

## UNESCO Report warns governments in Asia not to ignore the education needs of internal migrants

Three quarters of all those on the move are internal migrants, often moving from rural to urban areas to find better opportunities. Depending on the definition, Asia has the highest rates of internal migration, at each education level. The new UNESCO Global Education Monitoring Report, *Building bridges, not walls*, looks at the implications for these movements on education systems.

Manos Antoninis, Director of the GEM Report, said: *“Countries are underestimating the education needs of children on the move. Many governments, such as India, have made efforts, including to track migrant children, to set up seasonal hostels or boarding schools and translate school materials. But they may be missing the bigger picture. Schools must reflect cultural differences and improve teacher training. Until then, the value of an education will always lose to the attraction of earning money through work.”*

The Report shows that in India 10.7 million rural children lived in households with a seasonal migrant in 2013. About 28% of youth aged 15 to 19 in these households were illiterate or had not completed primary school, compared to a national average of 18%. About 80% of temporary migrant children in seven Indian cities lacked access to education near worksites. Children of brick kiln workers in Punjab state in 2015 were found to work 7-9 hours a day.

Entitled *‘Building bridges, not walls’*, the Report warns of registration and documentation requirements set up to reduce migratory flows that make it harder to enter schools, and have effects even long after they have been eased. Eligibility for benefits under the Mumbai Slum Areas Act required proof of residence, which many did not have. Viet Nam’s ho-khau system restricted migrants’ access to public education, and poor rural to urban migrants moved to areas underserved by public schools. Recent reforms aim to abolish restrictions but there is a long way to go: 89% of youth aged 15–17 with permanent status were enrolled in upper secondary education, compared to 30% of those with temporary status. In China, despite major reforms to reduce residence permit restrictions since 2006, migrants in Beijing still have to provide five certificates to enroll in schools.

The Report emphasizes the acute education needs faced by **children living in slums** in the region. It estimates these needs will increase with 80 million more children expected to live in slums globally by 2030. While scarce, data tend to show that education in slums is far worse than in other urban areas. In Bangladesh in 2016, the rate of adolescents out of secondary school was twice as high in slums as in other urban areas. Often these children have no other resort but to enrol in private but unregulated schools of lower quality.

Manos Antoninis, Director of the GEM Report continued: *“As the number of people living in and around cities continues to grow in poorer countries, we need a systematic handle on the education needs of those in slums. Without evidence to rally around, governments will be able to continue ignoring the problem.”*

Slum dwellers’ education needs are often severely impacted by eviction and resettlement: In India, 18% of the students displaced by a River Front Project in Ahmedabad dropped out, and an additional 11% had lower attendance. The 2016 India Habitat III national report committed the government to universal provision of basic services including education. Yet research from the same year showed that urban planners were not being trained to understand the particular needs of slum dwellers.

Children who have left home to become **domestic workers** are found to be the most vulnerable to exclusion from education. In Indonesia, about 59% of child domestic workers in Jakarta and other metropolitan areas were girls from rural areas. More than half had primary education only.

The Report also warns of the negative impact on children's education that **being left behind** as parents migrate can have. In Cambodia, children left behind, especially girls, were more likely to drop out. In India and Viet Nam cognitive ability test scores were lower among left-behind children aged 5-8. In all three countries, mental health problems and lower self-confidence were more common among migrants' children. Boarding schools set up to cope with children left behind often have poor academic performance and poor nutrition.

1. Governments must live up to their responsibility to protect people's right to an education, no matter their identification or residence status.
2. Governments should ease legal restrictions for migrants to qualify for social protection and free, public education. Legal restrictions can incentivize unauthorized schools and discriminatory attitudes towards migrant children and have long-term impacts even after the restrictions are eased.
3. Governments need to invest in better local level data on the size and scope of all types of migration in their countries to help plan better for migrants' educational needs.

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#### **Notes to editors**

*Visit the [#EducationOnTheMove campaign](#) page to see the stories of people on the move around the world in real time, showing their challenges, and successes in accessing an inclusive education.*

*Visit the Report's [electronic press kit](#) containing Report and multimedia materials.*

The 2019 Global Education Monitoring Report examines the education impact of migration and displacement across all population movements: within and across borders, voluntary and forced, for employment and education. It also reviews progress on education in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. In view of increasing diversity, the report analyses how education can build inclusive societies and help people move beyond tolerance and learn to live together. Education provided equally builds bridges; unequal provision raises walls between migrants and refugees and their host communities.