

Education

## Out-of-school children, adolescents and youth



## Key points

- The global rates for out-of-school children, adolescents and youth show a substantial downward decline across levels of education corresponding to primary, lower secondary and upper secondary education.
- Global trends show that the world is moving towards greater gender parity in out-of-school rates, although inequalities at the primary school level persist (9% for girls and 7% for boys, resulting in a 2 percentage points gender gap).
- Female and male out-of-school rates for the lower secondary (around 15%) and upper secondary (around 35%) school-age populations are nearly identical at the global level.
- Out-of-school rates for youth of upper secondary school age are far greater than those for children and adolescents of primary and lower secondary school age.
- Despite the overall historically downward trend, global out-of-school rates seem to have stagnated in recent years.
- Although global proportions of boys and girls not in education are roughly equal, global averages mask large gender inequalities among regions. As of 2018, gender parity in the out-of-school rate had not been achieved in any region in the world with girls generally having a higher out-of-school rate than boys in most regions, particularly in primary school.

## Background

Out-of-school children, adolescents and youth comprise two groups based on their exposure to education: those who have entered school in the past and dropped out; and those who have not entered school. Children who drop out in early grades are unlikely to acquire even the most basic mastery of reading and writing, numeracy and other skills. Children who never enter school will have no exposure to formal education at all and will bear the attendant lifelong consequences.

Children, adolescents and youth who are not enrolled in school are often those from poor households and from socially marginalized communities, including children with disabilities, and from ethnic-minority communities, rural areas and areas with conflict. These barriers often interact with gender to create even greater disadvantages in learning opportunities. Education is essential to the achievement of the SDGs: it will not be possible to achieve universal completion of primary and secondary education by 2030 (SDG Goal 4) without tackling the problem of out-of-school children, adolescents and youth.

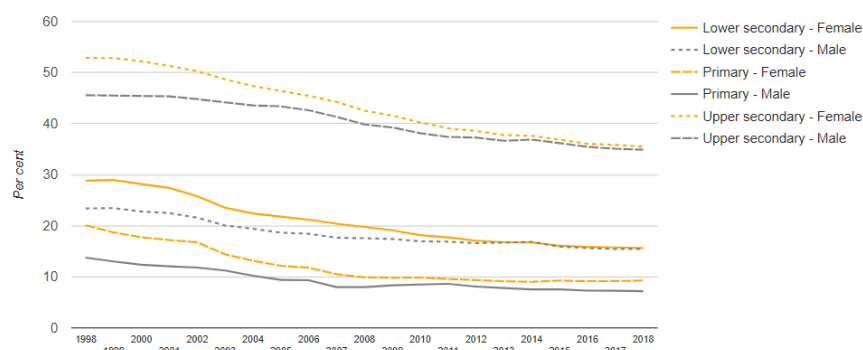
## The world is moving towards greater gender parity in out-of-school rates, although some inequalities at the primary level remain

Globally, the rates of out-of-school children, adolescents and youth for all three levels of education, primary, lower secondary and upper secondary, have followed a similar downward trend (see figure 1), which has been accompanied by a reduction in gender disparities. While girls and young women have historically been excluded

from education relative to boys, statistics for 2018 show that male and female out-of-school rates for the lower secondary school-age population (around 15%) and the upper secondary school-age population (around 35%) are now nearly identical at the global level.

While the gender gap among children of primary school age has more than halved since 1998, gender disparities remain. Among children of primary school age, the gender gap has widened marginally over recent years due to the continued decline in the male out-of-school rate and a small increase in the female out-of-school rate. In 2018, the global out-of-school rate among girls of primary school age (9.3%) was two percentage points higher than that of boys (7.2%).

**Figure 1:** Global out-of-school rate by level of education: 2000–2015 (Percentage)



Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics, database (<http://uis.unesco.org/en/topic/out-school-children-and-youth>) (accessed February 2020)

Out-of-school rates for youth of upper secondary school age are larger than those for children and adolescents of primary and lower secondary school age

Data show that out-of-school rates for youth, both girls and boys, of upper secondary school age are far greater than those for children and adolescents of primary and lower secondary school age. 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 may never have had the opportunity to go to school when they were younger; upper secondary education is often not compulsory; and upper secondary school-age youth may choose employment over continued education.<sup>1</sup>

Despite the downward trend, out-of-school rates have stagnated in recent years

It is important to note that despite the overall downward trend, out-of-school rates appear to have stagnated in recent years.

The primary out-of-school rate has decreased only slightly since around 2008, reaching 8% in 2018, and the

lower secondary out-of-school rate has been at 16% since around 2012.

