



## Left Behind on the Road to Learning Opportunities for All

UNESCO Bangkok's AIMS (Assessment, Information systems, Monitoring and Statistics) Unit, the regional office of the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS), is pleased to share "Out-of-School Children and Adolescents in Asia and the Pacific: Left Behind on the Road to Learning Opportunities for All". Here we take a look at the most recent data from UIS on the rates and number of out-of-school children and adolescents since 2000, first globally and then within this region, examining common characteristics these young people share to provide insights into which groups are more likely to find themselves excluded from national education systems. The focus then turns to a closer examination of the obstacles out-of-school children and adolescents face in this regard and introduces educational programmes that can help them overcome these challenges.

### INTRODUCTION: NEW PATH, MAJOR OBSTACLE

The ambitious agenda to achieve Education for All by 2015 was deemed "unfinished business" at the World Education Forum in Incheon, Republic of Korea. Governments there expressed their support for the new path outlined in the proposed fourth goal of the upcoming Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which calls on countries to "ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote life-long learning opportunities for all". The Incheon Declaration itself set out a transformative vision of education in the Asia-Pacific region, with countries agreeing to "the provision of 12 years of free, publicly funded, equitable quality primary and secondary education, of which at least nine years are compulsory, leading to relevant learning outcomes", as well as for "meaningful education and training opportunities for the large population of out-of-school children and adolescents, who require immediate, targeted and sustained action ensuring that all children are in school and are learning".

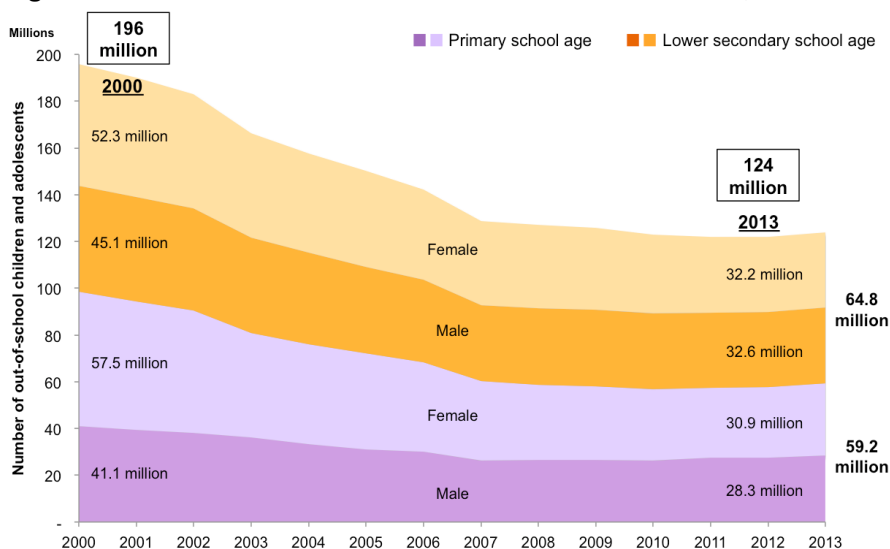
The latest UIS data on out-of-school children and adolescents help put into perspective just how challenging it will be to turn that vision into reality unless new approaches are taken to expand learning opportunities. The data show that progress toward lowering the number of out-of-school children and adolescents has stalled both globally and within this region. This is particularly significant in Asia and the Pacific, which is home to 29 per cent of the world's out-of-school primary-age children and 53 per cent of its out-of-school lower secondary-age adolescents. Girls, rural children and those from poor households are more likely to be out of school due to the particular barriers each group faces. Understanding these barriers and identifying common characteristics among these young people is crucial to countries' efforts to develop strategies to make education available for all children that are tailored to their national contexts.

### GLOBAL OVERVIEW

**Globally, progress on the rate and number of out-of-school children and adolescents has stagnated<sup>1</sup>.**

Initial successes in expanding access to education in the early 2000s have largely ground to a halt in recent years. The global number of out-of-school children dropped continuously from 2000 until 2007. Since then there has been virtually no progress in reducing the global number of out-of-school children. **In fact, they have increased in number by 2.4 million between 2010 and 2013.**

Figure 1: Global number of out-of-school children and adolescents, 2000-2013



**Box 1: UIS definitions of out-of-school children and adolescents**

Out-of-school children	Children of official <b>primary</b> school age who are not in primary or secondary education. Children in pre-primary education or non-formal education are considered out of school
Out-of-school adolescents	Adolescents of official <b>lower secondary</b> school age who are not in primary or secondary education. Adolescents in pre-primary education or non-formal education are considered out of school.

Source: UIS 2015a

Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics Data Centre, accessed in August 2015b

<sup>1</sup> For further analysis of global out-of-school children and adolescents, please refer to the UIS policy paper 22/fact sheet 33 "A growing number of children and adolescent are out of school as aid fails to meet the mark" (UIS & EFA GMR 2015). Global data on children and adolescents who are denied the right to education are available at UNESCO eAtlas of Out-of-School Children (<http://www.uis.unesco.org/data/atlas-out-of-school-children/en>). Global report on Out-of-School Children also summarizes the status of out-of-school children and adolescents in the world (<http://www.uis.unesco.org/Education/Pages/oosci-global-report.aspx>).

