

# New Methodology Shows that 258 Million Children, Adolescents and Youth Are Out of School

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**This fact sheet presents the latest UIS data on education available as of September 2019.**

Three years after the adoption of Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4) and the promise to provide universal primary and secondary education, there has been no progress in reducing the global number of out-of-school children, adolescents and youth. This fact sheet by the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS) highlights the most recent statistics on trends at the global and regional levels, based on a revised calculation method that provides more precise estimates of the out-of-school population.

## Out-of-school children, adolescents and youth: Global status and trends

### *No progress in reducing out-of-school numbers*

In 2018, 258.4 million children, adolescents and youth were out of school, representing one-sixth of the global population of this age group (see **Figure 1** and **Table 1**). This number is 3.4 million lower than the number of out-of-school children released by the UIS in September 2018 (261.8 million). Most of this reduction is due to a change in the methodology used to calculate the number and rate of out-of-school children. Until 2018, children enrolled in pre-primary education were included in the count of out-of-school children. Starting in 2019, any children enrolled in formal education, regardless of the level, are considered to be in school, including children of primary school age enrolled in pre-primary education (see **Box 1**).

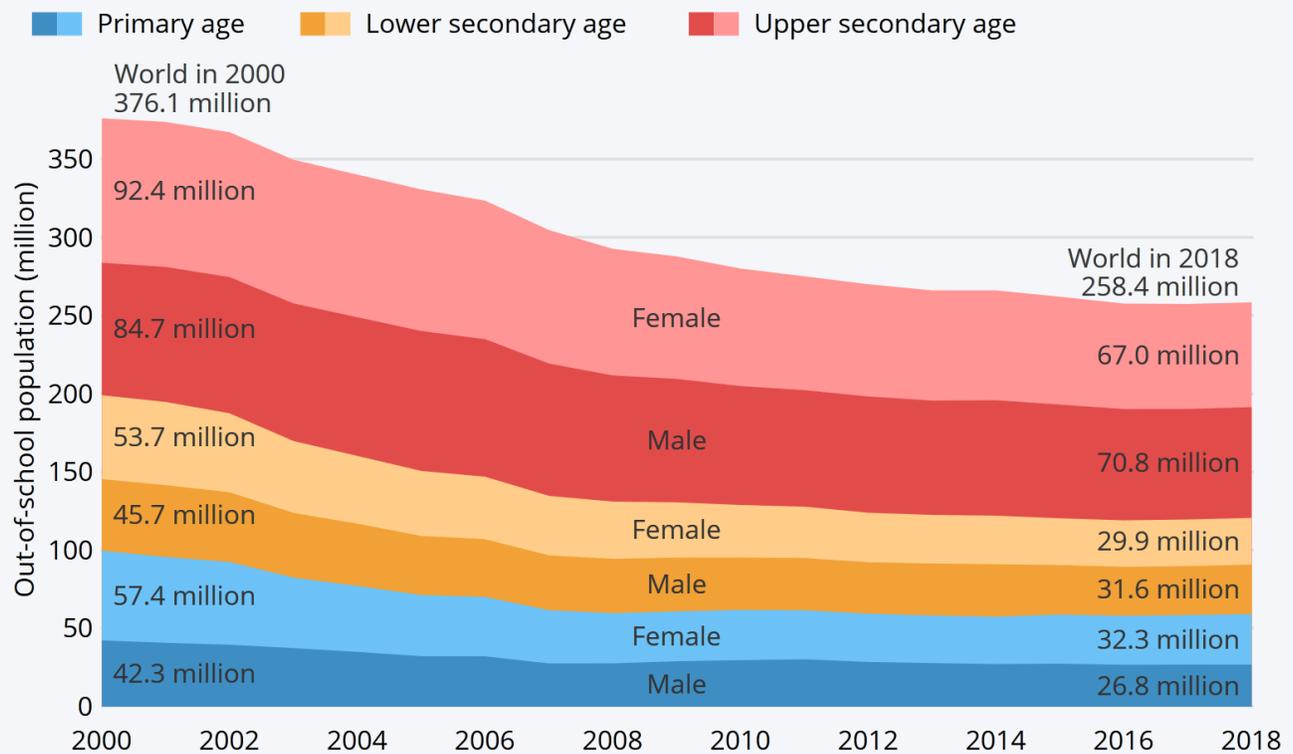
The change in the calculation method did not affect the overall trend in out-of-school figures, which still points towards stagnation in recent years. The number of children, adolescents and youth who are excluded from education fell steadily in the decade following 2000, but UIS data show that this progress has basically stopped in recent years; the total number of out-of-school children and youth has declined by little more than 1 million per year since 2015. Some 59 million, or 23% of the total, are children of primary school age (about 6 to 11 years old); 62 million, or 24% of the total, are adolescents of lower secondary school age (about



12 to 14 years old); and 138 million, or 53% of the total, are youth of upper secondary school age (about 15 to 17 years old).

**FIGURE 1**

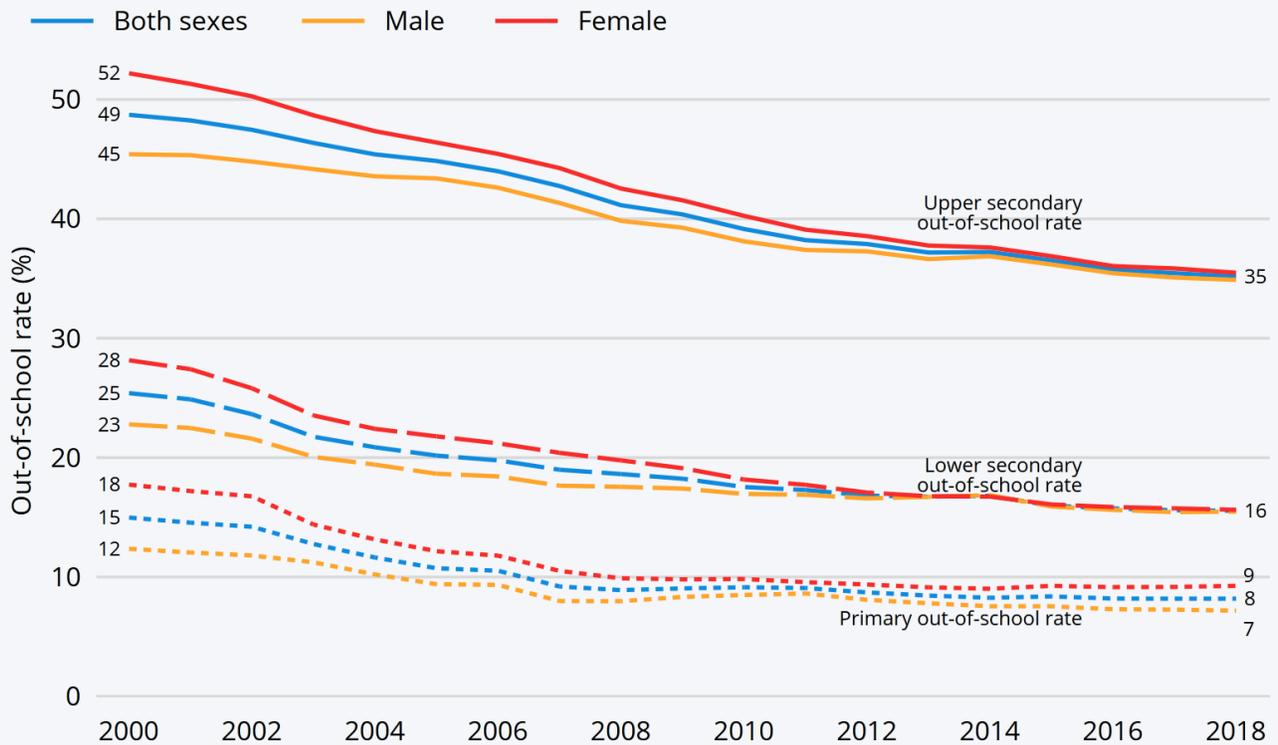
Global number of out-of-school children, adolescents and youth, 2000-2018



Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics database.

The rates of out-of-school children, adolescents and youth have followed a similar trend (see **Figure 2**). After an initial decline in the years after 2000, the primary out-of-school rate has decreased only slightly since 2008, reaching 8% in 2018, and the lower secondary out-of-school rate has been at 16% since 2012. The upper secondary out-of-school rate, which was initially at much higher levels than the primary and lower secondary out-of-school rates, has fallen more steadily since 2000, reaching 35% in 2018.

Upper secondary school-age youth are more than four times as likely to be out of school as children of primary school age and more than twice as likely to be out of school as adolescents of lower secondary school age. The high out-of-school rates for older cohorts can be explained by poverty and a variety of other reasons: many youth never had a chance to enter school when they were younger, upper secondary education is often not compulsory, and upper secondary school-age youth may choose employment over continuing their education (UIS and GEMR, 2016).


**FIGURE 2**
**Global out-of-school rate by age group and sex, 2000-2018**


Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics database.


**Table 1. Out-of-school rates and numbers by SDG region, 2018**

Out-of-school children of primary school age							
Region	Out-of-school rate (%)				Out-of-school number (millions)		
	Both sexes	Male	Female	GPIA	Both sexes	Male	Female
Europe and Northern America	1.7	1.9	1.5	0.79	1.1	0.6	0.5
Latin America and the Caribbean	3.8	4.2	3.5	0.84	2.3	1.3	1.0
Central Asia	2.0	1.7	2.3	1.27	0.1	0.0	0.1
Southern Asia	6.8	5.9	7.8	1.24	12.5	5.6	6.8
Eastern and South-Eastern Asia	3.2	2.8	3.7	1.23	5.7	2.6	3.1
Northern Africa and Western Asia	9.2	8.3	10.1	1.17	5.0	2.3	2.7
Sub-Saharan Africa	18.8	16.3	21.4	1.24	32.2	14.1	18.1
Oceania	5.0	4.4	5.7	1.23	0.2	0.1	0.1
World	8.2	7.2	9.3	1.22	59.1	26.8	32.3
Out-of-school adolescents of lower secondary school age							
Region	Out-of-school rate (%)				Out-of-school number (millions)		
	Both sexes	Male	Female	GPIA	Both sexes	Male	Female
Europe and Northern America	1.6	1.5	1.7	1.11	0.7	0.4	0.4
Latin America and the Caribbean	7.2	7.4	7.1	0.96	2.5	1.3	1.2
Central Asia	5.2	4.1	6.4	1.37	0.3	0.1	0.2
Southern Asia	15.2	16.2	14.1	0.87	16.5	9.2	7.3
Eastern and South-Eastern Asia	9.7	10.3	8.9	0.87	9.0	5.1	4.0
Northern Africa and Western Asia	13.9	12.2	15.7	1.22	4.0	1.8	2.2
Sub-Saharan Africa	36.7	35.3	38.1	1.07	28.3	13.7	14.5
Oceania	5.4	4.4	6.5	1.31	0.1	0.0	0.1
World	15.6	15.5	15.6	1.01	61.5	31.6	29.9
Out-of-school youth of upper secondary school age							
Region	Out-of-school rate (%)				Out-of-school number (millions)		
	Both sexes	Male	Female	GPIA	Both sexes	Male	Female
Europe and Northern America	6.7	7.0	6.4	0.91	2.5	1.3	1.2
Latin America and the Caribbean	23.0	23.8	22.1	0.93	7.2	3.8	3.4
Central Asia	26.7	25.0	28.5	1.12	0.7	0.3	0.4
Southern Asia	45.5	44.1	47.1	1.06	64.0	32.6	31.5
Eastern and South-Eastern Asia	20.6	24.3	16.5	0.68	17.9	11.1	6.8
Northern Africa and Western Asia	29.8	27.5	32.3	1.15	8.1	3.8	4.3
Sub-Saharan Africa	57.5	54.5	60.5	1.10	37.0	17.7	19.3
Oceania	24.6	23.1	26.2	1.12	0.4	0.2	0.2
World	35.2	34.9	35.5	1.02	137.8	70.8	67.0
Out-of-school children, adolescents and youth of primary, lower secondary and upper secondary age							
Region	Out-of-school rate (%)				Out-of-school number (millions)		
	Both sexes	Male	Female	GPIA	Both sexes	Male	Female
Europe and Northern America	2.9	3.1	2.8	0.91	4.4	2.3	2.0
Latin America and the Caribbean	9.6	9.9	9.2	0.92	12.0	6.3	5.6
Central Asia	8.2	7.2	9.1	1.21	1.1	0.5	0.6
Southern Asia	21.5	20.9	22.1	1.05	93.0	47.4	45.6
Eastern and South-Eastern Asia	9.1	10.0	8.2	0.82	32.6	18.8	13.8
Northern Africa and Western Asia	15.5	14.0	17.0	1.17	17.1	7.9	9.2
Sub-Saharan Africa	31.2	28.9	33.6	1.14	97.5	45.5	52.0
Oceania	9.3	8.4	10.2	1.18	0.7	0.3	0.4
World	17.1	16.6	17.7	1.07	258.4	129.2	129.2

**Notes:** GPIA = adjusted gender parity index (female/male out-of-school rate). Male and female out-of-school numbers may not add up to the total number because of rounding.

Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics database.



### Box 1: Definition of the out-of-school rate

The calculation method for the out-of-school rate has evolved over time. Before 2005, the primary out-of-school rate was derived from the primary net enrolment rate, i.e. the proportion of the population of primary school age enrolled in primary education. Under this approach, only children of primary school age in primary education were considered in school. This meant that primary-age children in secondary education were counted as part of the out-of-school population.

In 2005, a joint publication by the UIS and UNICEF described a new calculation method for the out-of-school rate. According to the revised methodology, “children of primary school age are counted as being in school when they are participating either in primary or secondary education” (UIS, 2005). However, children of primary school age in pre-primary education continued to be counted as out of school. The 2005 report gave two reasons for this. First, on the background of the Millennium Development Goal of universal primary education, the content of pre-primary education was not seen as always appropriate for children of primary school age. The second reason was more technical: enrolment data on pre-primary education by age, which are needed to identify primary-age children, were missing for too many countries to calculate regional and global estimates.

The methodological framework for the global Out-of-School Children Initiative (OOSCI), launched by the UIS and UNICEF in 2010, kept the existing calculation method for the primary out-of-school rate and added a lower secondary out-of-school rate (UNICEF and UIS, 2015). For the latter, any adolescents of lower secondary age enrolled in primary or secondary school were considered in school. In addition, the methodological framework for OOSCI introduced a pre-primary out-of-school rate. Although pre-primary education programmes may be longer than one year, the OOSCI methodology proposed a standard approach for all countries by focusing on participation in education of children aged one year below the official entrance age into primary school.

With the adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals and the promise of primary and secondary education for all girls and boys, the upper secondary out-of-school rate was included in the monitoring framework for SDG 4 on education, in addition to the primary and lower secondary out-of-school rate (UNESCO 2016). The upper secondary out-of-school rate was defined as the proportion of youth of upper secondary age who are not enrolled in primary, secondary or tertiary education.

Pre-primary education is important for primary school readiness and because of this, SDG target 4.2 calls for universal access to early childhood development, care and pre-primary education. One of the global indicators used to monitor SDG 4 is the participation rate in organized learning of children aged one year before the official primary entry age, but there is no pre-primary out-of-school rate *per se* among the SDG 4 indicators (see **Box 2**).

A comparison of the calculation methods for the different out-of-school rates used until 2018 shows that the treatment of pre-primary education was inconsistent with the treatment of participation in other levels of education. While adolescents and youth of lower and upper secondary age enrolled in primary education were counted as in school, children of primary age in pre-primary education were considered out of school, thus inflating primary out-of-school rates in countries where children tend to stay in pre-primary education beyond pre-primary age.

To recognize the importance of pre-primary education and to ensure consistency in the calculation of out-of-school figures, the Technical Cooperation Group on the Indicators for SDG 4 – Education 2030 (TCG), approved a change in the calculation method of out-of-school rates and numbers at its meeting in November 2018. Children, adolescents and youth of primary, lower secondary and upper secondary school age are now considered out of school if they are not enrolled in pre-primary, primary, secondary or post-secondary education. The UIS published data based on the new methodology for the first time in September 2019.



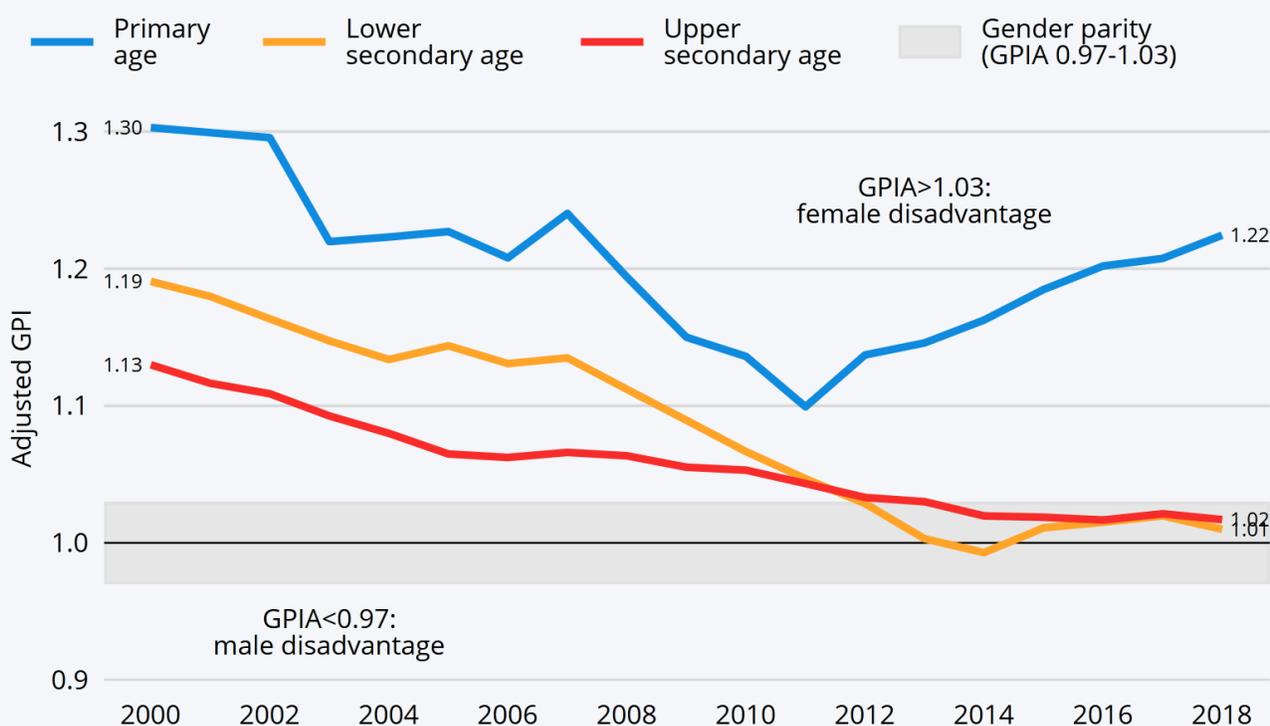
### ***The world is moving towards gender parity in out-of-school rates, although inequalities persist at regional and country levels***

The decline in out-of-school rates and numbers over the past 15 years occurred with a reduction in gender disparity at the global level. Historically, girls and young women were more likely to be excluded from education. However, the most recent statistics show that globally, the male and female out-of-school rates for the lower secondary and upper secondary school-age populations are now nearly identical, while the gender gap among children of primary school age dropped from more than five percentage points in 2000 to two percentage points in 2018.

