ALL IN SCHOOL كلّنا في المدرسة

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

SUMMARY
REGIONAL REPORT
ON OUT-OF-SCHOOL CHILDREN

OCTOBER 2014

UNESCO
INSTITUTE
for
STATISTICS

United Nations
Educational, Scientific and
Cultural Organization

unicef

Summary

Introduction

The Middle East and North Africa (MENA) Regional Report is part of the Global Out-of-School Children Initiative (OOSCI), launched by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS) in 2010. The overall objectives of the Initiative are to:

- Improve the statistical information and analysis on out-of-school children;
- Identify and analyse the barriers that contribute to exclusion from education;
- Analyse existing policies and strategies related to enhanced school participation.

The Regional Report bases its analysis of the problem of out-of-school children on the model developed by the Initiative, the so-called Five Dimensions of Exclusion Model. The model works with five main target groups:

- Dimensions 1, 2 and 3 include children who are not participating in formal education in three age groups: pre-primary, primary and lower secondary age; and
- Dimensions 4 and 5 include children who are enrolled in primary or lower secondary education respectively but who are at risk of dropping out.

The report builds on nine recent national studies on out-of-school children in MENA: Algeria, Djibouti, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Morocco, Sudan, Tunisia and Yemen, by bringing in analysis and key findings on profiles as well as barriers and policy responses from these studies.

Profiles of MENA's out-of-school children

Children's exclusion from education remains a significant problem in MENA. Data from the UIS show that in 2012, an estimated 7.2 million children in MENA were out of school. The figure comprises 4.3 million children of primary school age and 2.9 million of lower secondary age. A further 5.1 million children of pre-primary school age were not enrolled in pre-primary or primary education in 2012.
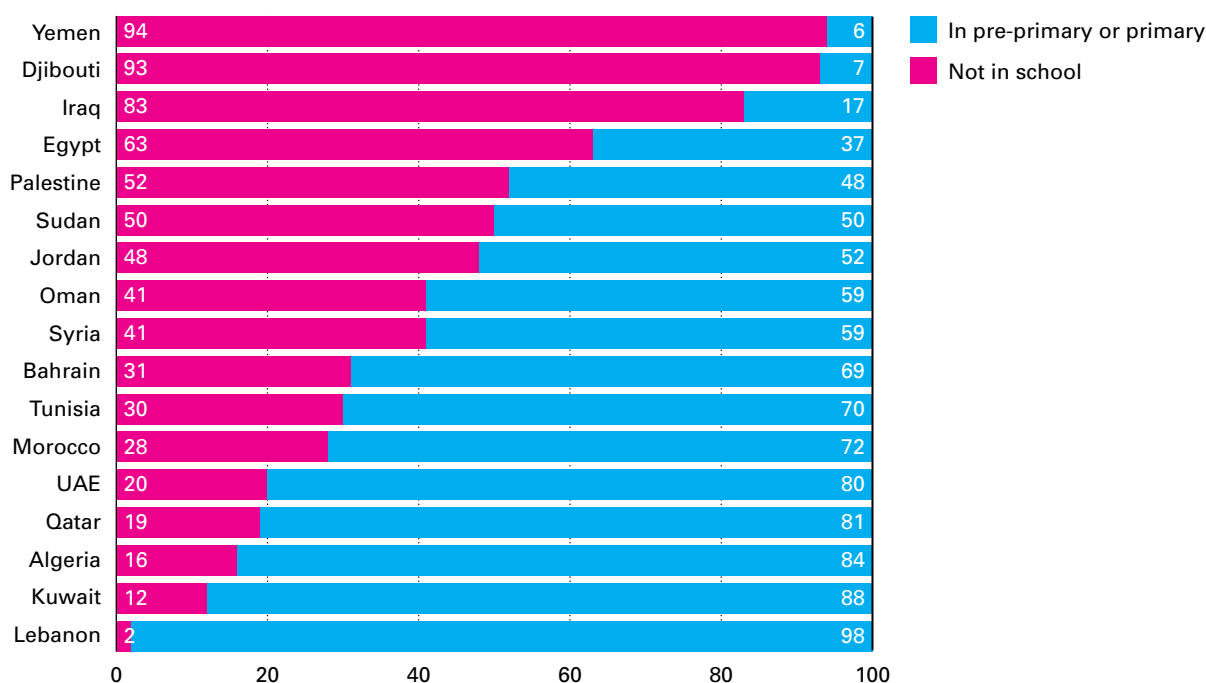
Education exclusion is intimately linked to the region's challenge of early school leaving. Many of the countries in MENA have children dropping out of primary and lower secondary education, which reflects the need for greater attention to school retention and underlines the exclusion patterns in these countries. The problem is particularly severe at the lower secondary level, where half of the countries struggle with dropout rates at or above 10 per cent before the last grade of the lower secondary school cycle. Reasons for children's exclusion include persisting and mutually reinforcing inequalities