FACT SHEET

According to UIS data for the school year ending in 2013, 124 million children and adolescents (roughly between the ages of six and 15) have either never started school or have dropped out (see Figure 1). The global number of primary age (typically between six and 11) out-of-school children stood at more than 59 million in 2013. This means that **one out of 11 children (9 per cent) has no access to education.**

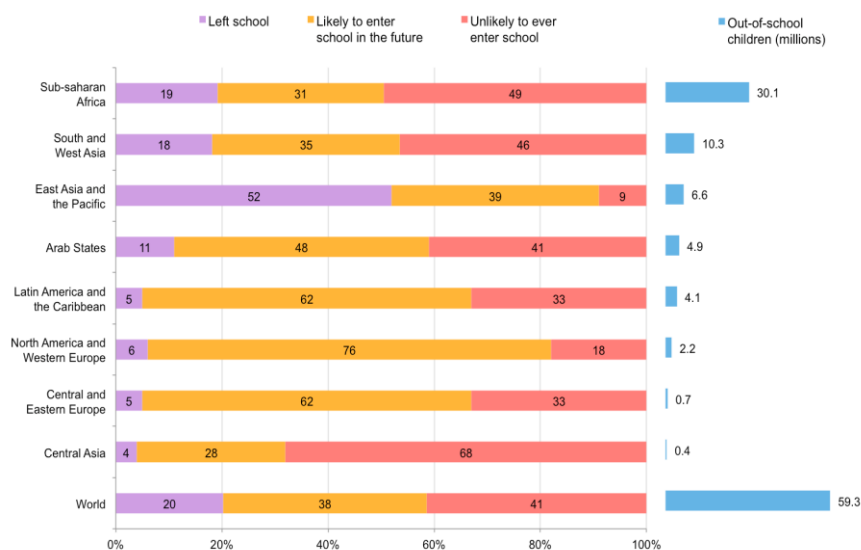
A growing number of adolescents of lower secondary school age (typically between 12 and 15) are also out of school, with the global total reaching almost 65 million in 2013. One out of six adolescents (17 per cent) are not enrolled in school. The out-of-school issue is more serious among adolescents of lower secondary school age, who are almost twice as likely to be out of school as primary school age children.

We see a similar pattern of substantial initial progress followed by later stagnation in efforts to reduce the gap between the out-of-school rates of girls and boys. That gap has narrowed steadily since 2000, but efforts to further reduce it have also faltered in recent years. In 2013, 1 out of 10 girls and 1 out of 12 boys of primary school age were out

of school, while 1 out of 6 male and female adolescents of lower secondary age were out of school in 2013 (UIS 2015b).

To better evaluate the challenges ahead, the UIS produces estimates to gauge how many children who are currently out of school will attend in the future (see Figure 2). Globally, 41 per cent (or 24 million) of all out-of-school primary children have never attended school and will probably never start if current trends continue. About 20 per cent of these children attended school in the past but could not continue their education, while 38 per cent are likely to start late and will be over-age for their grade levels<sup>2</sup>.

**Figure 2: Primary school exposure of out-of-school primary children by region, 2013**



Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics Data Centre, accessed in August 2015b

### Box 2: The Global Initiative on Out-of-School Children (OOSCI) in Asia and the Pacific

The Global Out-of-School Children Initiative (OOSCI) was launched in 2010 as a joint endeavour between the UIS and UNICEF to support participating countries to build evidence-based strategies to reduce the number of out-of-school children and adolescents. Given the global stagnation in achieving universal primary education (EFA Goal 2), the OOSCI aims to support countries to get all children in school through a targeted approach with three core objectives:

- Develop comprehensive profiles of out-of-school children and children in school who are at risk of dropping out;
- Identify barriers and bottlenecks that prevent those children from completing basic education; and
- Recommend innovative policies and strategies that can bring them back into school and keep them there.

Twenty-six countries participated in the first phase of the OOSCI, which together accounted for half the world's population of out-of-school children. Ten countries were from the Asia and the Pacific region. In 2014, an additional seven countries from the region joined the second phase of the initiative for a total of 17 countries from Asia and the Pacific.

The report, "*Fixing the Broken Promise of Education for All: Findings from the Global Initiative on Out-of-school Children*", compiles data and analysis of national and regional OOSCI studies (UIS 2015c).

## ASIA AND THE PACIFIC OVERVIEW

**29 per cent of the world's out-of-school children and 53 per cent of its out-of-school adolescents are from the Asia and the Pacific region.**