The trend in gender parity can also be seen in the values of the adjusted gender parity index (GPIA) of the out-of-school rate in **Figure 3**, an indicator published for the first time in 2017 (UIS and GEMR, 2017). The adjusted GPI of the global primary out-of-school rate fell from 1.30 in 2000 to a low of 1.10 in 2011. In recent years, there was an uptick due to the continued decline of the male out-of-school rate combined with a small increase in the female out-of-school rate. This means that, globally, girls of primary school age are still more likely to be out of school compared to boys.

#### **FIGURE 3**

GPIA of global out-of-school rate by age group, 2000-2018



Notes: GPIA = adjusted gender parity index (female/male out-of-school rate).  
Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics database.



In contrast, the most recent values of the adjusted GPI for the lower secondary and upper secondary out-of-school rates are in the gender parity range between 0.97 and 1.03, meaning that males and females in these age groups have the same probability of being out of school.

It is important to note that global averages mask disparities at regional and country levels, which are discussed below. In many countries, girls of all ages face considerable barriers to education (see the [UIS global education database](#)).

## Regional out-of-school figures

The global out-of-school figures hide large regional differences. This section presents data for the regions used to monitor the SDGs.

### ***Sub-Saharan Africa has the highest out-of-school rates***

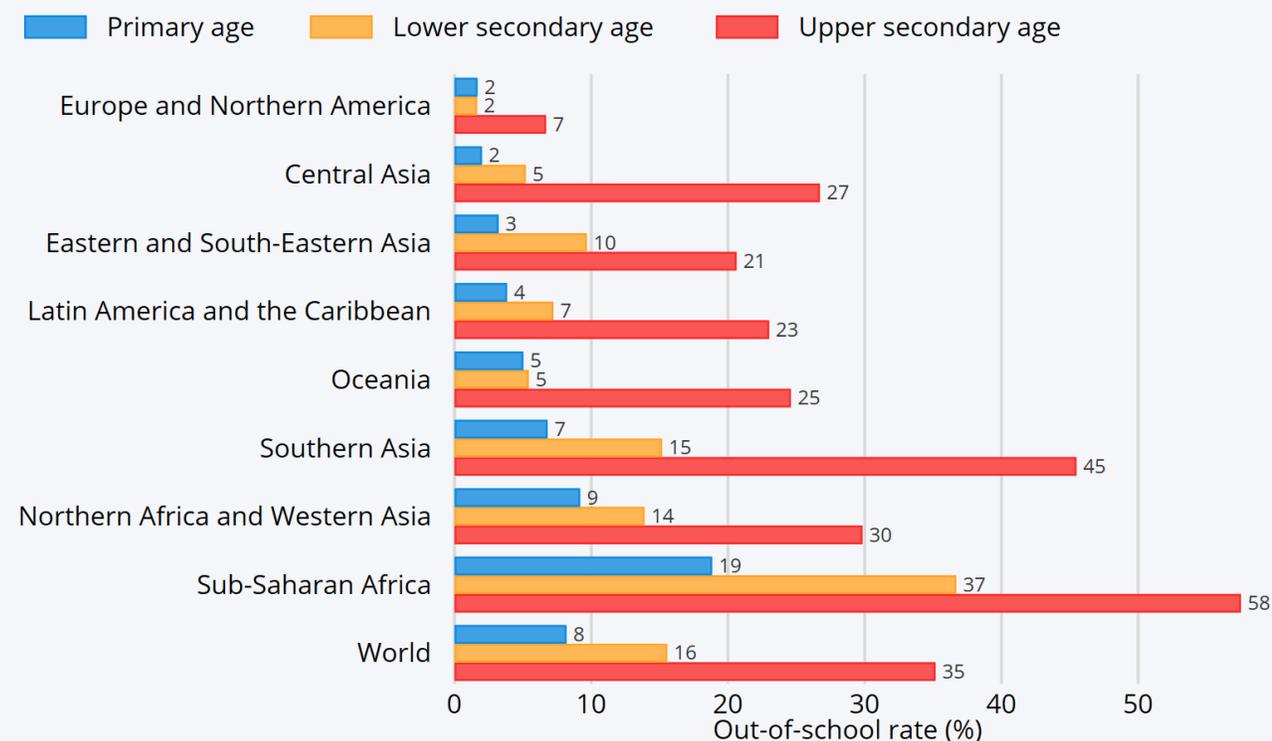
As in previous years, sub-Saharan Africa remains the region with the highest out-of-school rates for all age groups (see Table 1 and **Figure 4**). Of the 59 million out-of-school children of primary school age, 32 million, or more than one-half, live in sub-Saharan Africa. Southern Asia has the second-highest number of out-of-school children with 13 million. Sub-Saharan Africa also has the highest rate of exclusion, with 19% of primary school-age children denied the right to education, followed by Northern Africa and Western Asia (9%) and Southern Asia (7%).

The global lower secondary out-of-school rate (16%) is twice as high as the primary out-of-school rate, but because it is calculated for a smaller age cohort, the global number of out-of-school adolescents (62 million) is only slightly higher than the number of primary school-age out-of-school children. Three regions are home to nearly nine out of ten out-of-school adolescents: sub-Saharan Africa (28 million), Southern Asia (17 million) and Eastern and South-Eastern Asia (9 million). Sub-Saharan Africa is also the region with the highest rate of out-of-school adolescents (37%), followed by Southern Asia (15%), and Northern Africa and Western Asia (14%).

In all regions, out-of-school rates and numbers are far higher among youth of upper secondary school age than among younger cohorts. In total, 138 million upper secondary school-age youth were not in school in 2018, 17 million more than the combined number of out-of-school children and adolescents of primary and lower secondary school age. The largest proportion, 64 million, live in Southern Asia, a further 37 million in sub-Saharan Africa, and 18 million in Eastern and South-Eastern Asia. More than one-half of all youth are out of school in sub-Saharan Africa (58%) and nearly half of all youth in Southern Asia (46%).

**FIGURE 4**

### Out-of-school rate by region and age group, 2018



Notes: Regions are sorted by the primary out-of-school rate.  
Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics database.

#### ***Gender disparities persist at the regional level***

In 2000, 54% of the 376 million out-of-school children, adolescents and youth were female. By 2018, the female share of the global out-of-school population had fallen to 50%. However, these global averages mask considerable differences at regional and national levels.