in school participation based on household wealth, location and gender. Excluded children are predominately from the poorest households in rural areas, with poor rural girls often the most disadvantaged.

Dimension 1: Very high level of exclusion for children of pre-primary school age

Close to 60 per cent of the pre-primary age children in MENA do not participate in pre-primary or primary education, and progress over the past decade has been limited in close to half of the countries. Children from poor families are far more likely to be excluded from pre-school, although they have the most to gain from participation. In Djibouti, Iraq, Syria and Yemen, attendance in early childhood education programmes among four-year-old children from the richest wealth quintile is at least four times higher than among children from the poorest wealth quintile. Current provision of early childhood education in the region reinforces existing inequalities that are linked with children's home background. Except for Morocco, gender disparities in pre-primary education participation are low.

Share of children of pre-primary school age who are not enrolled in pre-primary or primary education in 2013, by country

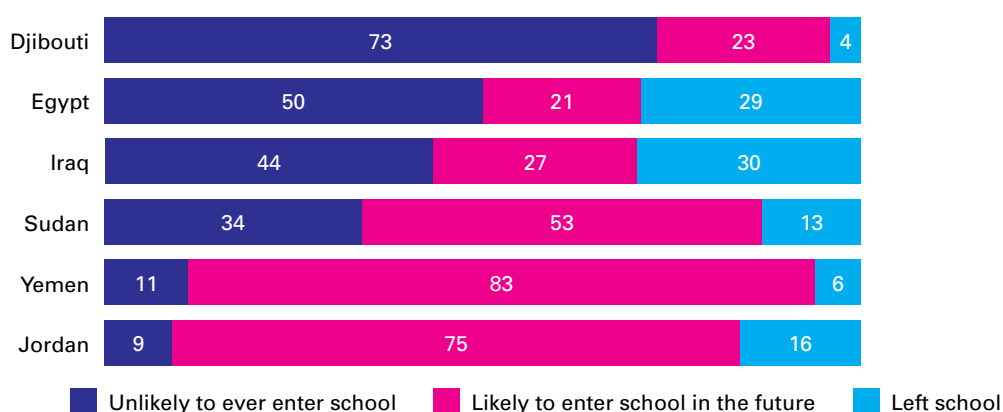| Country	Not in school	In pre-primary or primary
Yemen	94	6
Djibouti	93	7
Iraq	83	17
Egypt	63	37
Palestine	52	48
Sudan	50	50
Jordan	48	52
Oman	41	59
Syria	41	59
Bahrain	31	69
Tunisia	30	70
Morocco	28	72
UAE	20	80
Qatar	19	81
Algeria	16	84
Kuwait	12	88
Lebanon	2	98

Note: Data for Morocco are from 2013, Algeria, Djibouti and Jordan from 2011, Yemen from 2010 and Iraq and Kuwait from 2007.
Source: (UIS, 2014b); draft national OOSCI studies from Sudan and Tunisia.

Dimension 2: Major progress in reducing education exclusion for primary age children

Over the past decade, the large majority of countries in the region have reduced the share of primary age children who are out of school and two thirds of the countries have reduced the share by at least 50 per cent. Particularly remarkable progress is recorded in Djibouti, Morocco and Yemen. While girls still make up the majority of children who are out of school, the overall expansion in school participation has reduced girls' education disadvantage. In Djibouti and Sudan, limited access to primary education is still very common and the systems in these countries struggle to extend the general coverage of primary education to the whole primary school age population. By contrast, today more than half of the countries in the region have out-of-school populations representing 3 per cent or less of the relevant age cohort.