### Number of out-of-school children of primary school age

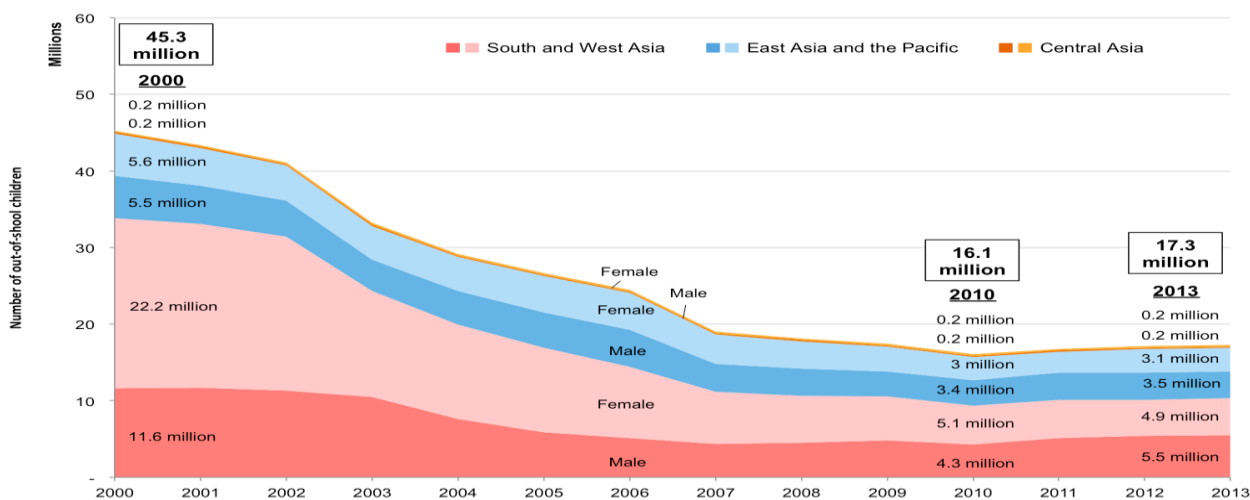
In Asia and the Pacific, there were 17.3 million out-of-school children of primary school age in 2013 (see Figure 3), which accounts for almost 29 per cent of all out-of-school children worldwide. Sixty per cent of out-of-school children (10.4 million) in the region are in South and West Asia.

The number of out-of-school children has been steadily decreasing since the early 2000s, dropping in this region by 28 million between 2000 and 2013. The most significant improvement was seen in South and West Asia, where the number fell by 23.5 million during this period.

<sup>2</sup> Country specific information can be obtained at [the UIS website](http://theUISwebsite). In Asia and the Pacific, Bangladesh, Cambodia, Kyrgyzstan, Lao PDR, Nepal, Tajikistan and Timor-Leste are available.

Despite such tremendous advances, there has been a slight increase in the number of out-of-school children in recent years: **there are 1.2 million more out-of-school children in the region now than there were in 2010**. This means that the Asia and the Pacific region accounts for 50 per cent of the global rise in the number of out-of-school children between 2010 and 2013. As shown in Figure 3, this growth is mainly due to the fact that the number of male out-of-school children in South and West Asia increased by 22 per cent in only three years.

**Figure 3: Number of out-of-school children in Asia and the Pacific, 2000-2013**



Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics Data Centre, accessed in August 2015b

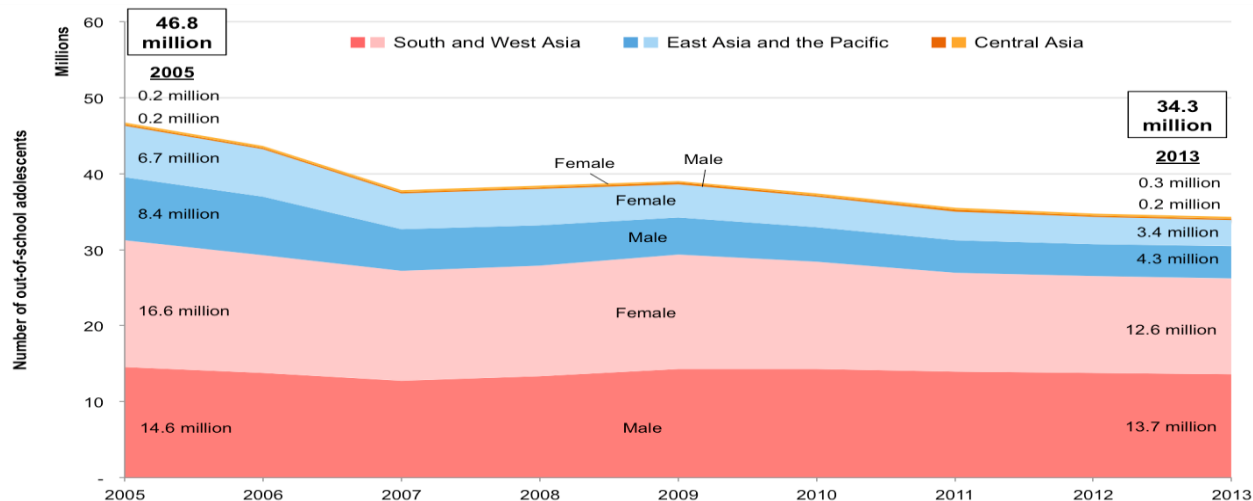
Looking at the primary school exposure of out-of-school children (see Figure 2), about 30 to 40 per cent of out-of-school children in the region are likely to enter school in the future. While 9 per cent of children who are currently out of school in East Asia and the Pacific are unlikely to ever go to school, this number is much higher in Central Asia (68 per cent) and South and West Asia (46 per cent).

#### **Number of out-of-school adolescents of lower secondary school age**

In 2013, there were 34.3 million out-of-school adolescents of lower secondary age in Asia and the Pacific (see Figure 4), accounting for 53 per cent of the global total. There are more out-of-school adolescents than out-of-school children of primary age in the region, especially in South and West Asia.