Primary school-age girls face a disadvantage in most regions, with the exception of Latin America and the Caribbean as well as Europe and Northern America, where boys are more likely to be out of school (see Table 1 and **Figure 5**). The widest gender disparities at the primary level are observed in Central Asia, with an adjusted GPI of 1.27, although this is an artifact of very low out-of-school rates at which GPI values tend to take on extreme values. In 2018, no region had achieved gender parity among children of primary school age.

For lower secondary out-of-school rates, the widest gender disparity is also observed in Central Asia, where there are 137 female adolescents out of school for every 100 male adolescents not in school (adjusted GPI of 1.37). As in the case of Oceania, this GPI can be partly explained by low out-of-school rates in the region.



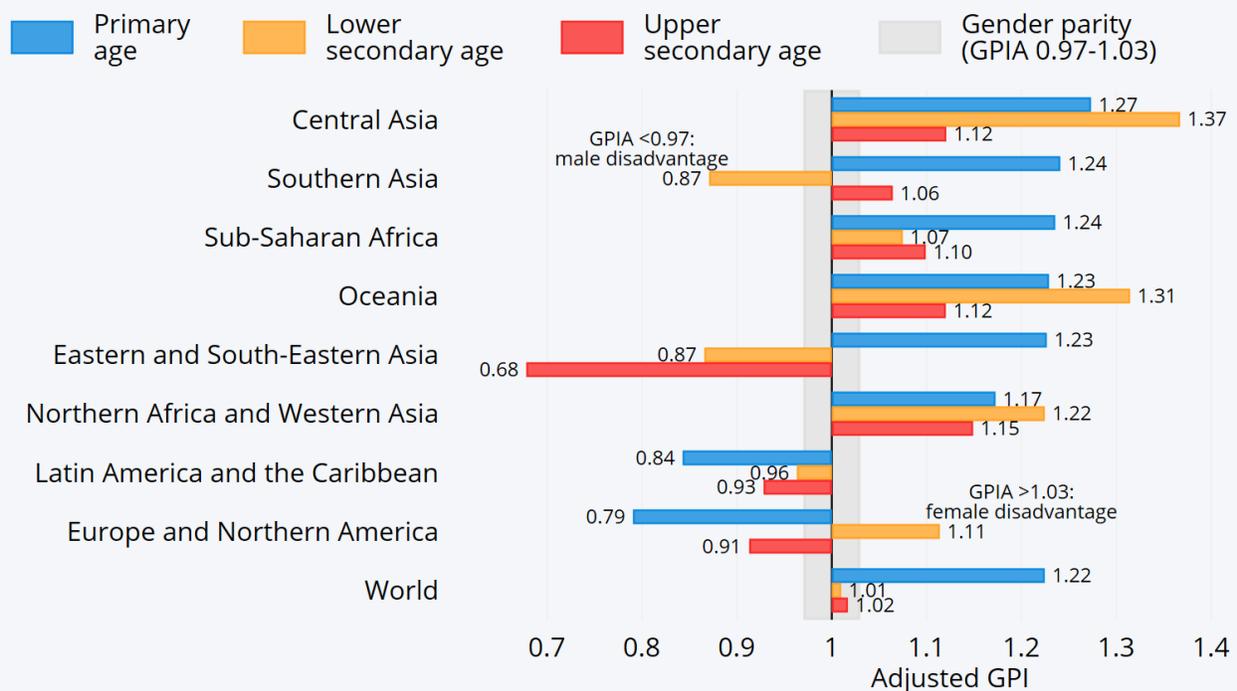
Across Northern Africa and Western Asia, girls of every school-age group are more likely to be excluded from education than boys. For every 100 boys of primary school age out of school there are 117 girls denied the right to education. Data suggest that girls who are able to start school tend to pursue their studies. In lower secondary education 121 girls for 100 boys are out of school, and in upper secondary education the ratio is 115 girls for 100 boys.

Among regions where male adolescents are more likely to be out of school, Southern Asia and Eastern and South-Eastern Asia have the widest gender gap with an adjusted GPI of 0.87. As among children of primary school age, no region has achieved gender parity, but Latin America and the Caribbean (adjusted GPI 0.96) is closest to parity for the lower secondary school-age group.

Among upper secondary school-age youth, the largest disparities in favour of females are observed in Eastern and South-Eastern Asia (adjusted GPI 0.68). Latin America and Caribbean (adjusted GPI 0.93) and Southern Asia (adjusted GPI 1.06) are closest to gender parity.

**FIGURE 5**

### Adjusted gender parity index of out-of-school rate, 2018 or latest year



Notes: GPIA = adjusted gender parity index (female/male out-of-school rate; see Box 1). Regions are sorted by the GPIA of the primary out-of-school rate.

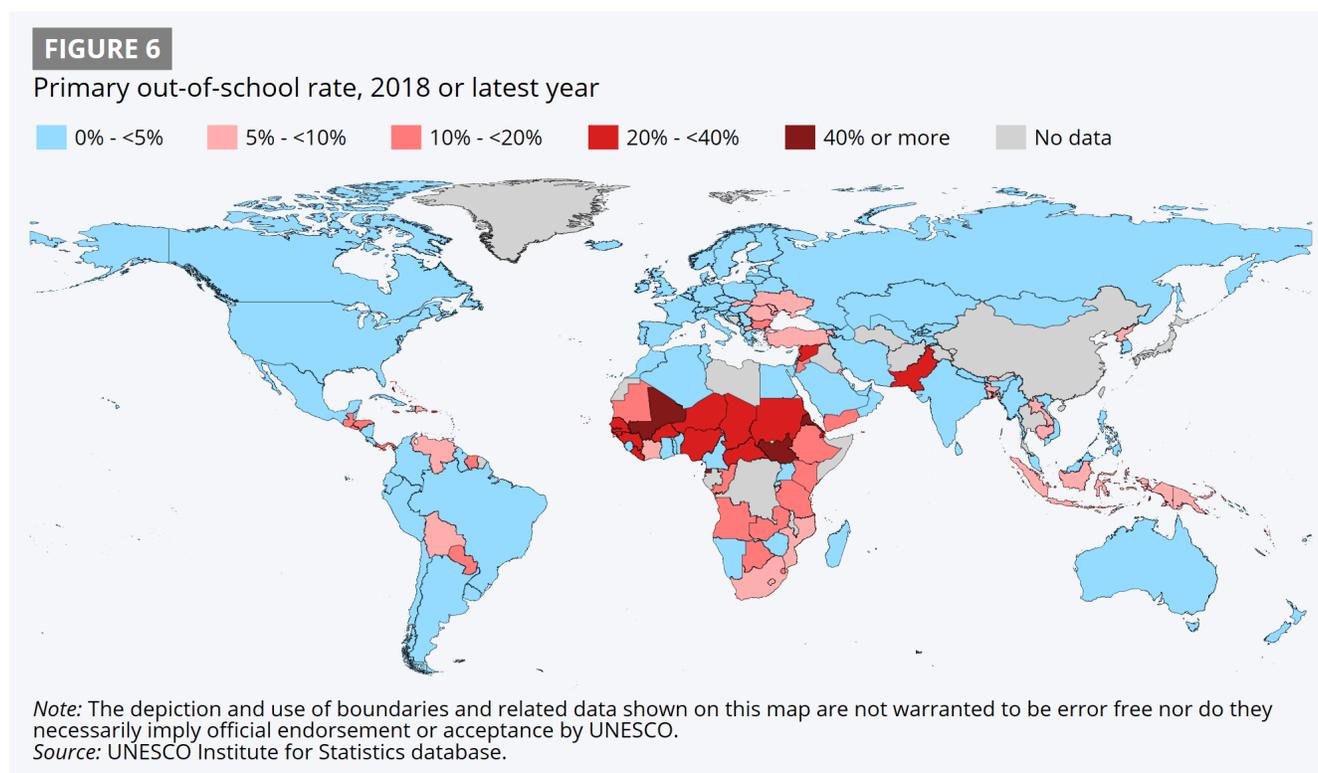
Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics database.



