

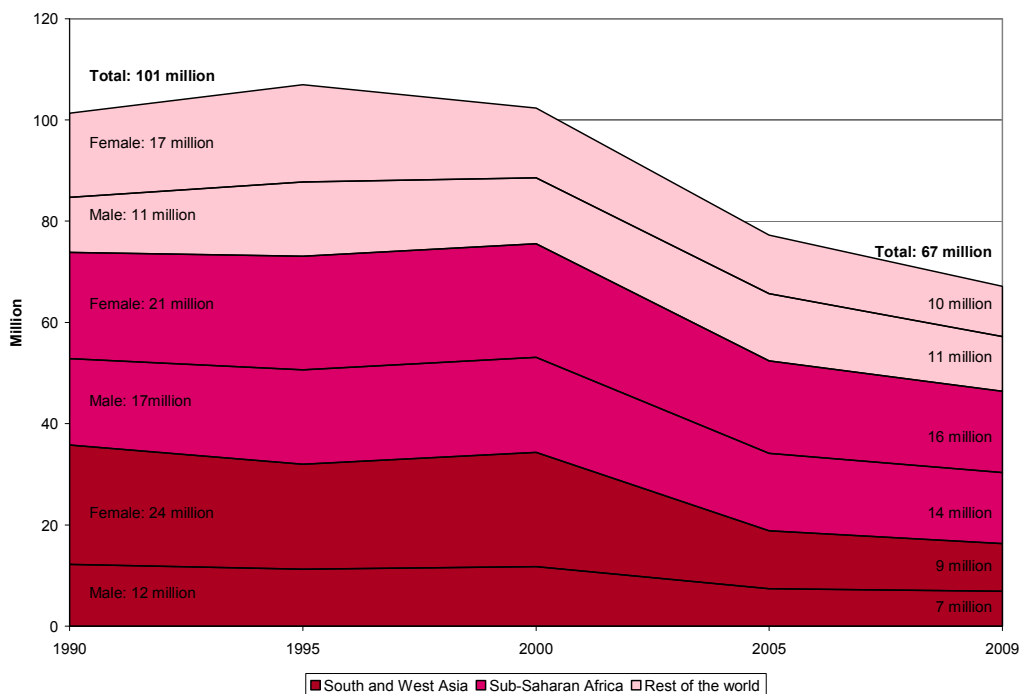
OUT-OF-SCHOOL CHILDREN: NEW DATA REVEAL PERSISTENT CHALLENGES

This fact sheet presents new data for the school year ending in 2009 on the number of out-of-school children and their characteristics. In doing so, it provides a snapshot of the critical issues that need to be addressed to reach these children.

According to new data from the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS), 67 million children were out of school globally in 2009 (see **Figure 1**)¹. This figure has been falling, especially since 2000, when the international community reinforced commitments to achieve universal primary education (UPE). Since then, the share of out-of-school children of primary school age has fallen from 16% to 10%. In addition, efforts to improve educational access for girls have yielded positive results. In 2009, girls accounted for 53% of children out of school compared to 57% in 2000.

Yet despite this progress, the pace of change appears to be slowing. The new data underscore a central message of the 2011 edition of the Education for All Global Monitoring Report: “the world is not on track to achieve UPE by 2015”. Moreover, it will be increasingly difficult to reach those children who remain excluded from education due to the complex nature of inequities associated with gender, ethnicity, wealth and location.

