

Central and Southern Asia fact sheet – 2020 GEM Report.

Please note that this factsheet only contains some of the mentions from the region. The full Report and all regional mentions can be found here: [Bit.ly/2020gemreport](https://bit.ly/2020gemreport)

Embargo : 23 June



Headline statistic: 30% of countries in the region did not target the marginalised in their education response to Covid-19

Persistent exclusion

- 95 million children and youth are entirely excluded from education in the region, with poverty the main constraint to access.
- Central and Southern Asia has by far the most illiterates aged 25 to 64 (269 million), and the number has remained constant for about 25 years, but progress among youth since the late 1990s is expected to start having an impact.
- In **Afghanistan**, where more than 1,000 schools were closed in late 2018 due to conflict, half a million children were out of school
- In **Pakistan**, hardly any poor rural women complete secondary school despite a target for universal secondary completion by 2030.
- Exclusion can happen inside school walls as well: More than 50% of 11- to 15-year-olds have experienced bullying in school in **Nepal**
- Grade repetition, practiced worldwide, is an inclusion challenge. Some **Indian** states are abandoning automatic promotion despite its benefits. Analysis for this report suggests that children who repeated a primary grade were less likely to complete primary school and more likely to leave school early. This is important, as the probability of repeating remains higher for children who belong to scheduled castes.

Inequitable foundations: Alongside today's new Report, the GEM Report has launched a new website, [PEER](https://peer.unesco.org), with descriptions of laws and policies on inclusion in education for every country in the world.

- Only 36% of countries provide a definition of inclusion in education that is comprehensive, covering all learners, without exception. And 29% of countries only target people with disabilities in their definitions of inclusive education
- No country has an education law that is inclusive of all learners, no matter their background, identity or ability
- In the region, 62% had education laws referring to people with disabilities, 31% had laws on gender, 38% on ethnicity and indigeneity and 7% on language. In **Bangladesh**, the 2010 National Education Policy recognized children's right to receive education in their mother tongue.
- 42% of countries in the region have laws calling for children with disabilities to be educated in separate settings, while 17% had laws calling for inclusion.
- In the **Islamic Republic of Iran**, which revised its special education law in 2004, the 2016 Charter on Citizenry Rights affirmed that 'no one should be deprived of the opportunity to acquire knowledge or job skills due to their disabilities' and included regulations to support those registered in mainstream schools with resource teachers. However, there is no legal

guarantee of the right to inclusive education. A 2015 regulation specified that students who could not 'study in regular educational environments' would be placed in segregated special education centres. All children are screened at age 6 for ability to be enrolled in first grade. Those who fail are referred for professional evaluation. In 2014, 1.2 million children were assessed at 862 fixed centres and at 17 mobile bases for nomadic populations. About 13% were referred, and over 90% of those were placed in special schools.

- **India's** 2016 Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act translated the CRPD principles into the national context and established a right to inclusive education. However, it introduced ambiguity and the possibility of segregation, stating that 'every child with a benchmark disability should have access to free education in an appropriate environment ... in a neighbourhood school, or in a special school of his choice'. The Kerala state law on the right to education referred to special schools and the possibility of homeschooling children with severe and multiple disabilities
- **Nepal's** government is drawing up an action plan to create disability-friendly education infrastructure and facilities, improve teacher training and develop a flexible curriculum by 2030. However, the government has yet to articulate, in law or policy, inclusive education standards in line with international standards and how to ensure them.

Exclusion can be very blatant in some laws:

- Article 16 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women prohibits forced and child marriage, but 20 countries, including many with a high prevalence of child marriage, such as **Bangladesh**, have expressed reservations on the article. **Bangladesh's** legal provision against child marriage is contradictory, as it punishes parents or guardians but does not declare such marriages void. Girls can get married at the age of 15 with their fathers' approval in **Afghanistan**, and can get married at age 16 in most provinces in **Pakistan**.
- **Bangladesh** has not ratified ILO Convention 138 on the minimum age for work
- Refugees such as the Rohingya in **Bangladesh** are taught in a parallel education system. In January 2020, the government announced that, as of April 2020, 10,000 Rohingya children in grades 6 to 9 in camps would enrol in a pilot programme using the Myanmar curriculum. While the decision goes some way to offer the Rohingya an education prospect, it violates the principle of inclusion of refugees in national education systems.

Education systems often assume that all children are the same.

