

New UNESCO data: Numbers out of school children stagnate while aid to basic education falls by six per cent in a year

New statistics released by UNESCO show that 57 million children were out of school in 2011; a drop of just two million from the year before*. Compounding this problem for children around the world is a new data analysis showing that aid to basic education has decreased for the first time since 2002.

The new figures were released before a high-level discussion in New York on 11 June in support of the United Nations Secretary-General's Global Education First Initiative. They highlight the need to tackle the twin crises in education – whether children get into school at all, and whether they learn once they are there.

“We are at a critical juncture,” said UNESCO’s Director-General, Irina Bokova. “The world must move beyond helping children enter school to also ensure that they actually learn the basics when they are there. Our twin challenge is to get every child in school by understanding and acting on the multiple causes of exclusion, and to ensure they learn with qualified teachers in healthy and safe environments. Now is not the time for aid donors to back out. Quite the reverse: to reach these children and our ambition to end the learning crisis, donors must renew their commitments so that no child is left out of school due to lack of resources, as they pledged at the turn of this century.”

The new figures on out-of-school children were released by UNESCO’s Institute for Statistics. They show that countries in sub-Saharan Africa account for more than half of all out-of-school children and have the highest out-of-school rate. More than 20 per cent of African children have never attended primary school or have left school without completing primary education. By contrast, countries in South and West Asia have made considerable gains over the past two decades, reducing the number of out-of-school children by two-thirds from 40 million in 1999 to 12 million in 2011.

Typically, it is children in poor, remote areas, those affected by conflict, or those belonging to ethnic, racial and linguistic minorities who are denied an opportunity for schooling. Children from poor households are three times as likely to be out of school than children from rich households. Girls from poor households in rural areas are among the children facing the greatest barriers to education.

Although more children now enter school, there has been little progress in reducing the rate at which they leave it. About 137 million children began primary school in 2011 but at least 34

million are likely to drop out before reaching the last grade. That translates into an early school leaving rate of 25 per cent—the same level as in 2000.

Sub-Saharan Africa and South and West Asia have the highest rate of early school leaving. Across these regions, more than one of every three students who started primary school in 2010 will not make it to the last grade. New interventions are required to reduce this rate in order to achieve universal primary education and ensure that every child acquires basic literacy and numeracy skills.

While out-of-school figures are stagnant, new analysis from the *Education for All Global Monitoring Report* finds that aid to basic education declined by six per cent between 2010 and 2011. Over the course of that year, six of the top ten donors to education reduced their spending. The changing donor landscape now sees the United Kingdom as the largest bilateral donor to basic education.

In addition, funds are not directed to the regions and countries most in need. Only \$1.9 billion was allocated to low income countries in 2011, a reduction of nine per cent, and a far cry from the \$26 billion needed to fill the finance gap for basic education.

The report calls for donors to prioritise countries and regions most in need: sub-Saharan Africa accounts for more than half of out-of-school children and yet received seven per cent less aid in 2011 than 2010. Aid to Nigeria, the country that is home to the largest number of out of school children in the world, dropped by more than a quarter from 2010 to 2011. The biggest reductions in basic education were made by Canada, the Netherlands and the World Bank (IDA), which cut their contributions to the region by over one-third.

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NOTES TO EDITORS:

*In 2012, the UIS estimated that 61 million children of primary school age were out of school in 2010. In 2013, UIS revised its estimate for 2010 to 59 million children out-of-school. The difference between the estimates published in 2012 and 2013 is due to the availability of new national data.

Out of school data was produced by the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS)

Aid trends calculated by the EFA Global Monitoring Report team use data from the OECD Creditor Reporting System aid database

The EFA Global Monitoring Report is developed annually by an independent team and published by UNESCO.