

GLOBAL INITIATIVE ON OUT OF SCHOOL CHILDREN



Summary brochure

Education Equity Now!

A regional analysis of the situation of out of school children in Central and Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States



United Nations
Educational, Scientific and
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Design: services-concept.ch
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**GLOBAL INITIATIVE ON
OUT OF SCHOOL CHILDREN**

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Summary brochure

Foreword

All children and adolescents have the right to quality education. Yet this report finds that in the region of Central and Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States (CEE/CIS), which is mostly home to middle income economies, 2.5 million children of basic school age and 1.6 million children of pre-primary school age are out of school. At the upper-secondary level, non-enrolment rates increase significantly in most countries. Additionally, there are many more children, perhaps millions, from the most marginalized communities, who are excluded from national data collection procedures and thus are invisible in national indicators on education. For example, there are an estimated 5.1 million children with disabilities in the region whose educational status is largely unknown.

In the context of the fast-approaching 2015 deadline to realize the Millennium Development Goals and the discussions around the post-2015 development agenda, it is more urgent than ever for governments and their partners to act to include every child in the region in quality learning. This study – *Education Equity Now! A regional analysis of the situation of out of school children in the region* – proposes the following priorities for action in countries in the region.

- 1. Every child in school.** One child out of school is one too many; every child has the right to education. High school enrolment rates in the region are a testament to the commitment of countries in the region to ensuring children's right to education. The work ahead requires closing the equity gaps in education participation by focusing on improved education policies for the inclusion of the most marginalized children.
- 2. Every child learning.** The quality of education is crucial to ensuring that young people's learning outcomes are relevant to the labour force, their personal growth and the society where they live. To improve educational outcomes, urgent attention is needed to better assess the overall levels of learning and the gaps in skills and knowledge, with particular attention to the equity gaps in learning that impede the most marginalized children. More and smarter investment is required to improve the quality of teaching-learning processes, with special attention to the quality of teacher education, recruitment and assessment systems.
- 3. Every child learning early and enrolling on-time.** Early childhood education is a right for every child and is also a smart investment. Providing early learning services to the most marginalized children is the most cost-effective strategy for reducing equity gaps in access and learning in basic education and for helping children to enrol in school on-time. All children should start grade 1 at age 6 and should have access to one year of pre-primary education. In CEE/CIS this means a significant expansion in the number and types of early learning services available.

4. Every child supported by effective and efficient governance systems. Reducing equity gaps in school participation and learning requires steadfast commitment from governments. In CEE/CIS this means strengthening equity-enhancing government systems and encouraging inter-sectoral communication, coordination and collaboration around monitoring and responding to cases of out of school children. This requires financing mechanisms that enhance opportunities for marginalized children in remote schools, and seeking the views of young people and families.

UNICEF will continue to advocate and support countries to close equity gaps in school participation and learning outcomes. I trust the evidence presented in this report will inspire governments and their partners across the region to intensify their efforts to improve equity. Together we can include all children in quality learning.



Marie-Pierre Poirier
Regional Director, UNICEF
Central and Eastern Europe and the
Commonwealth of Independent States



Introduction

In the CEE/CIS Region, 2.5 million children are deprived of their right to education. The children who remain out of school are those from the most marginalized communities. This brochure presents an overview of the situation of out of school children in the region – who they are, why they are out of school and what governments and their partners can do to help every child realise his or her right to education. Ending inequities in educational access and learning is an urgent priority for governments in the region, which aim to ensure children’s inherent right to education and understand education as an essential means for reducing poverty and advancing national development goals.

The children out of school are easy to overlook when skimming national school enrolment data. Almost all countries in the region have primary school enrolment rates over 95 per cent. Yet this national picture belies sub-national disparities that leave certain groups of children largely excluded from education. Large equity gaps in education access and outcomes exist between groups of children, with shockingly low rates of access and learning for marginalized groups of children.

Who are the out of school children in the CEE/CIS? Some out of school children have never enrolled in school, some were enrolled but dropped out and some will enter school late. Some children who are enrolled in school but are excluded from learning can also be considered out of school, since the purpose of school is learning. Children’s exclusion in the CEE/CIS is rooted in complex, diverse and interacting situations.

Certain profiles of children are over-represented in the out of school population: adolescents and pre-primary-school-age children are more likely to be out of school than are primary-school-age children; children from ethnic minority groups and children with disabilities are more likely than their peers to be out of school; while children performing below academic standards in school are at high risk of dropping out. Working children and children from the poorest households make up a significant part of the out of school population, while children affected by gender discrimination face serious barriers to inclusion in schools; in some countries boys are more excluded and in others girls are more excluded. Children who identified with more than one of these profiles are the most at risk of being out of school.