- No countries in the region recognize sign language as an official language
- Only 13% of schools in **Uzbekistan** and 7% in **Kazakhstan** but 64% in **India** are adapted for students with disabilities.
- Effective hygiene management. One in ten schools does not have basic sanitation, critical for many girls to stay in school when menstruating.
- **Bangladesh's** curriculum and textbook board reached only 963 of an estimated 40,000 visually impaired children under 15 with Braille textbooks in 2016

Curricula and textbooks can alienate too.

- In many countries, girls and women are under-represented in textbooks or, when included, depicted in traditional roles. In **Afghanistan**, women were almost absent from grade 1 textbooks published in the 1990s. Since 2001, they have been more present but in passive

and domestic roles as mothers, caregivers, daughters and sisters. They are mostly represented as dependent, with teaching being the only career open to them.

- A review of 95 primary and secondary compulsory education textbooks in the Islamic **Republic of Iran** showed that women accounted for 37% of images. About half the images showing women were related to family and education, while work environments appeared in less than 7%. There were no images of women in about 60% of textbooks for Farsi and foreign language, 63% for science and 74% for social science.
- In **India**, the Maharashtra State Bureau of Textbook Production and Curriculum Research revised many textbook images in 2019. For instance, grade 2 textbooks show men and women sharing household chores, along with a female doctor and a male chef. Students are asked to note these images and talk about them.
- The share of females in secondary school English language textbook text and images was 37% in **Bangladesh** and 24% in Punjab province, **Pakistan**. Women were represented in less prestigious occupations and as introverted and passive
- In **Nepal**, the health and physical education curriculum in grades 6 to 9 discusses health and well-being of sexually and gender diverse learners, with a particular focus on the hijras, a transgender and intersex group recognized in Southern Asia as a third gender
- There was only one mention related to disability in the text of seven secondary school English language textbooks in the **Islamic Republic of Iran**

Inclusion in education requires resources:

- In **Nepal**, the budget discussion for the 2016–23 school sector development plan addressed the shift from special schools to a more inclusive approach. Reform strategies included modules in pre-service teacher education and capacity building of national- and district-level staff. However, the expenditure framework noted that inclusive education was one of several ‘other item’ costs, which amounted to 3.4% of the total school sector cost categories. A separate budget line on ‘inclusive education’ was only explicitly noted for the secondary school development programme, amounting to just 0.02% of secondary school activities.
- In **Nepal**, according to the 2017 Disability Rights Act and the Inclusive Education Policy for Persons with Disabilities, children should be able to attend schools in their communities without discrimination, but other provisions allow for educating children with disabilities separately. Government efforts focusing on infrastructure and facilities, teacher education and flexible curricula by 2030 need to be aligned with international standards
- **India** has made considerable efforts to expand the rural school network since the 2009 Right to Education Act, which required primary schools to be located no more than 1 km from a child’s home. However, expansion was achieved by increasing the number of small schools with inadequate infrastructure, resulting in an ongoing process of rationalizing education resource distribution. While primary education is ensured in most rural villages, school distribution rationalization in remote rural areas has affected school distance for secondary and higher education, particularly for girls and learners with disabilities

Teachers need and want training on inclusion

- Teachers in **Bangladesh** reported a lack of both pre-and in-service opportunities for professional development on meeting the needs of students with disabilities.
- In **Nepal**, the National Centre for Educational Development incorporated a gender awareness module in its teacher professional development programme

- **It is important for teachers to be more diverse:** The government of **Bangladesh**, with donor support, recruited 650 primary school teachers with disabilities, about 70% of them women. In India, the share of teachers from scheduled castes, which constitute 16% of the country's population, increased from 9% in 2005 to 13% in 2013.
- In **Afghanistan**, many teaching positions are reportedly gained through bribery or nepotism. Financial and other obstacles to entry may effectively block candidates from diverse socio-economic backgrounds and can also exacerbate gender disparity. For every 100 male teachers, there are 66 female teachers and the ratio drops as low as 10 in some provinces, including Uruzgan and Zabul. The Ministry of Education has taken measures to reduce corruption in teacher recruitment
- In **Nepal**, educated individuals with visual impairments are actively recruited as teachers in mainstream schools: Out of the approximately 1,000 people in Nepal with visual impairments and a university degree, around 400 worked as teachers in mainstream schools. A survey found that both students and principals perceived these teachers positively. Students reported that the teachers' strengths were positive attitudes, good communication skills and more attention paid to social and moral lessons

Parents can help or hinder inclusion:

- In **Pakistan**, the gap in the probability of boys receiving more household resources for education was 13 percentage points for 5- to 9-year-olds and 24 points for 10- to 14-year-olds

There is a chronic lack of quality data on those left behind.