Share of out-of-school children of primary age by school exposure, selected countries

Country	Unlikely to ever enter school	Likely to enter school in the future	Left school
Djibouti	73	23	4
Egypt	50	21	29
Iraq	44	27	30
Sudan	34	53	13
Yemen	11	83	6
Jordan	9	75	16

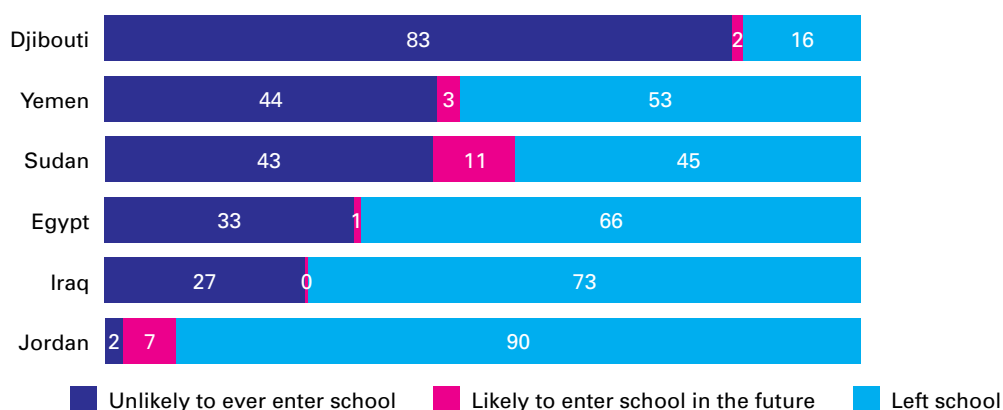■ Unlikely to ever enter school   ■ Likely to enter school in the future   ■ Left school

Source: UIS calculations based on Djibouti MICS 2006; Egypt DHS 2008; Iraq MICS 2011; Jordan DHS 2007; UNPD (2010); draft national OOSCI studies from Sudan and Yemen.

Dimension 3: Exclusion for children of lower secondary school age remains a challenge

The participation of lower secondary school age children has increased over time, with the share of this age group who are out of school declining from 18 per cent in 2003 to 12 per cent in 2012. Yet, in one quarter of the countries in MENA, at least one of every four lower secondary age children were still out of school in 2012, with the highest levels of exclusion recorded in Djibouti, Sudan and Yemen. The disparities by gender are substantial for this age group, with the majority of countries favouring boys' participation. This is also an age where children from disadvantaged households fall behind. In Tunisia, 19 per cent of lower secondary age children from the poorest wealth quintile are out of school, compared to only 1 per cent of children from the richest quintile. In Sudan, 42 per cent of children from the poorest group are out of school, compared to 3 per cent of children from the richest households.

Share of out-of-school children of lower secondary age by school exposure, selected countries

Country	Unlikely to ever enter school	Likely to enter school in the future	Left school
Djibouti	83	2	16
Yemen	44	3	53
Sudan	43	11	45
Egypt	33	1	66
Iraq	27	0	73
Jordan	2	7	90

