

DESPIITE PROGRESS, UNESCO REPORT FINDS THAT EDUCATION INEQUALITIES PERSIST IN EURASIA

PARIS, 7 June — A new UNESCO report covering 30 education systems in Central and Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia shows that exclusion from education persists, particularly for children with disabilities and those of ethnic minorities, despite overall progress in access to education over the past 20 years and a 50% reduction in out-of-school rates. While many countries still see segregated schooling as a solution, the report urges governments to move towards inclusive education systems that meet all learners' needs, particularly as COVID-19 risks derailing progress and increasing exclusion for the most disadvantaged students.

All Means All, produced by the Global Education Monitoring Report at UNESCO, the European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education and the Network of Education Policy Centers, shows there has been move towards more inclusive systems. The percentage of children with disabilities in special schools fell from 78% in 2006 to 53% in 2016. The percentage of children in residential institutions in the region also fell by 30% over that period. But there remains a legacy of segregated schooling, once wrongly regarded as efficient.

A commitment to provide education in students' mother language means that 22 countries have separate schools for linguistic and ethnic minorities. But there are also risks from parallel provision: Different curricula perpetuate ethnic stereotypes, textbooks are translated from the majority language, and the range of subjects offered for the minority is limited. Bilingual education, in which both the majority and the minority learn each other's history and traditions, are a rare exception.

Roma children continue to be the most excluded in the region. New analysis found that about 60% of Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian youth in the Balkans do not attend upper secondary school. Roma children are also disproportionately diagnosed with intellectual disabilities.

Despite progress, children with disabilities are still more likely to be out of school and excluded from mainstream education. In several countries, the share of children with disabilities in the out-of-school population is on average twice as large as the share of the in-school population. One in three students identified with special education needs in Central and Eastern European countries is still placed in special schools.

The Report warns that the onset of COVID-19 will set back moves towards inclusion in the region. Online education was a challenge for an estimated one in four secondary school students without a laptop and one in ten who has no access to the internet. Only 43% of countries designed learning materials for speakers of minority languages.

“The COVID-19 pandemic represents a set-back for inclusion in education. The momentum will be lost if governments do not urgently prioritize inclusion challenges that can reconstruct a better

education system valuing the diversity of all learners,” said Manos Antoninis, Director of the Global Education Monitoring Report.

Psycho-social support for students – especially those with special needs – is also lacking during COVID-19 school-closures. Remote schooling can lead to disadvantaged students feeling even more isolated, in passive roles, and at risk of disengaging from learning. Most remote learning provisions were developed without attention to learners’ socio-emotional development.

Gender discrimination is also common, if not rising. Just 7 of 23 countries have policies explicitly addressing and prohibiting school bullying and discrimination for reasons of sexual orientation, gender identity and expression.

However, as Cor Meijer, Director of the European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education points out, “All countries are on the journey towards more inclusive education systems. The regional report shows how different countries approach and implement policy developments around inclusion in education and offers an important source of inspiration for informing the necessary changes in thinking and action in order to move towards more inclusive education systems.”

“The prerequisite for adequate policy response is to see learner diversity as an opportunity” added Lana Jurko, Executive Director of the Network of Education Policy Centers. “While participatory policy making is an adequate measure that is gaining recognition in the region, it needs to be strengthened in regard to the diversity of stakeholders involved and in particular in seeking parents’ and learners’ voices.”

The report also contains ten policy recommendations, as well as examples, on how countries could move towards more inclusive education systems.

Media contacts:

Kate Redman, UNESCO GEM Report: k.redman@unesco.org

Gina Dafalia, UNESCO GEM Report: d.dafalia@unesco.org

To download the full report and all the country profiles please visit this [page](#).