Figure 1. Number of out-of-school children by region and sex, 1990-2009



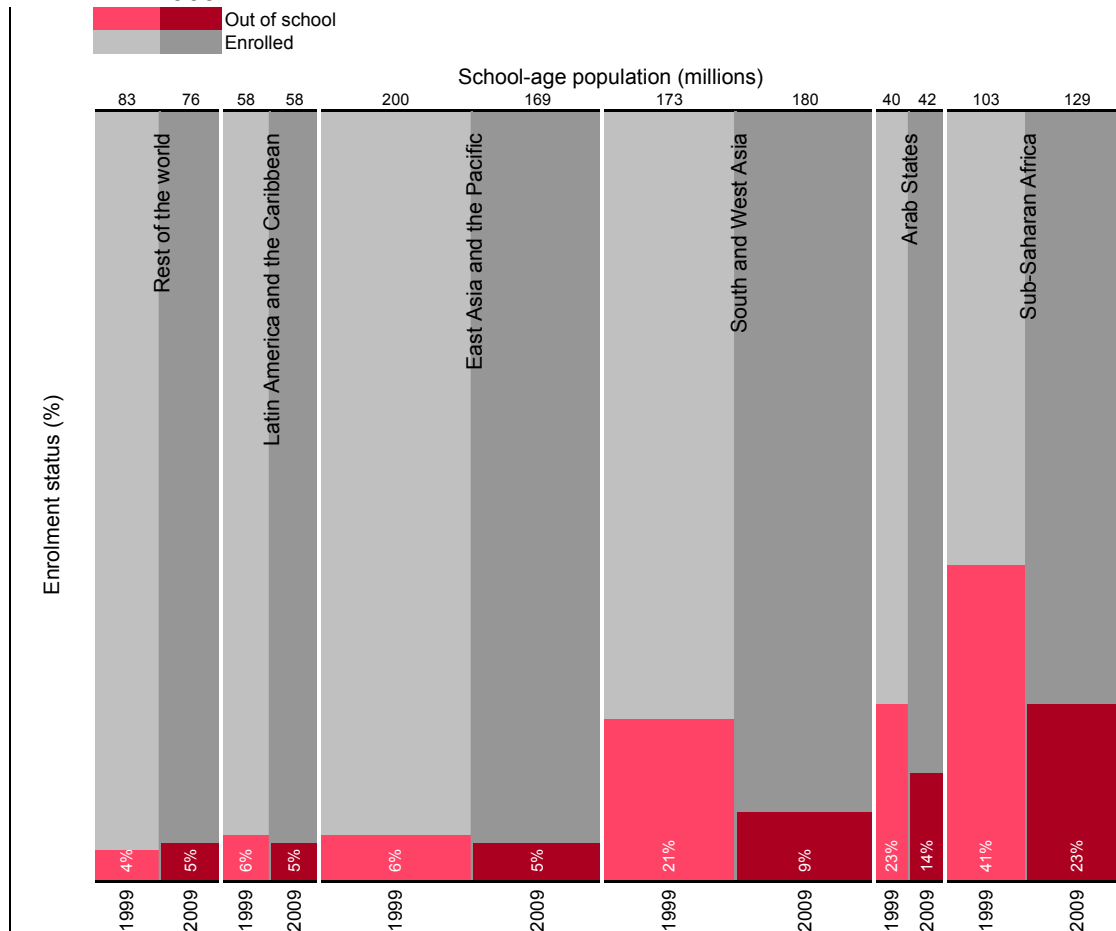
Source: UIS database, 2011.

¹ The precise number of out-of-school children of primary school age is 67.16 million for the school year ending in 2009. This represents a decrease of 0.6% compared to the global total for 2008 of 67.48 million which was published in the 2011 edition of the Education for All *Global Monitoring Report*.

How many children are out of school across the regions?

Figure 2 illustrates the variations in enrolment by region. South and West Asia has made the greatest gains, with the number of out-of-school children falling from 36 million to 16 million since 1999, despite a considerable rise in the primary school-age population (173 million to 180 million). This region also managed to reduce the gender gap, with the share of out-of-school girls falling from 66% to 58% over the same period.

Figure 2. Distribution of primary school-age population by enrolment status, 1999 and 2009



Source: UIS database, 2011.