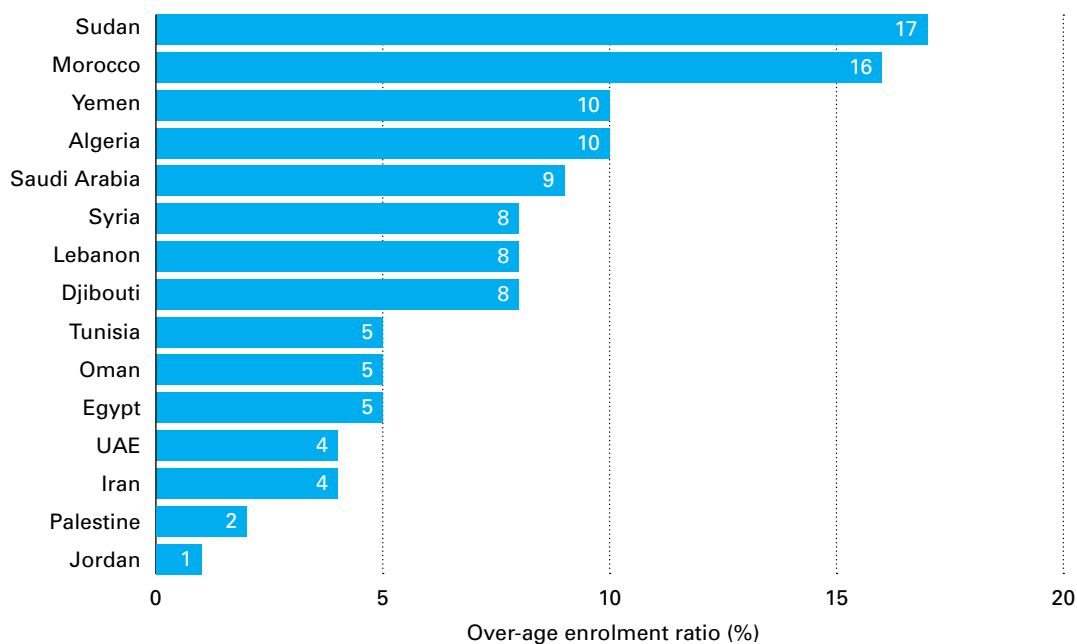■ Unlikely to ever enter school   ■ Likely to enter school in the future   ■ Left school

Source: UIS calculations based on Djibouti MICS 2006; Egypt DHS 2008; Iraq MICS 2011; Jordan DHS 2007; UNPD (2010 revision); draft national OOSCI studies Sudan and Yemen.

Dimension 4: High dropout from primary education in the region's poorest countries

At the primary level, early school leaving remains a major concern in the region's poorest countries. Nearly one quarter of those children who entered Grade 1 in Yemen and Djibouti leave school before reaching the final grade of the primary cycle. In the five countries where gender disparity is still a major issue at the primary level, girls are at a disadvantage in two countries (Djibouti and Sudan) and boys in three countries (Algeria, Oman and Lebanon). One common characteristic of children who drop out of school is that they are older than the official age for a particular grade. Overage children

are disproportionally from the poorest households and from rural areas. In Sudan, almost 80 per cent of children from the poorest wealth quintile who attend school are overage, compared to fewer than 20 per cent from the richest quintile.

Overage enrolment ratio in primary education in 2012, by country

Country	Over-age enrolment ratio (%)
Sudan	17
Morocco	16
Yemen	10
Algeria	10
Saudi Arabia	9
Syria	8
Lebanon	8
Djibouti	8
Tunisia	5
Oman	5
Egypt	5
UAE	4
Iran	4
Palestine	2
Jordan	1

Note: The indicator covers the share of the primary school age population that is over the official primary school age (ISCED 1). It does not capture primary age children who are overage for their grade. Data for Djibouti, Jordan and Sudan are from 2011.

Source: UIS, 2014a.

Dimension 5: Early school leaving is a big problem at the lower secondary school level

Several countries in the region, most notably Algeria, Syria and Tunisia, face a severe dropout crisis at the lower secondary level. In these three countries alone, a range from one quarter to one third of all enrolled children drop out before the last grade of the lower secondary cycle. The gender profiles on dropout show considerable heterogeneity across countries. The sharpest gender disparities are found in Algeria, Kuwait, Palestine, Tunisia and UAE, with disparities ranging from 15 to 17 percentage points between girls and boys. In all of these countries except in the UAE, high dropout rates for boys constitute a major problem. In Tunisia, 39 per cent of boys drop out before the last grade of the lower secondary school cycle, compared to 22 per cent of Tunisian girls.