The number of out-of-school adolescents in the region has been falling since the early 2000s. Between 2005 and 2013, the number of out-of-school adolescents was reduced by 12.4 million, with East and the Pacific registering a particularly high drop of 7.4 million. There are also 4.9 million fewer out-of-school adolescents in South and West Asia than there were in 2005. Notably, the number of female out-of-school adolescents was reduced significantly between 2005 and 2013. Despite the overall improvement, the number of out-of-school adolescents has been growing in Central Asia, where there were about 28 thousand more out-of-school adolescents than there were in 2005.

**Figure 4: Number of out-of-school adolescents in Asia and the Pacific, 2000-2013**



**Note:** Since data from 2000-2004 are unavailable in Central Asia, the starting year is 2005.

Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics Data Centre, accessed in August 2015b

### Rates of primary age out-of-school children

The rates of out-of-school children throughout Asia and the Pacific were lower than the global average (9 per cent) in 2013 (see Figure 5).

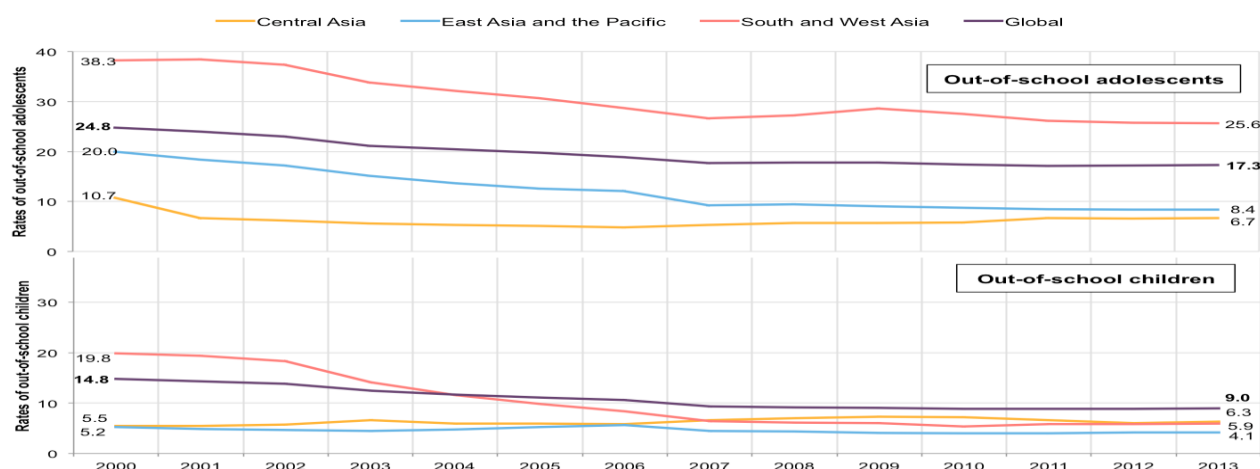
South and West Asia in particular made tremendous strides over the past decade, with rates dropping from 20 to 6 per cent between 2000 and 2013. Children in this sub-region are almost three times less likely to be out of school than they would have been in 2000. East Asia and the Pacific has also seen a consistent drop in the rate of out-of-school children since 2000, and now has the lowest rate in the region with only one out of 24 children (4.1 per cent) out of school. Running counter to this regional trend, the rate of out-of-school children in Central Asia increased by 0.8 percentage points between 2000 and 2013. This sub-region has the highest rate of out-of-school children in the region at 6.3 per cent – one out of 16 children had no access to school in 2013.

### Rates of out-of-school adolescents of lower secondary school age

The last decade has also seen significant advances toward reducing the number of out-of-school adolescents in this region, with reductions in this area greater overall than with out-of-school children. However, proportionally more adolescents continue to remain out of school than primary school age children.

In South and West Asia, the rate of out-of-school adolescents dropped by 12 percentage points to 26 per cent. This improvement was not as significant as progress in this sub-region toward out-of-children. As of 2013, 25 per cent of adolescents had no access to school, a rate that is higher than the global average of 17 per cent. In East Asia and the Pacific, meanwhile, the rate fell from 20 to 8 per cent between 2000 and 2013, leaving one in 12 adolescents out of school. Adolescents in this sub-region are almost twice as likely to be out of school as children of primary school age. Progress was also seen in Central Asia, which had the lowest rate of out-of-school adolescents (7 per cent) in the region in 2013. This was a drop of 4 percentage points between 2000 and 2013, meaning more significant progress was made in this area than toward out-of-school children between 2000 and 2013. However, in keeping with the wider theme of recent stagnation, it's worth noting that the rate of out-of-school adolescents has been increasing slightly since 2008.

**Figure 5: Rates of out-of-school children and adolescents in Asia and the Pacific, 2000-2013**



Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics Data Centre, accessed in August 2015b

The regional outlook is similar to the global one in that while the rates of out-of-school children and adolescents fell overall between 2000 and 2007, progress since then has been stagnant. That said, there have been some noteworthy successes in efforts to expand educational opportunities, chief among these the 20 percentage point drop in out-of-school female children and adolescents in South and West Asia from 2000 to 2013. As a point of comparison, the rate for their male counterparts dropped by only six to seven percentage points during this time.