## National out-of-school figures

### *The countries with the highest out-of-school rates are in sub-Saharan Africa*

Turning to national data, the map in **Figure 6** shows that more than one out of five children of primary school age is out of school in countries of sub-Saharan Africa, Western Asia, and Southern Asia. The countries with the highest out-of-school rates include South Sudan (62%), Equatorial Guinea (55%), Eritrea (47%), and Mali (41%).



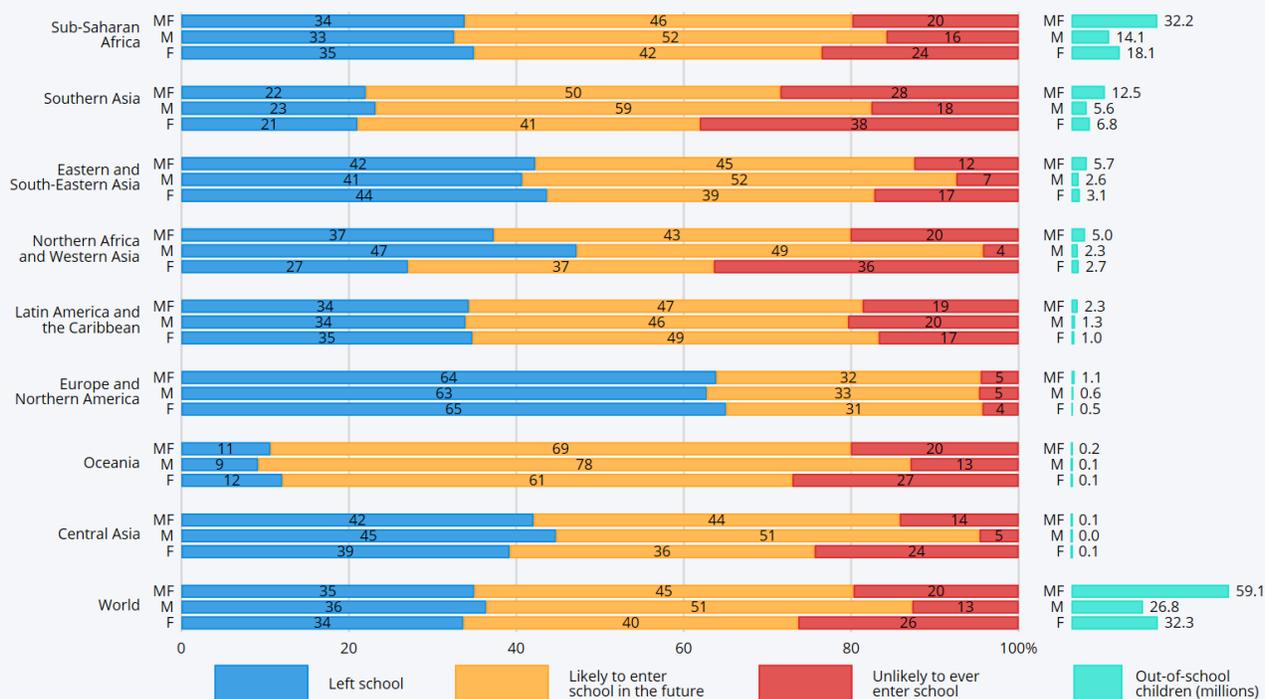
### *More than 1 out of 5 out-of-school children will never enter a classroom*

It is important to keep in mind that not all out-of-school children are permanently excluded from education. Some out-of-school children have attended school in the past but dropped out, others may attend in the future, while a third group is unlikely to ever set foot in a classroom. **Figure 7** presents estimates for the distribution of out-of-school children.

Globally, 20% or 12 million of all primary-age out-of-school children have never attended school and will probably never start if current trends continue. One-third of all out-of-school children attended school in the past but did not continue their education, and 45% are likely to enter school late and will be overage for their grade, according to UIS estimates.


**FIGURE 7**

### School exposure of out-of-school children of primary school age by region, 2018



*Note:* Male and female out-of-school numbers may not add up to the total number due to rounding.  
*Source:* UNESCO Institute for Statistics database.

In Southern Asia, more than one out of four out-of-school children will probably never set foot in a classroom. This is also the case for one out of five out-of-school children in sub-Saharan Africa, Northern Africa and Western Asia, and Oceania.

Girls remain more likely to be permanently excluded from education, despite the efforts and progress made over the past two decades. According to UIS data, 9 million girls of primary school age will never have the opportunity to learn to read and write in primary school, compared to about 3 million boys.

Across sub-Saharan Africa, 4 million girls will never attend school compared to 2 million boys. In total, 32 million children between the ages of 6 and 11 are out of school across the region. 46% of these children will start at a later age, but one-fifth will remain entirely excluded.

The gender gap is even wider in Northern Africa and Western Asia, where one out of three out-of-school girls will never receive any formal education, compared to one out of twenty-five out-of-school boys. Close to 1 million girls compared to 0.1 million boys are permanently excluded from education. One out of five of the



5 million out-of-school children in the region will never enrol. About 37% of out-of-school children began primary school but dropped out and 43% are likely to enter school late.

