell from 49% to 21% between 1998 and 2011.

**Increasing education expenditure.** The expansion of primary education requires significant additional resources to construct classrooms, recruit teachers and procure textbooks. Ghana, which abolished fees in 2003, doubled education spending as a share of gross national product from 4.2% in 1999 to 8.5% in 2011. This helped increase primary education enrolment by 70% from 2.4 million children in 1999 to 4.1 million in 2013.

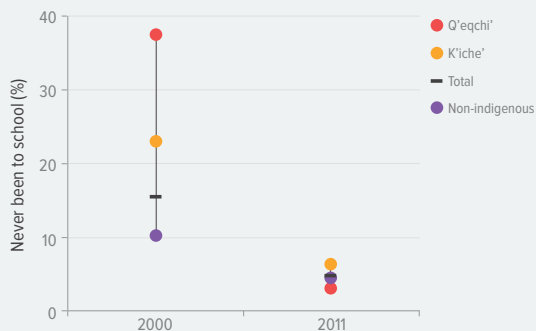
In Cambodia, education spending as a share of gross national product almost tripled, from 1% in 1999 to 2.7% in 2010, in order to finance its fee abolition policy, which was introduced in 2001. In addition, the government partnered with the donor community through a sector-wide approach, which helped coordinate different interventions and made it possible to disburse funds directly to schools. Aid to basic education per primary school-age child doubled from US\$9 in 2002/2003 to US\$19 in 2011. The percentage of children who had never been to school fell from 26% to 11% between 2000 and 2010.

**Social cash transfers.** In order to improve access to education, some countries, especially in Latin America, have also invested in wider social programmes to support poor families and make it easier to send their children to school.

Nicaragua introduced its Social Protection Network (*Red de Protección Social*) programme in 2000 and rolled it out in selected districts in 2003. It included two cash transfers: one equivalent to US\$120 per year for households with children aged 7 to 13 years who had not yet completed fourth grade; and the other an annual transfer to cover a school bag, uniform and school supplies. In addition, local school associations or teachers were given education transfers for each beneficiary child enrolled in Grades 1 to 4. An evaluation of the programme showed good targeting of the poorest households and positive effects on enrolment and retention. Overall, the percentage of children who had never been to school fell from 17% in 1998 to 7% in 2009.

**FIGURE 8**

Percentage of children who had never been to school, selected ethnic groups, Guatemala, 2000 and 2011



Note: See endnote 1.

Source: *World Inequality Database in Education (2014)* based on the 2000 and 2011 Guatemala Living Conditions Survey

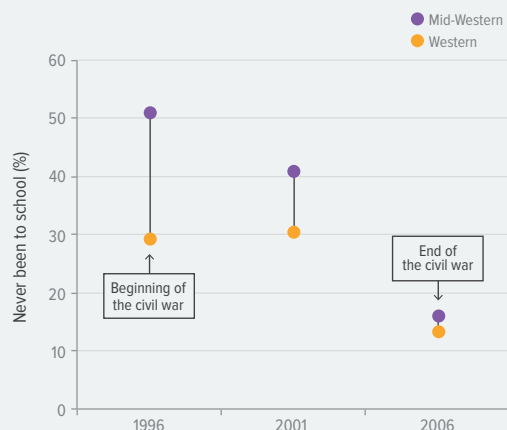
### Increasing attention to ethnic and linguistic minorities.

Progress towards UPE inevitably hinges on including children from marginalised populations, especially ethnic and linguistic minorities. Reforms to strengthen the teaching of mother tongue languages in primary schools have increased access. Morocco introduced the teaching of Amazigh in primary schools in 2003. The percentage of children who had never been to school fell from 9% in 2003 to 4% in 2009.

Guatemala, whose education system did not serve the needs of its indigenous populations, expanded its bilingual education programme to 15 languages. As part of the programme, bilingual learning materials promoting indigenous culture were produced and teachers were trained to use them. **Figure 8** shows that 38% of Q'eqchi' children had never been to school in 2000, which was 2.5 times above the national average. By 2011, only 3% had never been to school, which was even below the national average.