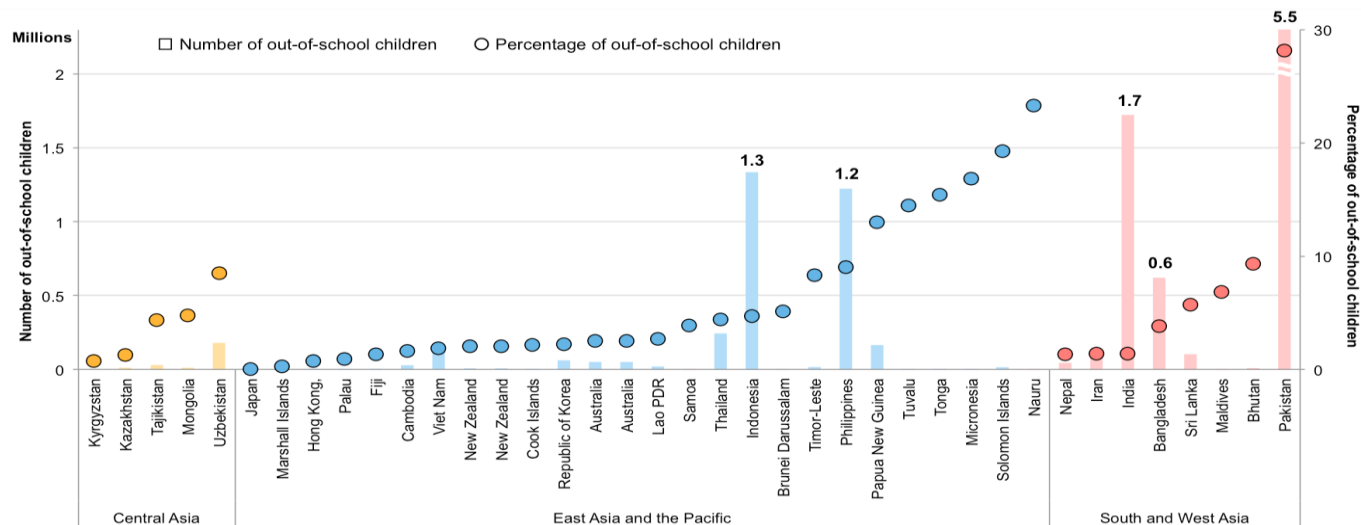
### Number and rates of out-of-school children and adolescents in selected countries

Figure 6 illustrates the number and rates of out-of-school children of primary school age in selected Asia and the Pacific countries. Currently, out-of-school children are more likely to be concentrated in a few countries: Pakistan (5.5 million), India (1.7 million), Indonesia (1.3 million), Philippines (1.2 million) and Bangladesh (0.6 million). These countries are home to 90 per cent of the out-of-school children among 24 countries in the region with available data<sup>3</sup>. The countries with the highest rates out-of-school children are Pakistan (28.1 per cent), Nauru (23.3 per cent), the Solomon Islands (19.3 per cent), the Federated States of Micronesia (16.9 per cent) and Tonga (15.4 per cent).

The situation in these latter four small island developing states (SIDS) illustrates how even though some countries may have only a small number of out-of-school children, the issue is still important– the proportion to the population is greater than 15 per cent in the countries mentioned. This is also true for out-of-school adolescent populations and rates (see Figure 7).

<sup>3</sup> It is important to note that Figure 6 does not include countries such as Afghanistan and China, which may have large numbers of out-of-school children, but lack precise data.

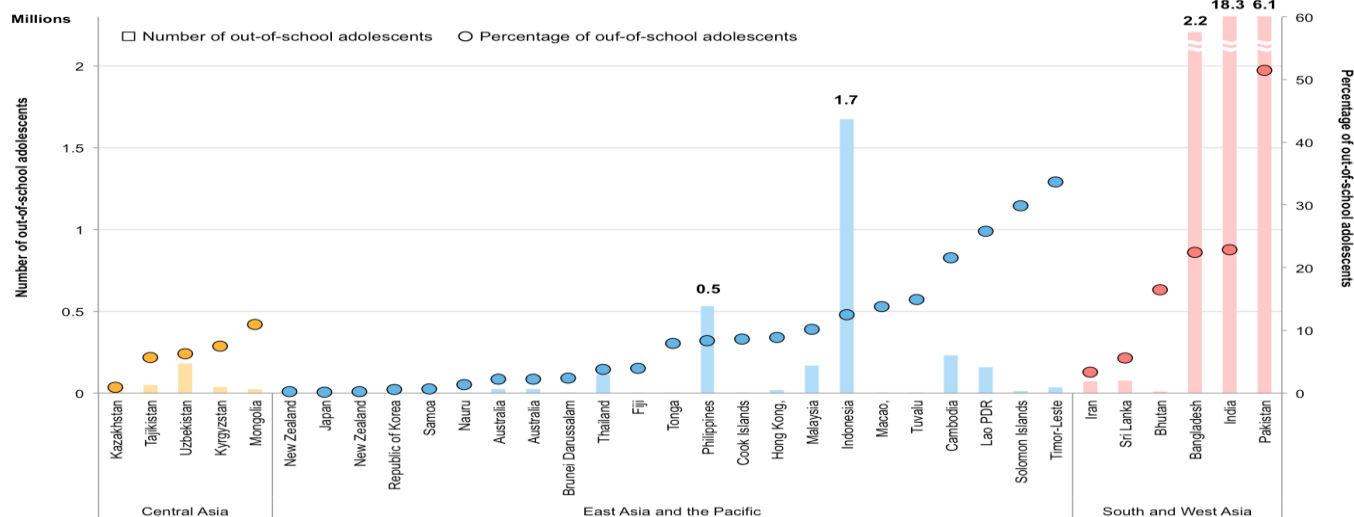
Figure 6: Number and rates of out-of-school children in selected countries, 2013 or latest year



**Notes:** Data for Palau, Republic of Korea and Tajikistan refer to 2014. Data for Cambodia, Fiji, India, Indonesia, Japan, Nauru, Papua New Guinea and Samoa refer to 2012. Data for Marshall Islands, Timor-Leste and Uzbekistan refer to 2011. Data for Bangladesh refer to 2010. Data for Thailand refer to 2009. Data for Maldives and Solomon Islands refer to 2007.

Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics Data Centre, accessed in August 2015b

Figure 7: Rates and number of out-of-school adolescents in selected countries, 2013 or latest year



**Notes:** Data for Republic of Korea refer to 2014. Data for Fiji, Indonesia, Japan, Nauru and Malaysia refer to 2012. Data for India, Tajikistan, Timor-Leste, Samoa and Uzbekistan refer to 2012. Data for Bangladesh refer to 2010. Data for Thailand refer to 2009. Data for Cambodia and Mongolia refer to 2008. Data for Solomon Islands refer to 2007.

Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics Data Centre, accessed in August 2015b

## CHARACTERISTICS AND COMMONALITIES

### Out-of-school children and adolescents: Who are they?

Effective strategies to bring out-of-school children and adolescents into education systems requires first understanding just who comprises these groups. The UIS has found that there are wide disparities in terms of sex, children living in rural versus urban areas and between low and high-earning households. Globally, for example, only 9 per cent of out-of-school children come from wealthy households, whereas that figure more than triples to 31 per cent for children from poor households. Likewise, only 12 per cent of out-of-school children are from urban areas compared to 23 per cent for rural children (UIS & EFA GMR 2013). This attests to severe disparities based on household economic standing and geographical location.

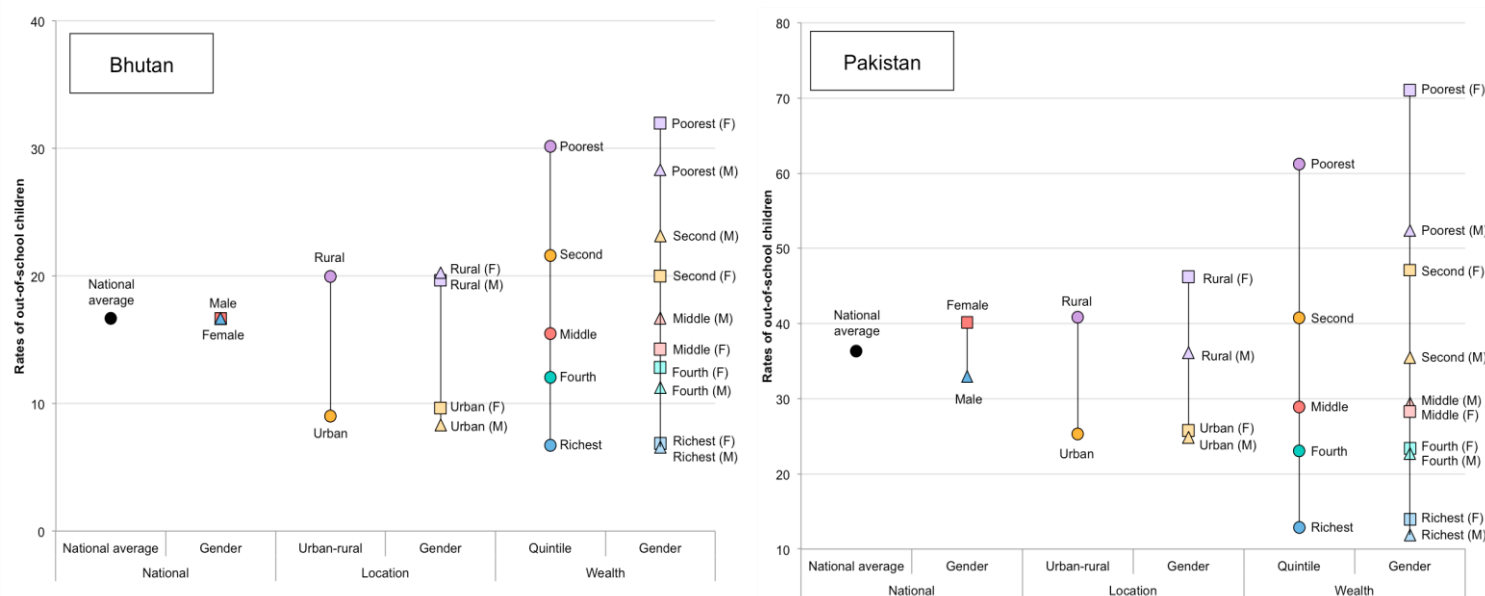
Figure 8 uses household survey data from Bhutan and Pakistan to show some of the characteristics of out-of-school children of primary school age in these two countries. Bhutan’s out-of-school children rate was 17 per cent in 2010, while in Pakistan the rate was 36 per cent in 2012. The gender gap is smaller in Bhutan; however, in Pakistan girls of primary school age are generally more likely to be out of school than boys (40 per cent and 33 per cent respectively).