- Four countries do not collect data on disabilities in their EMIS: **Bhutan, Laos, Nepal and Pakistan**
- Household surveys are key for breaking education data down by individual characteristics. But 29% of countries – corresponding to 6% of the region's population – did not have surveys with publicly available data.
- A study in Qom, **Islamic Republic of Iran**, estimated that 5% of students aged 6 to 14 were dyslexic. However, screening tests remain at the level of research studies in university medical departments and are not yet part of formal procedures

Signs of moves towards inclusion: The Report and its [PEER](#) website note many countries using positive, innovative approaches to transition to inclusion. Of those noted in the report:

- **India, Nepal and Pakistan**, which have a historically established gender minority identity, are testing a 'third gender' option in their data collection tools
- A large-scale female secondary school stipend programme introduced in **Bangladesh** in 1994 increased attainment by 14% to 25%, delayed marriage, reduced number of offspring and improved decision-making autonomy
- Community-based education (CBE) has been instrumental in expanding services in areas governments find hard to reach. In **Afghanistan**, the governments has taken over CBE structures, which rely on local people in resource-constrained environments
- In **Nepal**, the Curriculum Development Centre developed primary school textbooks and supplementary reading materials in 22 languages
- In **India's** Odisha state, multilingual education covered about 1,500 primary schools and 21 tribal languages of instruction.
- **Bangladesh**, within the framework of the 2010 National Education Policy, which recognized the right of all children to receive mother tongue education, the Mother Tongue-based

Multilingual Education programme has been introduced in five indigenous languages in pre-primary education

- In **India**, inclusive practices are found in relation to early intervention for children with disabilities. Tamil Nadu state set up a State Resource Centre for Inclusive Education. Andhra Pradesh and Maharashtra states arranged transport for children and their parents. Bihar state ensured representation of parents of learners with disabilities on school management committees. Overall, though, delivering education in inclusive settings is relatively less preferred in Central and Southern Asia and in Northern Africa and Western Asia.
- **Pakistan's** Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act 2018 prohibits discrimination against transgender people in education and establishes their right to education and a 3% quota for transgender children in mainstream public and private education institutions. It also stipulated that service providers should ensure equal opportunity in both academic and extracurricular activities, such as sports
- In **India's** Delhi National Capital Territory, cooperation between the transgender rights NGO Society for People's Awareness, Care and Empowerment and the Directorate of Education resulted in 27 schools being certified as trans-friendly. The schools have taken measures inclusive of transgender and gender non-conforming children, including making at least one toilet gender-neutral and raising awareness to prevent bullying
- In **Pakistan**, the Disability Act 2014 introduced admission quotas for students with disabilities at all education levels. Tertiary education institutions are asked to provide admission test exemption, age limit relaxation, fee concessions and appropriate examination modes. However, smaller institutions lack the financial means for such measures, and there is no follow-up system to check implementation.
- In **Bangladesh**, a randomized control trial of an intervention that provided 144 hours of training for employment over 18 months to 12- to 18-year-old girls found that those who received life skills training were 31% less likely to marry before age 18; the figure was 23% for those who received livelihood training in entrepreneurship, mobile phone servicing, photography and basic first aid.
- In 2019, **Pakistan's** Government Rules and Disability Act 2014 introduced admission quotas for students with disabilities at all education levels. Tertiary education institutions were asked to exempt candidates with disabilities from admission tests, relax age limits, provide fee concessions and offer appropriate examination modalities
- In **Sri Lanka**, 5% of all available places in tertiary education institutions are reserved for students from one of its 16 economically disadvantaged districts

- **ENDS –**

For more information, b-roll, photos, for interviews, videos or animations please contact Kate Redman k.redman@unesco.org 0033 6 71 78 62 34

Notes to editors

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

The Global Education Monitoring Report (GEM Report) is developed by an independent team and published by UNESCO. It has the official mandate of monitoring progress in meeting the fourth Sustainable Development Goal on education, SDG 4.

The PEER Website will be publicly available from 23 June. Until that point, journalists can access the site using the following passwords:

- <https://www.education-profiles.org/>
- Username: team
- Password: gemprofiles246!

Two regional reports will be released on the theme of inclusion and education later in the year: A Report on Latin America and the Caribbean in October, and a Report on Central and Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia in December