Most of the progress reported for South and West Asia resulted from policy changes in India, where the number of out-of-school children fell from 20 million to 4 million between 2002 and 2008. This dramatic reduction has been partly attributed to a government initiative for UPE (entitled *Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan*) which was launched in 2001. The Islamic Republic of Iran also reported a significant reduction of its number of out-of-school children from 560,000 to 23,000 between 2000 and 2007.

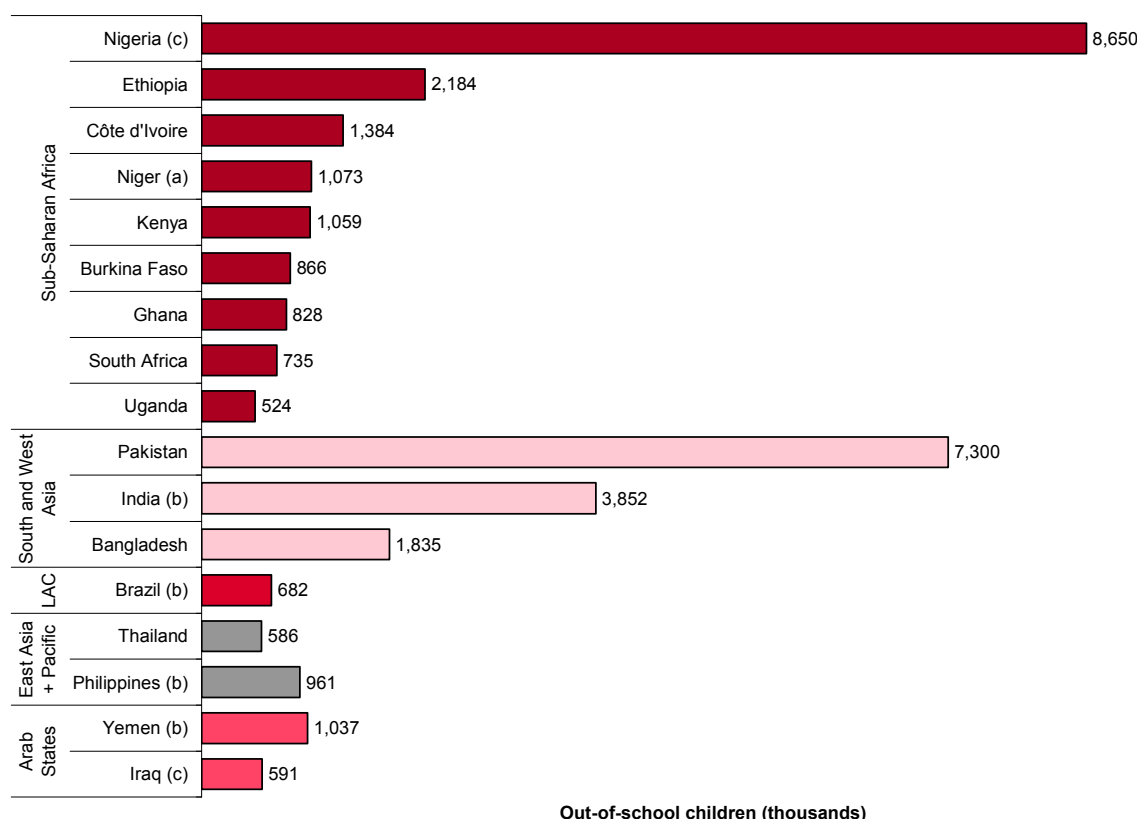
Pakistan has the highest number of out-of-school children (7.3 million in 2009) in the region, representing 34% of the country's primary school-age population. Girls account for 57% of children excluded from primary education. In Bangladesh, about 2 million children – or nearly 11% of the primary school-age population – are not enrolled in school.

In sub-Saharan Africa, the number of out-of-school children decreased from about 43 million to 30 million between 1999 and 2009. This progress is all the more remarkable when considering that the primary school-age population increased by 26 million during the same period. Nevertheless, 23% of all primary school-age children remain excluded from education across the region.

