



UNESCO projections show countries are off track in meeting their education commitments for 2030

Almost five years since the UN adopted Sustainable Development Goals for the target date of 2030, UNESCO projections show that the countries of the world will fail to meet the educational commitments of that agenda, Sustainable Development Goal 4, unless there is serious progress over the coming decade.

UNESCO projections ahead of the [UN High-level Political Forum \(link is external\)](#) that is to examine progress in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, show that when all children should be in school, one in six 6 to 17-year-olds will still be excluded in 2030. Projections also show that 40% of children worldwide will fail to complete secondary education, a figure that is forecast to reach 50% in sub-Saharan Africa where the proportion of trained teachers has been declining since 2000. The new projections ([Meeting Commitments: Are countries on track to achieve SDG 4?](#)) were produced by the UNESCO Institute for Statistics and the Global Education Monitoring Report. The figures are all the more worrying considering that SDG 4 calls for effective learning, not just for school enrolment.

At current trends, learning rates are expected to stagnate in middle-income countries and drop by almost a third in Francophone African countries in 2030. Furthermore, without rapid acceleration, 20% of young people and 30% of adults in low-income countries will still be unable to read by the target date for the elimination of illiteracy.

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development emphasizes leaving no-one behind, yet only 4% of the poorest 20% complete upper secondary school in the poorest countries, compared to 36% of the richest. The gap is even wider in lower-middle-income countries.

In 2015, UNESCO's Global Education Monitoring Report identified an annual funding deficit of \$39 billion to achieve SDG 4 but aid to education has stagnated since 2010.

“Countries need more and better data to target policies and make the most of every dollar spent on education,” said the Director of the UNESCO Institute for Statistics, Silvia Montoya. “Data are a necessity – not a luxury – for all countries. Yet today, fewer than half of countries are able to provide the data needed to monitor progress towards the global education goal. What is the point in setting targets if we can't track them? Better finance and coordination are needed to support countries, fix this data gap and, most importantly, make progress before we get any closer to the deadline.”

A complementary publication by the Global Education Monitoring Report ([Beyond Commitments: How countries implement SDG 4](#)) analyzes policies that countries claim to have put in place since 2015 to achieve educational targets, highlighting the need to align national education plans with SDG4.

Manos Antoninis, Director of the Global Education Monitoring Report: “Countries have interpreted the meaning of the targets in the global education goal very differently. This seems correct given that countries set off from such different starting points. But they must not deviate too much from the promises they made back in 2015. If countries match their plans with their commitments now, they can get back on track by 2030.”

The Report shows that many countries have prioritized equity and inclusion since 2015 to meet their obligation. Thus, school vouchers are issued to indigenous students in Bolivia, tuition fees have been abolished for the poorest in Vietnam, and conditional cash transfers are given to refugee children in Turkey, and to children with severe intellectual disabilities in South Africa.

Learning has been prioritized too, with a third of countries introducing learning assessments to look at trends over time, and one in four countries using learning results to reform their curricula.

The weakest synergies between countries’ plans and their education commitments are seen in the lack of cross-sectoral collaboration, which can typically only be found in attempts to link early childhood education and health care, and, later on, education and the labour market.

For more information and interviews, contact Kate Redman k.redman@unesco.org(link sends e-mail) +33(0)671786234