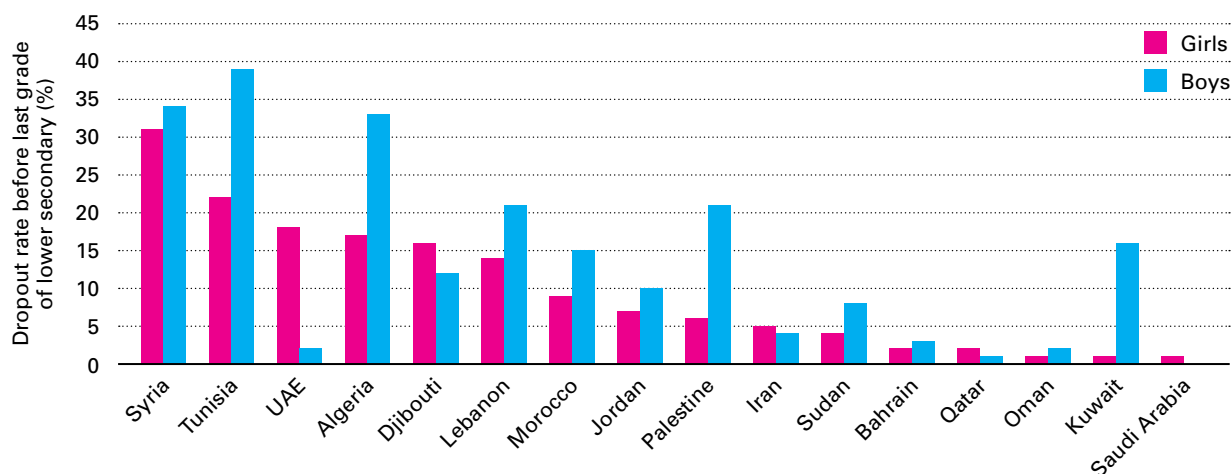# Barriers to education participation and policy responses

The profiles of out-of-school children in MENA reveal that three of the most serious areas of exclusion in the region are linked to high levels of dropout, in particular at the lower secondary level, persisting inequalities by gender, and limited protection of the right to education for conflict-affected children.

Tackling dropout rates by addressing low demand, low quality of education and violence

Household wealth and social perceptions about the benefits of education are closely linked to schooling decisions, affecting families' demand for continued education. Poverty and child labour reinforce each other and are associated with lower school attendance. High costs of private tuition also emerge as an important barrier for school retention. Policy responses to directly offset economic barriers to education for

Note: The dropout rate before the last grade is defined as 100 per cent minus the survival rate to the last grade of the lower secondary level. Data for Djibouti and Morocco are from 2012, Jordan and Qatar from 2010, and Sudan and Tunisia from 2009.

Source: UIS, 2014a.

vulnerable groups, typically through cash transfers, do not come forward as a strong theme in the national OOSCI studies from the region. While the majority of the MENA countries have social assistance programmes in place, most have a narrow focus on smoothing family income and consumption rather than directly addressing social inequalities among children and youth. One exception is Morocco, where the large-scale conditional cash transfer 'Taysir programme' is linked to school attendance and shows promising results.

A low quality of education and bad school climate push children out of school. The limited data available point to a high prevalence of violence in schools in several countries, often playing out differently for girls and boys. Adequate legislation against corporal punishments in schools, at home and in all other settings is a necessary foundation for efforts to improve school climate and combat education exclusion. Half of the countries in the region have yet to adopt laws prohibiting corporal punishment in schools. Some of the OOSCI studies highlight existing interventions to track and support children at risk of dropping out. In Tunisia, three national programmes specifically aimed at preventing early school leaving in primary and lower secondary education have been put in place. In Morocco, the 2009-2012 Urgency Programme includes the expansion of a system of support units in schools that are responsible for detecting pupils at risk of dropping out and providing pedagogical support.

Addressing gender discrimination by working on social norms, demand and supply

Social norms and traditions continue to be major barriers for girls' education in MENA. Perceptions and expectations on the role of women and men in the family, in the labour market and in the broader society contribute to girls and boys being valued differently, with implications for families' schooling decisions. The practice of early marriage is one of the most extreme barriers for girls schooling and is an important cause of early school leaving in Djibouti, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Sudan and Yemen. Analysis for this report shows that mixed schooling can be favourable to girls' education participation in the region. This contrasts sharply with the move towards segregated schooling in several countries in the region. Country examples show that education has been, and continues to be a powerful strategy for increasing girls' autonomy and social mobility. The innovative Ishraq Programme in Egypt, targeted at girls who have dropped out of school, has improved girls' literacy skills and self-confidence, and has led to greater mobility and participation of girls in the local community.