Geographical location also factors heavily into out-of-school rates. Children from rural areas are more likely to be out of school than those from urban areas in both countries. In Bhutan, one out of five out-of-school children come from rural areas compared to one out of nine from urban areas. In Pakistan, children from rural areas are more likely to be out of school than those from urban areas (41 per cent and 25 per cent). The gender gap is small both in urban and rural Bhutan, with the rate standing at less than two percentage points. However, the gender gap is much wider in rural Pakistan, with a difference of 10 percentage points between boys and girls, while the difference is as small as one percentage point in urban areas.

Household income is another key factor. Children from the poorest households have the highest out-of-school rate (30 per cent), while those from the richest have the lowest (7 per cent) in Bhutan. This holds true in Pakistan as well where children from the poorest households have the highest average out-of-school rate (61 per cent), while children from the richest have the lowest (13 per cent). The gender gap remains small in Bhutan – even among the poorest households where the greatest disparity is seen, the gap between female and male out-of-school rates is only four percentage points. The gap between female and male out-of-school rates is more significant in Pakistan at 19 percentage points.

This slice of the Asia and the Pacific region shows that where disparities exist, girls, rural children and children from poor households are on average more likely to be out of school than boys, urban children and those from wealthy households.

**Figure 8: Characteristics of out-of-school children by location and wealth, Bhutan (2010) and Pakistan (2012)**



**Note:** Data for Bhutan are from Bhutan MICS 2010. Data for Pakistan are from Pakistan DHS 2012-2013  
 Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics Data Centre (household survey data), accessed in August 2015b

**Box 3: The gap between administrative and household survey data**

International statistics on out-of-school children can be calculated from two different data sources: administrative and household survey sources. Administrative data are collected by the UIS from official administrative sources at the national level through its annual survey on formal education. By this standard, all children and adolescents of primary or lower secondary school age who are **not enrolled** in primary or secondary education are considered to be out of school. Household survey data are collected through international household survey programmes, such as the Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS) and the Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys (MICS). In these surveys, children and adolescents of primary or lower secondary school age who **do not attend** primary or secondary school at any time during the reference school year are considered to be out of school.

It is important to note that administrative records and household surveys are two data sources which differ in fundamental ways: who collects the data, as well as how, when and for what purpose. As a result, the out-of-school children estimates calculated from one data source may not match those based on other data sources. For instance, in the case of Lao PDR in 2012, the rate of out-of-school children of primary school age is 4.1 per cent according to administrative data and 14.2 per cent from household survey data<sup>4</sup>.

<sup>4</sup> Lao PDR MICS 2011-2012

## BARRIERS TO BASIC EDUCATION<sup>5</sup>

Some of the main barriers keeping most disadvantaged children out of school can be identified by drawing on country studies carried out under the Global Initiative on Out-of-School Children and other evidence. There are practical barriers, such as the distance to the nearest school and school infrastructure; financial barriers, such as school fees and the opportunity cost of schooling (particularly the need for them to contribute to household incomes); and social barriers, such as discrimination against girls and children with disabilities.

### Practical barriers

The lack of nearby schools, classrooms and teachers can impact school attendance, particularly in rural areas and urban slums. The lack of facilities catering to specific needs, such as those of girls as well as children with disabilities, are also likely to increase the risk that students from these groups will drop out.

- Children in metropolitan slums in Bangladesh were 2.5 times more likely to be excluded from school than the national average (UNICEF & UIS 2014a).
- In Kyrgyzstan, 63.5 per cent of teachers surveyed said they would not be able to integrate children with visual impairments (82.7 per cent said the same in the case of completely blind children) and 44.2 per cent were unable to facilitate children with wheelchairs (UNICEF & UIS 2012).
- In Tajikistan, among girls who dropped out of school or were at risk of dropping out, 18 per cent said that they have missed school because of poor sanitation facilities (UNICEF & UIS 2013a).
- In Viet Nam, surveys in six provinces revealed that some lower secondary students were enrolled in school, but then dropped out because the schools were over 10km away and they could not afford to have a bicycle or the bus fare (UNICEF & UIS 2014b).

### Financial barriers

Family economic hardship and subsequent child labour are another major obstacle to education in countries with high numbers of out-of-school children. Poor households, which are less able to afford the direct and indirect costs of education, tend to rely on additional income earned by their children. Children from such households are more likely to be involved in some form of work than to attend school.

- In Pakistan, children from the poorest quintile of households had rates of non-attendance that were about 30 percentage points higher than children from the richest quintile of households (UNICEF & UIS 2014a).
- In Sri Lanka, 19.1 per cent of out-of-school children were engaged in child labour. Out-of-school boys were more likely than girls to be engaged in this (24.7 per cent compared to 11.8 per cent) (UNICEF & UIS 2013b).
- In Tajikistan, 52.4 per cent of children living and working on the streets were out of school (UNICEF & UIS 2013a).

### Social barriers

Cultural norms and traditions around certain populations, such as girls, children with disabilities, and ethno-linguistic minorities, can determine whether children from these groups are in school or not.