As shown in **Figure 3**, there were 17 countries with more than 500,000 out-of-school children in 2009. Nine of these countries are located in sub-Saharan Africa. Nigeria alone was home to almost 9 million out-of-school children or 37% of its primary school-age population in 2007. Ethiopia had the second highest number of out-of-school children in the region at 2 million in 2009. This represents 16% of the country's primary school-age population, which nevertheless reflects considerable progress since 1999, when the figure reached 63%.

Many other sub-Saharan African countries have managed to significantly reduce their numbers of out-of-school children during the last decade. Between 1999 and 2009, the share of out-of-school children declined by more than 30 percentage points in Burundi, Madagascar, Mali, Mozambique, Niger and the United Republic of Tanzania. Much of this progress has been attributed to the abolition of school fees. Nevertheless, the proportion of children out of school remains very high in the following countries: Equatorial Guinea (46%), Côte d'Ivoire (43%), Niger (41%), Burkina Faso (36%) and the Central African Republic (31%).

Figure 3. Countries with more than 500,000 children out of school, 2009



Source: UIS database, 2011.

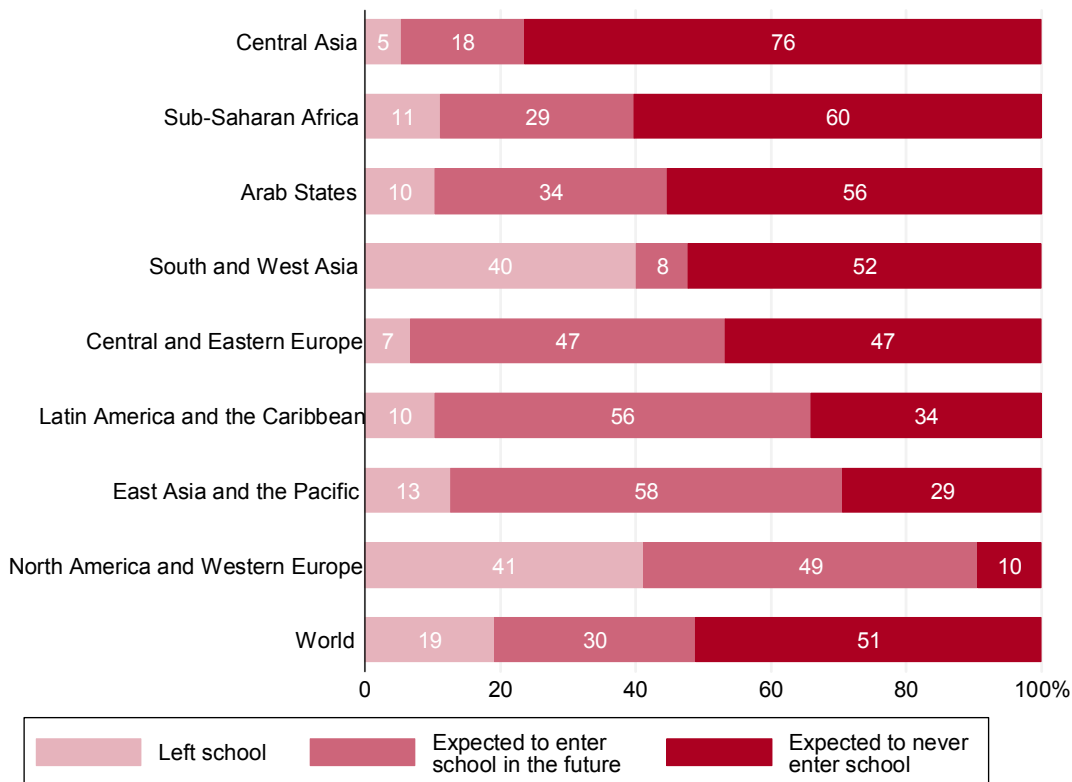
Notes: a: Data refer to 2010; b: Data refer to 2008; c: Data refer to 2007.