The classification of out-of-school children by past and possible future school attendance yields important insights for policymakers. To be effective, policies must be tailored to address the different situations facing out-of-school children. If the majority of out-of-school children in a country attended but left school, interventions should focus on reducing the dropout rate. For children who are likely to attend in the future, the goal is to ensure earlier entry into the education system. The most challenging group of out-of-school children are those who are unlikely to ever attend school, often because of a perpetuating cycle linked to lack of access to education and poverty.

**Table 2. Out-of-school rates and numbers by country income level, 2018**

Out-of-school children of primary school age							
Region	Out-of-school rate (%)				Out-of-school number (millions)		
	Both sexes	Male	Female	GPIA	Both sexes	Male	Female
Low-income countries	18.5	16.1	21.0	1.23	20.8	9.2	11.6
Lower-middle-income countries	9.4	8.0	10.9	1.26	30.4	13.4	17.0
Upper-middle-income countries	3.2	3.2	3.1	0.96	6.6	3.5	3.1
High-income countries	1.7	1.8	1.7	0.94	1.3	0.7	0.6
World	8.2	7.2	9.3	1.22	59.1	26.8	32.3
Out-of-school adolescents of lower secondary school age							
Region	Out-of-school rate (%)				Out-of-school number (millions)		
	Both sexes	Male	Female	GPIA	Both sexes	Male	Female
Low-income countries	38.5	35.7	41.4	1.14	21.2	9.9	11.3
Lower-middle-income countries	17.0	18.1	15.8	0.87	30.7	17.0	13.8
Upper-middle-income countries	7.2	6.9	7.6	1.09	8.4	4.2	4.2
High-income countries	2.5	2.4	2.6	1.06	1.1	0.5	0.5
World	15.6	15.5	15.6	1.01	61.5	31.6	29.9
Out-of-school youth of upper secondary school age							
Region	Out-of-school rate (%)				Out-of-school number (millions)		
	Both sexes	Male	Female	GPIA	Both sexes	Male	Female
Low-income countries	60.8	56.7	65.0	1.13	26.2	12.3	13.9
Lower-middle-income countries	43.6	42.4	44.9	1.06	87.7	44.4	43.4
Upper-middle-income countries	19.6	22.5	16.4	0.73	20.6	12.4	8.3
High-income countries	7.8	8.2	7.4	0.90	3.3	1.8	1.5
World	35.2	34.9	35.5	1.02	137.8	70.8	67.0
Out-of-school children, adolescents and youth of primary, lower secondary and upper secondary age							
Region	Out-of-school rate (%)				Out-of-school number (millions)		
	Both sexes	Male	Female	GPIA	Both sexes	Male	Female
Low-income countries	32.4	29.5	35.3	1.16	68.2	31.4	36.8
Lower-middle-income countries	21.1	20.4	21.8	1.06	148.9	74.8	74.1
Upper-middle-income countries	8.3	8.9	7.6	0.85	35.6	20.1	15.6
High-income countries	3.5	3.6	3.4	0.94	5.7	3.0	2.7
World	17.1	16.6	17.7	1.07	258.4	129.2	129.2

**Notes:** GPIA = adjusted gender parity index (female/male out-of-school rate). Male and female out-of-school numbers may not add up to the total number because of rounding.

Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics database.



The countries with the highest out-of-school rates also tend to be among the poorest countries in the world. The World Bank assigns countries to four groups according to their gross national income (GNI) per capita (World Bank, 2018). In low-income countries, out-of-school rates are systematically higher than in lower-middle-, upper-middle- and high-income countries (see **Table 2**). The primary out-of-school rate is 19% in low-income countries and 2% in high-income countries. The lower secondary out-of-school rate is 39% and 3%, respectively, and the upper secondary out-of-school rate is 61% and 8%, respectively. As a group, low-income countries combined have higher out-of-school rates than all individual SDG regions, except for sub-Saharan Africa, which has a marginally higher primary out-of-school rate.

Poverty levels are also closely linked to gender disparities in education. A comparison of male and female out-of-school rates shows that in low-income countries females are generally more likely to be out of school than males, while the opposite can be observed in high-income countries (see *Table 2*). This is especially true for youth of upper secondary school age, where female out-of-school rates are higher in low-income and lower-middle-income countries, while male out-of-school rates are higher in upper-middle-income and high-income countries.

### **Box 2: Children of pre-primary age out of school**

After the launch of the global Out-of-School Children Initiative by the UIS and UNICEF in 2010, the UIS began calculating the number of children aged one year below the entry age into primary education who are not enrolled in pre-primary or primary education. According to the latest UIS estimates, this number has declined over the past decade, from 52.1 million in 2009 to 47.2 million in 2018. These numbers correspond to out-of-school rates of 42% and 36%, respectively.

Two-thirds (68%) of all out-of-school children in this age group live in two regions: sub-Saharan Africa (17.5 million) and Southern Asia (14.6 million). Northern Africa and Western Asia are home to 5.4 million of these children, 4.5 million live in Europe and Northern America, while 3.9 million live in Eastern and South-Eastern Asia. In 2018, the highest pre-primary out-of-school rates were observed in sub-Saharan Africa (58%), Central Asia (53%), and Northern Africa and Western Asia (50%).

A comparison of female and male pre-primary out-of-school rates in 2018 shows that there is gender parity at the global level, as well as in all regions except Southern Asia and Latin America and the Caribbean, where boys are more likely to be out of school.

## **Children in pre-primary education**

Pre-primary education prepares children for formal schooling at the primary level, contributes to better performance and can prevent early drop out. The Sustainable Development Goals recognize the importance of pre-primary education, with target 4.2 calling for universal access to quality early childhood development, care and pre-primary education. In addition, the Education 2030 Framework for Action (UNESCO, 2016) encourages the provision of at least one year of free and compulsory pre-primary education of good quality. Because of this, the calculation method of out-of-school rates and numbers was changed in 2019 to count



children of primary age in pre-primary education as in school (see *Box 1*). This section describes the effect of the change in the methodology on out-of-school rates and numbers.

The UIS database contains information on participation in pre-primary education for 138 countries.<sup>1</sup> In these countries, 5.2 million children of primary school age were still enrolled in pre-primary education in 2017.<sup>2</sup> Until 2018, these children were considered part of the out-of-school population. The regions with the highest numbers of primary-age children in pre-primary education are Southern Asia (1.6 million), Europe and Northern America (1.4 million), and sub-Saharan Africa (0.8 million). If these children were still considered out of school, the regional out-of-school rates would be one percentage point higher in Southern Asia and two percentage points higher in Europe and Northern America and in sub-Saharan Africa.