The regional study points to particularly high levels of dropout for boys from lower secondary education in Algeria, Kuwait, Lebanon, Morocco, Palestine and Tunisia. Boys' lack of motivation for studies in Algeria and Tunisia is driven by uncertainty with respect to future employment opportunities and in many cases leads to dropout. In Tunisia, a recent survey showed that more than 41 per cent of young boys wish to emigrate and the most cited motivation behind this desire was the view that there is no future in Tunisia. Girls, on the other hand, express a desire for liberation and this necessarily involves education, which is seen as the only way for social advancement. As a result, girls are far more motivated and show stronger demand for secondary and higher education. In Tunisia, young women account for two thirds of the students in higher education.

Responding to the impact of conflict on education through protection, policy reforms and sustained funding

While an armed conflict continues to exclude many children in the region from education, the exact scale of the impact remains largely hidden. From the findings of the study, the following three issues emerge as particularly important:

- The security situation for students and teachers in many of the conflict-affected countries in the region is appalling. Direct attacks on schools, abductions, looting and military use of school buildings undermine children's right to education and are a major cause of education exclusion. Still, on a daily basis, a range of protection measures are used in insecure areas in Iraq, Palestine, Syria, Sudan and Yemen that make it possible for children to attend school.

- Children displaced by conflict face particularly severe barriers to education. A number of recent needs assessments for the education response to the Syrian war point to major barriers and bottlenecks for Syrian refugee children's education access. The most notable barriers include the high cost of schooling, language of instruction, insecurity, bureaucratic procedures and lack of legal papers for school registration.

- Low levels of funding emerge as the most critical bottleneck for reaching conflict-affected children with education. Numerous experiences show that even in very challenging environments, flexible and innovative measures can keep education going. The Global Education Cluster estimates that in 2012, only 1.3 million of those targeted by education in emergency responses in Palestine, Sudan, Syria and Yemen received support, while nearly 2.2 million were not reached due to funding shortfalls.

Key recommendations

The core message emerging from this study is that overcoming education exclusion will require public policies and investments to be better geared towards the narrowing of disparities in MENA. Building on the conclusions and recommendations from the recently conducted national OOSCI studies, decisive actions for eliminating education exclusion will necessarily have to address barriers at two levels – national-level delivery of education targeted at marginalized groups, and school-level learning. Looking ahead, three broad recommendations for taking such efforts forward include:

1. Scale up early childhood development (ECD) programmes and pre-primary education as part of wider poverty reduction programmes. The governments in the region should ensure that appropriate attention is paid and measures taken to expand the provision of ECD. The current patterns across MENA, where poor children's participation in ECD is consistently lower than that of richer children, is one of the most striking signs of deep inequality in the region. Levelling the playing field in terms of equal access to ECD is a matter of urgency and an area highlighted as a top priority in the national OOSCI studies from Algeria, Tunisia and Morocco.

2. Enhance cross-sectoral efforts to address multiple barriers to schooling. Children who are out of school rarely face only a single barrier to schooling, but usually face multiple factors that interact to cause education exclusion. Overcoming these barriers requires public policy actions and investments on several fronts, not all of them traditionally within the remit of the formal education sector. To have an effect on the hardest to reach children, education authorities need to work in close collaboration with other sectors that may include staff from health, child protection and welfare, as well as with NGOs. While cross-sectoral efforts need political, legal and economic backing from the highest political level, it is important that such efforts are driven from the local level and that from the outset these efforts are focused on practical solutions for excluded children.

3. Pay more attention to school retention. Above all, financial and human resources must be better targeted towards ensuring that dropouts are not 'push outs' from school. This requires close attention to several inter-related issues, including processes in which education staff ensure that children attend school, ability of schools to better respond to diversity among pupils, adequate resources for support structures for weaker students, relevant curriculum and improved school climate where corporal punishment is prohibited in law and in practice. All such efforts for improved school retention should put the role and capacity of teachers at the centre.

GLOBAL
PARTNERSHIP
for EDUCATION

UCW

Understanding Children's Work
An Inter-Agency Research Cooperation Project