Have these children ever been to school? What are their chances of enrolling in the future?

While 67 million children were out of school in 2009, this does not mean that they have never attended and will never attend school. In fact, out-of-school children can be divided into three groups: first, children who attended school in the past but are no longer in school; second, children who have not yet been in school but will enter school in the future; and third, children who will never attend school. Although it is not possible to predict future school attendance for each individual child, the probability of future entry into the education system can be estimated based on past patterns of school attendance.

The results of such an analysis are shown in **Figure 4**. Globally, 51% of all primary out-of-school children are expected to never enter school. A further 19% have attended but left school, and the remaining 30% are expected to enter school in the future. Regional data show large variations in these patterns. In Central Asia, sub-Saharan Africa, the Arab States, and South and West Asia, more than one-half of all out-of-school children are expected to never enter school. In East Asia and the Pacific, Latin America and the Caribbean, North America and Western Europe, and Central and Eastern Europe, most out-of-school children will start school late. Two regions – North America and Western Europe, as well as South and West Asia – have a large share of dropouts among their out-of-school populations.

Figure 4. School exposure of primary out-of-school children by region, 2009



Source: UIS database, 2011.

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, programmes and interventions should focus 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 34 million of the global number of out-of-school children – pose the most serious challenges to policymakers. One of the first steps in reaching these children is to better identify who they are (see Box 1).

Gender, geography and socio-economic status: Which children are out of school?

In 2009, 46 countries had more than 100,000 out-of-school children of primary school age. For 31 of these countries, data from nationally representative household surveys conducted between 2003 and 2010 were available for analysis.² As shown in **Figure 5**, an average of 25% of all children of primary school age were out of school in these 31 countries.

Overall, there is little difference between boys and girls in terms of attendance: the share of male and female out-of-school children is 24% and 26%, respectively. This means that girls are, on average for the 31 countries, 8% more likely to be out of school than boys. The gap between urban and rural areas is significantly bigger. Rural children are twice as likely to be out of school as urban children.

There is also a clear link between household wealth and the probability of not being in school. Compared to children from the richest 20% (quintile) of households, children from the poorest quintile are nearly four times as likely to be out of school, and the probability of being out of school decreases steadily with increasing household wealth.

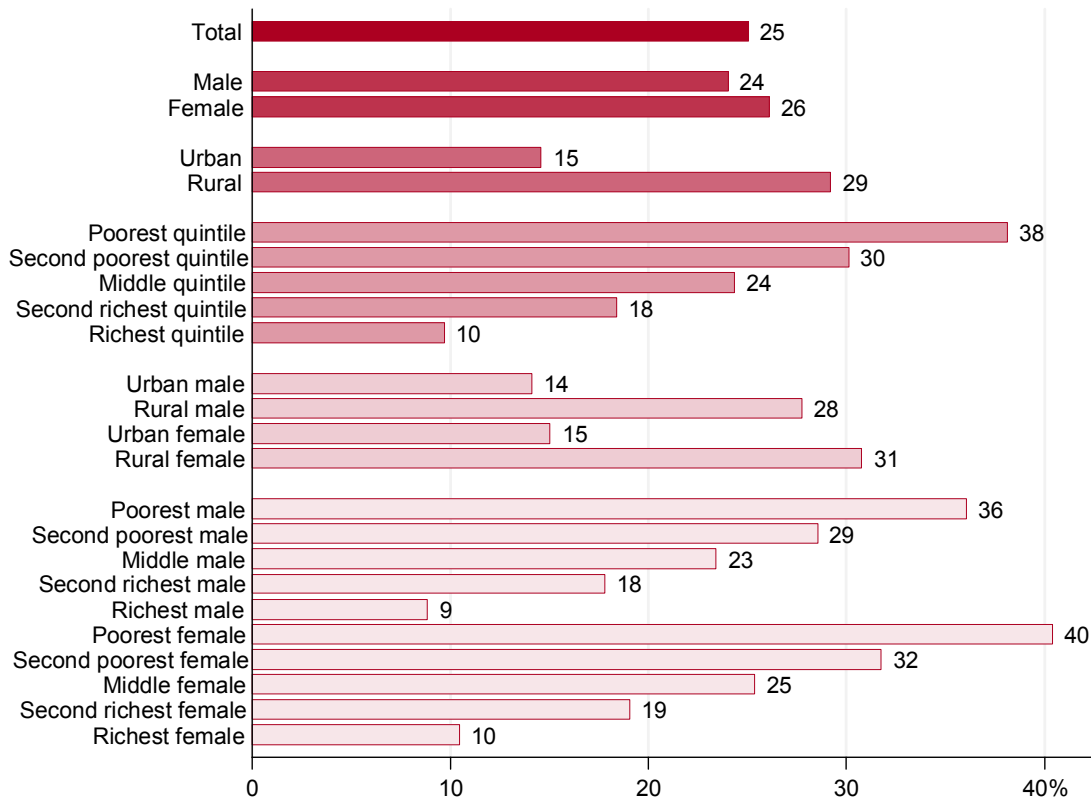
From a policymaking perspective, further disaggregation is needed to better identify those children most at risk of educational exclusion. For example, the combination of sex and location of residence reveals that girls from rural areas are more likely to be out of school than boys from rural areas and children of either sex from urban areas. The biggest disparity exists between rural girls and urban boys.