In relative terms, the change in the calculation method had the biggest effect on out-of-school rates in Oceania. In this region, the primary out-of-school rate is now 3.6%; under the previous methodology it would be more than seven percentage points higher (11.1%). In Europe and Northern America, the primary out-of-school rate would be 3.4% instead of 1.2%, and in Central Asia it would be 2.5% instead of 1.9%.

For many countries in the UIS database, no information on participation in pre-primary education is available. In sub-Saharan Africa, data are missing for 24 of 51 countries that represent 23 million of the 32 million primary-age out-of-school children in the region. In Southern Asia, three out of nine countries in the region lack data on pre-primary enrolment of primary-age children; these three countries account for 7 million of the 13 million out-of-school children in the region. Data coverage is also low for Northern Africa and Western Asia; here only 14 of 26 countries have data. Globally, information on enrolment in pre-primary education is missing for 102 countries that are home to 36 million out-of-school children of primary school age.

At the national level, the highest numbers of children of primary school age enrolled in pre-primary education in 2018 (or the most recent year with data) are found in Pakistan (1.7 million), the United States of America (1 million), Ghana (0.5 million), Brazil and Liberia (0.3 million each) (see **Figure 8**). The revised calculation method resulted in a reduction of the number of out-of-school children by 22% in Pakistan, 91% in the United States of America, 84% in Brazil, 76% in Ghana, and 61% in Liberia.

In summary, evidence from 138 countries shows that modifying the calculation of the out-of-school rate by counting children of primary age in pre-primary education as in school instead of out of school resulted in a more accurate description of participation in education and a noticeable reduction in the global number of out-of-school children. With more complete data coverage, this effect is likely to be even greater.

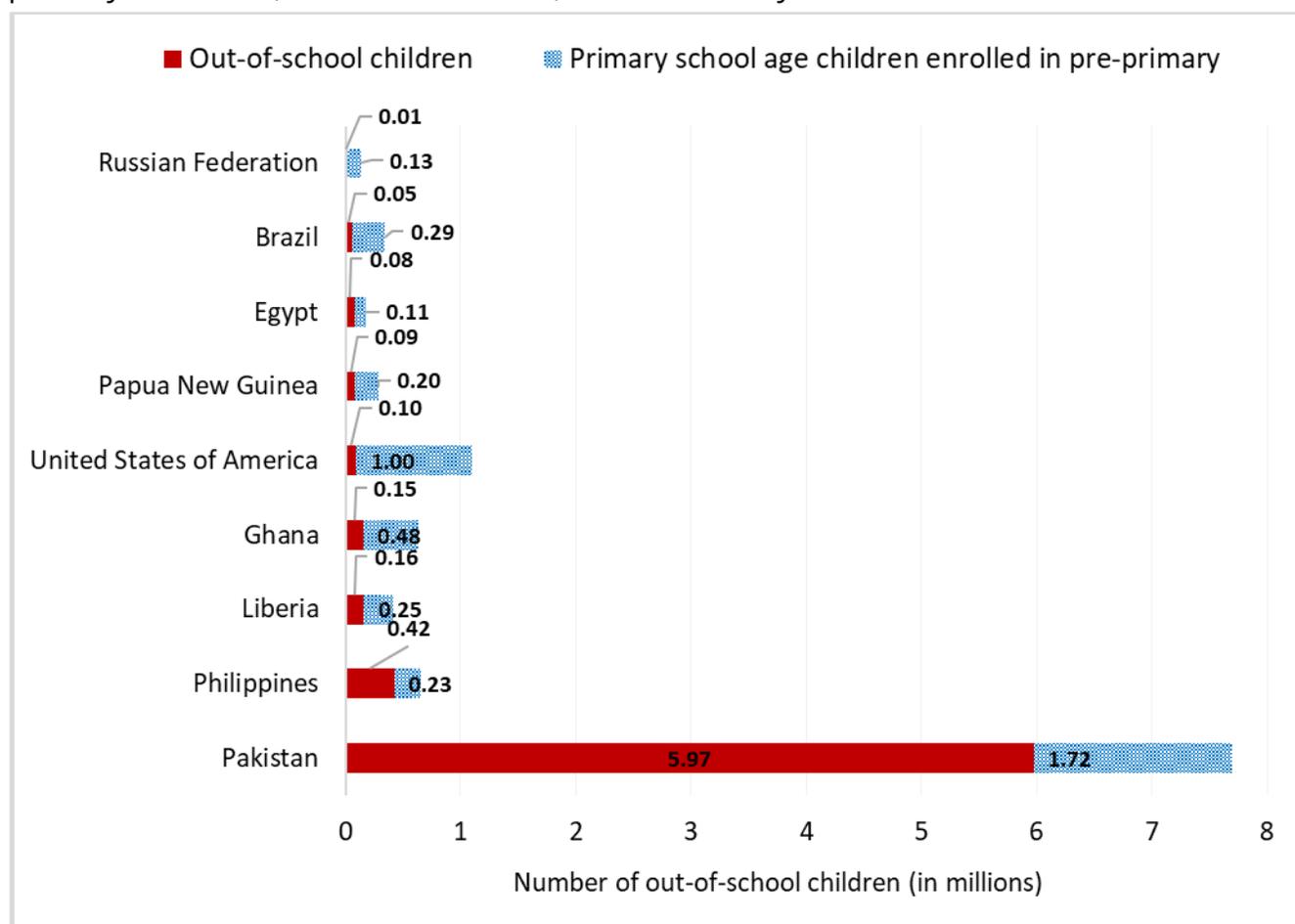
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<sup>1</sup> Pre-primary education is part of compulsory education in 47 of these 138 countries.

<sup>2</sup> The number of pupils of primary school age enrolled in pre-primary education is currently underestimated due to the lack of data from many countries. The UIS will continue to work with UNESCO Member States to improve data coverage and make imputations for missing data where possible.



**Figure 8:** Number of out-of-school children and children of primary age enrolled in pre-primary education, selected countries, 2018 or latest year



Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics database.

## Conclusion

The latest out-of-school figures underscore that the world is still far from universal access to primary and secondary education. The data also show that it is necessary to pay increased attention to pre-primary education. The SDGs emphasize access to early childhood education, care and pre-primary education as an integral part of children's education and this is reflected in the new out-of-school data released by the UIS in September 2019. Counting children in pre-primary education as in school offers a more accurate picture of access to education among different age groups. In parallel, it is essential that countries improve the collection of data on participation in pre-primary education to increase the availability of data needed to calculate all indicators in the SDG 4 monitoring framework.



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