- In India, the average rate of exclusion for primary school-age children from Scheduled Castes was 5.6 per cent and 5.3 per cent for Scheduled Tribes compared to the national average of 3.6 per cent. Girls from Scheduled Castes had the highest rates of exclusion at 6.1 per cent (UNICEF & UIS 2014a).
- In Kyrgyzstan, gender discrimination was reflected in the fact that girls were more than twice as likely to be out of school compared to boys. Early marriage was one of the reasons why girls were more likely to drop out (UNICEF & UIS 2012).
- In Pakistan, speaking Baluchi as a mother tongue carried a 54 per cent risk of having less than four years of schooling compared with 11 per cent for Urdu speakers (UNESCO 2010).
- In Viet Nam, the out-of-school rate for children with disabilities in primary and lower secondary education was 90 per cent (UNICEF & UIS 2014b).

## WHAT'S WORKING?

### Approaches for out-of-school children and adolescents

Some countries in the Asia and the Pacific region have already developed various strategies and programmes for out-of-school children and adolescents both in formal and non-formal education settings. The following are examples of some of these that have been implemented in this region.

Programmes	Objectives
Equivalency programmes	To help children and adolescents with no access to formal school to be able to study in a non-formal education programme and receive a certificate which is equivalent to formal education <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mother Tongue-Based Equivalency Programme for School Drop-outs (Nepal)</li> <li>• Accreditation and Equivalency Programme (Philippines)</li> <li>• Equivalency Programme Packages (A, B, C) (Indonesia)</li> </ul>
Functional literacy programmes	To help learners acquire basic literacy, reading, numeracy and problem-solving skills related to their individual daily lives <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• NFE Literacy Programmes – Basic Literacy Course &amp; Post Literacy Course (Bhutan)</li> <li>• Read-A-Thon (Philippines)</li> </ul>

<sup>5</sup> UNESCO eAtlas of Out-of-School Children features county data to show how gender, poverty, and location can affect children's chance of education (<http://www.uis.unesco.org/data/atlas-out-of-school-children/en>).

Re-entry programmes	To support children who have dropped out from primary school to return to formal education <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Accelerated Learning (A/L) (Cambodia)</li> <li>Second Chance Programme (Maldives)</li> </ul>
Other programmes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Mobile teacher programmes (Lao PDR)</li> <li>"Broad Class - Listen to Learn" Interactive Radio Instruction Program (Pakistan)</li> <li>Learning and Migration Program (LAMP) (India)</li> <li>Scholarship Program to Enhance Literacy and Learning (SPELL) (Viet Nam)</li> </ul>

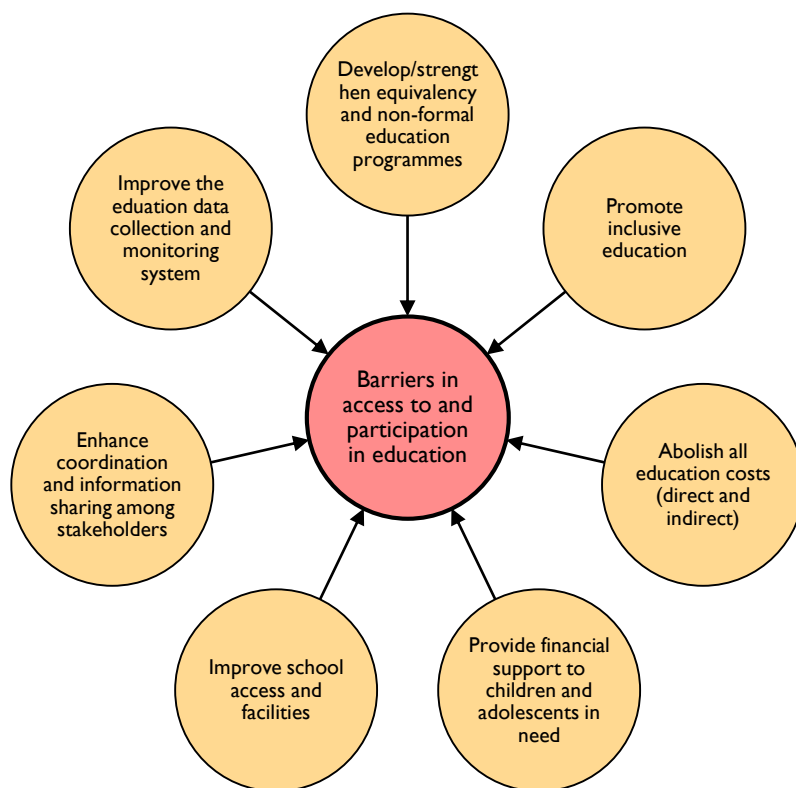
Source: FLS 2015

Even though various kinds of programmes are available, target groups often do not fully enjoy the potential benefits of these services due to the low quality of the initiatives. Moreover, monitoring of such programmes is still lacking.

## EN ROUTE TO BREAKING THE BARRIERS

Policy responses aiming to break barriers and open up access to education might differ between countries depending on the number of out-of-school children in the country. Those with large populations of out-of-school children usually need to balance targeted interventions with broader policy reforms, while countries approaching universal access to primary education require targeted efforts to overcome the particular barriers that keep the hardest-to-reach children out of school. Figure 9 summarizes some key strategies that countries could adapt to make education available for all children.

Figure 9: Key strategies to break the barriers



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- All the data are available at UNESCO Institute for Statistics Data Centre: <http://www.uis.unesco.org/datacentre/pages/default.aspx>
- Should you have any inquiries, kindly contact Aki Osawa [[a.osawa@unesco.org](mailto:a.osawa@unesco.org)]