It is also important to consider the combination of sex and household wealth. Within each wealth quintile, girls are always more likely to be out of school than boys, but the gap shrinks with increasing household wealth. Overall, the highest percentage of children out of school is observed among girls from the poorest household quintile (40%). Boys from the richest household quintile are the least likely to be out of school (9%).

In conclusion, while gender disparities are less visible at an aggregate level, they still play a role in combination with other factors. As shown in the groups compared in Figure 5, girls from rural areas and from the poorest households are the least likely to be in school.

² The data were collected from three international household surveys conducted between 2003 and 2010: (1) Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS): Indonesia, Mozambique, Philippines 2003; Morocco, Turkey 2004; Ethiopia, Guinea, Malawi, Senegal, United Republic of Tanzania 2005; Burkina Faso, Cambodia, India, Mali, Niger, Uganda 2006; Dominican Republic, Pakistan, Ukraine, Zambia 2007; Egypt, Ghana, Nigeria 2008; Kenya 2009; Colombia 2010. (2) Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys (MICS): Cameroon 2006, Central African Republic, Côte d'Ivoire 2006; Mauritania 2007; Bangladesh 2009. (3) *Pesquisa Nacional por Amostra de Domicílios* (PNAD): Brazil 2009.

Figure 5. Average out-of-school rate by individual and household characteristics (in 31 countries)



Source: Household survey data from 31 countries, 2003-2010.

Note: Mean values are unweighted.

Box 1. Global Initiative on out-of-school children

In 2009, UNICEF and the UIS launched a global initiative to provide the data required to inform policies aimed at reducing the number of out-of-school children. The specific objectives of the project are to:

- **improve information on and statistical analysis** of data on out-of-school children and develop complex profiles of these children that reflect the multiple deprivations and disparities they face in relation to education; and
- **analyse existing interventions related to enhanced school participation, identify bottlenecks and develop context-appropriate policies and strategies** for increasing enrolment and attendance of excluded and marginalised children.

Twenty-five countries from seven regions are currently engaged in the initiative. It will result in country and regional studies, a global report on out-of-school children and a methodological document. The aim is to support education sector planning and reform efforts, as well as annual sector and budget reviews within the framework of the EFA Fast-Track Initiative.

UNESCO Institute for Statistics

P.O. Box 6128, Succursale Centre-Ville, Montreal, Quebec H3C 3J7, Canada
Tel: (1 514) 343-6880 / Fax: (1 514) 343-5740 / Email: information@uis.unesco.org