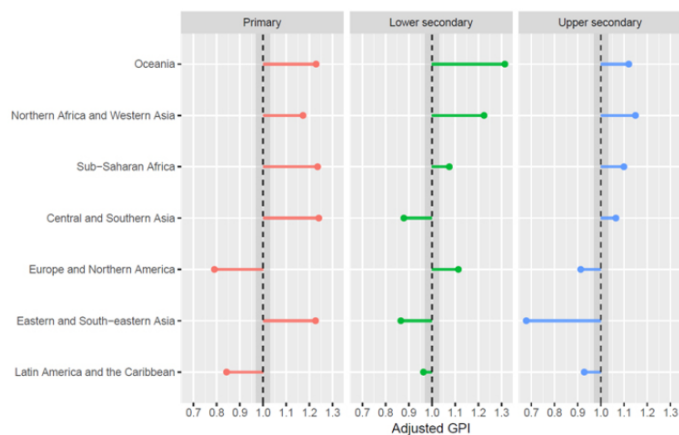
The upper secondary out-of-school rate, which was initially at much higher levels than the primary and lower secondary out-of-school rates, and which had been falling steadily since 2000, has stagnated at around 35% since 2013.

## Global averages mask large gender inequalities among regions

Although the shares of boys and girls not in education (for each of the three levels of education) are roughly equal at the global level, this is not necessarily the case among regions. In fact, as of 2018, gender parity in the out-of-school rate had not been achieved in any region in the world (see figure II).

In the majority of regions, females generally have a higher out-of-school rate than males. In Oceania (excluding Australia and New Zealand), Northern Africa and Western Asia and sub-Saharan Africa, gender inequality affecting girls, indicated by a GPI greater than 1, is evident at every level of education. In Europe and Northern America, Eastern and South-Eastern Asia and Latin America and the Caribbean, boys are more likely than girls to be out of school. In the case of Eastern and South-Eastern Asia, these disparities are most pronounced at the upper secondary level, when boys tend to drop out at a significant rate. In most regions, inequalities tend to be higher at the primary level relative to lower and upper secondary education.

**Figure II:** Adjusted gender parity index (GPI) of out-of-school rate by region and level of education: 2018



**Source:** UNESCO Institute for Statistics, database (<http://uis.unesco.org/en/topic/out-school-children-and-youth>) (accessed February 2020).

**Note:** Gender parity index is the female out-of-school rate divided by the male out-of-school rate. The gender parity index (GPI) of the out-of-school rate is the ratio of the female to male rates. A GPI value between 0.97 and 1.03 is usually interpreted to indicate gender parity. The adjusted gender parity index is the GPI adjusted to be symmetrical around 1 and limited to range between 0 and 2. The shaded grey area between 0.97 and 1.03 shows where parity has been achieved. Parity indices above 1 show a disparity affecting against girls, and parity indices below 1 show disparity affecting boys.

As countries strive to achieve universal primary and secondary education by 2030, they face different challenges and require different policies, depending on their circumstances.

Interventions that have been used successfully to reach the disadvantaged and the marginalized, especially girls, include: the abolishment of school fees; increased education budgets; social cash transfers, especially to support poor families, making it easier for them to send their children to school; increasing attention to ethnic and linguistic minorities; overcoming conflicts that keep children out of school because of hostilities; and improving the quality of education.

## Sources

- United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), UNESCO Institute for Statistics and Global Education Monitoring Report, "Leaving No One Behind: How Far on the Way to Universal Primary and Secondary Education?", Policy Paper 27/Fact Sheet No. 37, July 2016.
- UNESCO, UNESCO Institute for Statistics and Global Education Monitoring Report, "Progress in getting all children to school stalls but some countries show the way forward", Policy Paper 14/Fact Sheet 28, June 2014.

## About the data

### Definitions

- **Out-of-school rates:** Measure of the proportion of children, adolescents and youth who are not enrolled in or attending school, specifically: (a) the primary out-of-school rate is the proportion of children of official primary school age who are not enrolled in (or not attending) pre-primary, primary, secondary or post-secondary education, expressed as a percentage of the population of official primary school age; (b) the lower secondary out-of-school rate is the proportion of adolescents of lower secondary age not enrolled in (or not attending) pre-primary, primary, secondary or tertiary education; and (c) the upper secondary out-of-school rate is defined as the proportion of youth of upper secondary age who are not enrolled in (or not attending) pre-primary, primary, secondary or tertiary education.

### Coverage

Female and male children, adolescents and youth in the official age group for: (a) primary, (b) lower secondary, and (c) upper secondary education.

### Availability

Data are available for 120 countries at the primary education level and for 153 countries at the lower secondary and upper secondary education levels: countries are from all regional groupings under the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)<sup>2</sup> (latest available for the period 2000–2018).<sup>3</sup>

## Footnotes

1. United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), UNESCO Institute for Statistics and Global Education Monitoring Report, "Leaving No One Behind: How Far on the Way to Universal Primary and Secondary Education?", Policy Paper 27/Fact Sheet No. 37, July 2016.
2. United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA), Statistics Division, Regional groupings under the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).
3. Data from the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), UNESCO Institute for Statistics, Out-of-School Children and Youth (database) (accessed February 2020).