**FIGURE 9**

Percentage of children who had never been to school, selected regions, Nepal, 1996–2006



Note: See endnote 1.

Source: *World Inequality Database in Education (2014)* based on the 1996, 2001 and 2006 Nepal Demographic and Health Surveys

**Overcoming conflict.** One-half of all out-of-school children live in conflict-affected countries. There is a clear peace dividend when countries end hostilities. In Nepal, a major source of the conflict from 1996 to 2006 was inequality in access to education, among other issues. Recognising this, an attempt to increase educational opportunities was begun during the civil war, for example through scholarships to marginalised groups or village development committees. **Figure 9** shows that in 1996, 51% of children had never been to school in the conflict-affected Mid-Western region, compared with 29% in the Western region. By 2006, there was near parity, and these efforts continued after the peace accord.

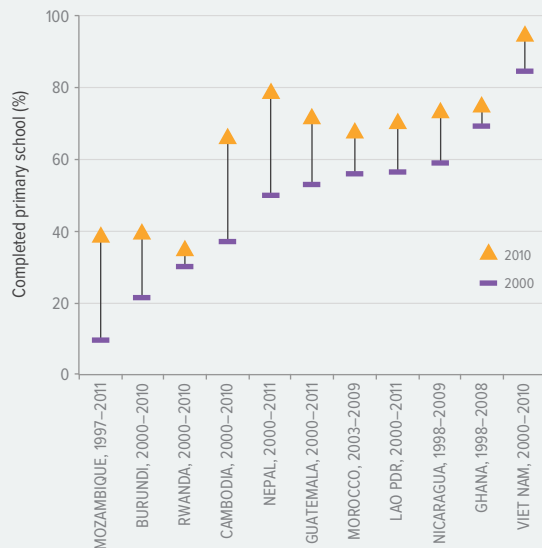


Rwanda invested heavily in education as a means to heal the effects of the genocide and the conflict that followed. For example, special funds were established to ensure that orphaned children benefited equally from educational opportunities. Donors backed the country's education plan and provided predictable financial flows, which allowed the implementation of a policy providing for nine years of free and compulsory education. The percentage of children who had never been to school was halved from 18% in 2000 to 9% in 2010.

**Quality.** The incentives for families to send their children to school and keep them there are higher when they can expect their children to learn basic skills. Viet Nam's curriculum is closely matched to what children are able to learn and pays particular attention to disadvantaged learners. Curriculum reform aimed to ensure that mathematics teaching provided all pupils with basic, applicable knowledge and skills relevant to local communities and future needs. The percentage of children who had never been to school fell from 3.8% in 2000 to 1.7% in 2010. Only in the Central Highlands region did it exceed 4%.

**FIGURE 10**

Percentage of children who had completed primary school, circa 2000 and 2010



**Note:** See endnote 2. The figure presents countries with at least 100,000 children out of school in 2000 that more than halved their out-of-school population by 2012.

Source: World Inequality Database in Education (2014)

### *Progress in enrolment should not lead to complacency*

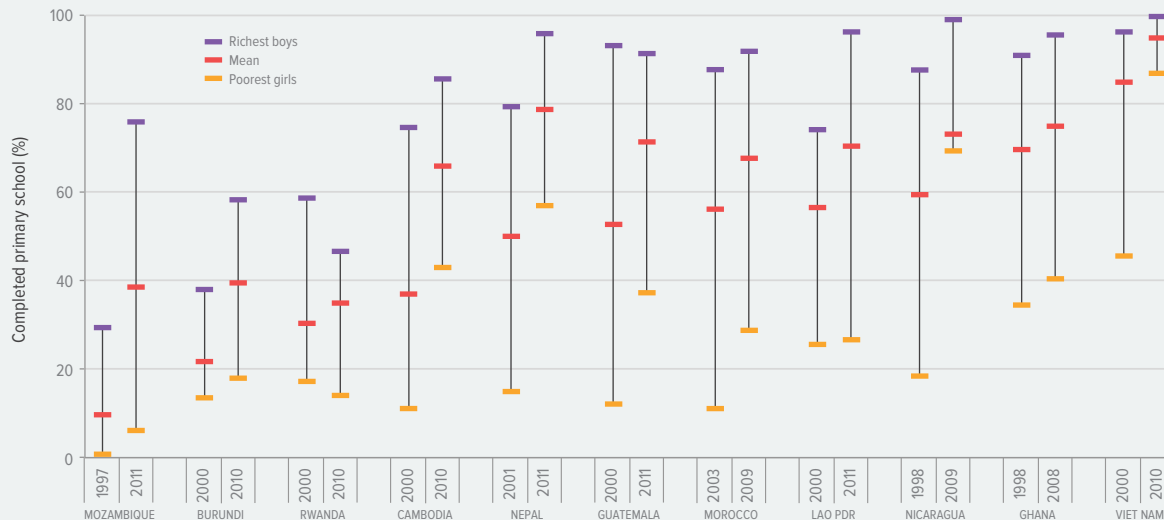
Enrolment is a partial measure of whether UPE has been achieved, given that success should be judged with respect to whether all children also complete primary education.

A closer look suggests that progress in access does not necessarily lead to UPE. Attainment of primary education increased much more slowly than enrolment rates. The percentage of children who had not completed primary school<sup>2</sup> fell by at least 50% in only 2 of the 11 countries: Nepal and Viet Nam. On average, the percentage of non-completers fell by one-third, with some countries such as Ghana and Rwanda progressing at a much slower pace (see **Figure 10**). In policy terms, steps to effectively expand access to primary school do not, in and of themselves, ensure high completion rates.

Viet Nam is the only country in this sample which has come truly close to achieving UPE, as the percentage of children who had completed primary education increased from 85% in 2000 to 95% in 2010. All other countries were below 80%, and three countries – Burundi, Rwanda and Mozambique – were below 40%.

**FIGURE 11**

Percentage of children who had completed primary school, by sex and wealth quintile, circa 2000 and 2010



**Note:** See endnote 2. The figure presents countries with at least 100,000 children out of school in 2000 that more than halved their out-of-school population by 2012.

Source: *World Inequality Database in Education (2014)*

This evidence should not overshadow the notable progress made by many countries in recent years. **Figure 11** shows that in some countries, the percentage of poorest girls who had completed primary education was higher in 2010 than what the national average had been in 2000. For example, in Cambodia, only 11% of the poorest quintile of girls had completed primary school in 2000 – relative to a national average of 37% – but 43% of the poorest quintile of girls had completed primary school by 2010.

### Conclusion

Global progress in reducing the number of out-of-school children has stalled since 2007. According to the latest data, nearly 58 million children of primary school age were still denied their right to education in 2012. It is now without doubt that the world will not meet its most prominent global education commitment of helping all these children access school by 2015.

Yet some countries are bucking this trend, showing that real and dramatic progress is possible if there is the political will. Clear examples of positive action in very different contexts include abolishing school fees, providing a well-balanced curriculum and establishing social cash transfers. As we embark on new, more ambitious global goals in the future, lessons must be drawn from

these examples to inform education plans in countries struggling to provide education for all.

UPE goes beyond simply children enrolling in school – they must complete their education as well. As shown in this paper, there has been greater progress in improving enrolment rates than in increasing completion rates. This unfinished business must take centre stage in 2015 and beyond.

1. In the remainder of the paper, the indicator 'Children who had never been to school' refers to the four-year age group of children aged three to six years older than the official entrance age; therefore, if the official primary school entrance age is 6 years, the indicator is calculated over the age group 9 to 12 years.

2. In the remainder of the paper, the indicator 'Children who had completed primary school' refers to the five-year age group of children three to seven years older than the official age of entry into the last grade of primary education; therefore, if the official age of entry into the last grade of primary school is 11 years, the indicator is calculated over the age group 14 to 18 years.

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The UIS is the official source of education data used to monitor Education for All and related international goals. Our eAtlas of Out-of-School Children lets you explore the data with interactive maps at <http://on.unesco.org/58million>.

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