Children who are enrolled in school but not learning may make up one of the biggest groups of out of school children. Results from the OECD’s Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) show that there are also serious equity gaps in learning. It found that the gap between the highest achievers and the lowest achievers in the CEE/CIS region ranges from the equivalent of six years of schooling to nine years of schooling. In other words, even in the country with the smallest gap in equity the lowest achievers are still at least six years behind their highest-achieving peers. Most often children from marginalized groups have lower levels of achievement than their peers from majority groups. The scores of poor children are on average the equivalent of almost one year of schooling behind the scores of their wealthier peers, while children living in rural areas are about two years behind their urban peers.

The data presented in this brochure is a synthesis of the data in the regional report – *Education Equity Now! A regional analysis of the situation of out of school children in CEE/CIS* – that was produced as part of the Global Initiative on Out of School Children (OOSC), launched jointly by UNICEF and the UNESCO Institute for Statistics in 2010 to accelerate efforts toward the goal of universal primary education in 2015. The goal of the Global Initiative is to achieve a breakthrough in reducing the number of out of school children globally. Twenty-six countries¹ from seven regions, including four countries from the CEE/CIS region – Kyrgyzstan, Romania, Tajikistan and Turkey – produced research reports on the situation regarding out of school children in their countries as part of the Initiative. These four countries were selected because of their interest to participate, their commitment to reducing the numbers of out of school children and the significance of their out of school children populations.

This brochure covers all countries in the CEE/CIS region, with particular focus on the data produced by the country studies from the four participating countries. The country reports reveal that they face common issues in reducing the number of out of school children and that they have much to learn from sharing their successes and challenges and collaborating on future initiatives to end education inequities.

Methodology and data sources

The research upon which this brochure is based makes use of existing data sources, analysed through desk research, complimented by information obtained through focus-group discussions with teachers, school heads and government officials at various levels of education administration in Albania, Armenia, Kyrgyzstan, Romania and Tajikistan. The main sources of data used in this report are as follows:

- UIS Data Centre²;
- UNICEF TransMONEE Database³;
- UNICEF Kyrgyzstan, Romania, Tajikistan and Turkey country reports on out of school children⁴;
 - UCW (Understanding Children’s Work)⁵;
 - MICS (Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey)⁶, 2006;
 - DHS (Demographic and Health Surveys)⁷, 2008.

¹ The twenty-six participating countries are: Bangladesh, Bolivia, Brazil, Cambodia, Colombia, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia, Ghana, India, Indonesia, Kyrgyzstan, Liberia, Mexico, Morocco, Mozambique, Nigeria, Pakistan, Philippines, Romania, South Sudan, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Tajikistan, Timor-Leste, Turkey and Zambia.

² UIS (UNESCO Institute for Statistics), Data Centre, <http://stats.uis.unesco.org>, May 2012 release.

³ TransMONEE Database, UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre, <http://www.transmonee.org>, 2011.

⁴ UNICEF, Out of School Children, Country Report: Kyrgyzstan, Bishkek: UNICEF Country Office, 2012a; UNICEF, Out of School Children, Country Report: Romania, Bucharest: UNICEF Country Office, 2012b, In press (2012-2013); UNICEF, Out of School Children, Country Report: Tajikistan, Dushanbe: UNICEF Country Office, 2012c, In press (2012-2013); UNICEF, Out of School Children, Country Report: Turkey, Istanbul: UNICEF Country Office, 2012d, In press (2012-2013).

⁵ The UCW programme is an international research cooperation initiative involving the ILO, UNICEF and the World Bank.

⁶ The Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) is a household survey programme developed by UNICEF to assist countries to fill gaps in data for monitoring the situation of children and women.

⁷ The Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS) programme has collected, analyzed, and disseminated accurate and representative data on population, health, HIV, and nutrition through more than 300 surveys in over 90 countries.

As a word of caution, readers should be aware that providing timely data on out of school children is a challenge for many CEE/CIS countries. For some countries, very little education data in general was available. For many countries data was missing for particular indicators and in some cases only relatively outdated data was available. The exclusion of certain CEE/CIS countries from some of the comparisons and analysis limits the scope of analysis not just for these countries, but also for the region as a whole. Data reliability is also an issue that can have various causes; these and other data issues are discussed in more detail in the full report.

Context

During the past two decades, countries in the CEE/CIS region have been faced with a unique set of challenges. The region issued in independence and economic transition, witnessed and, in some cases, participated in the evolution of the European Union and achieved middle income status. However the region has also struggled with weakened administrative structures, political instability and the fall out of the financial crisis, which impacted CEE/CIS more than any other region. Slowed economic growth, reduced remittances and high rates of unemployment, particularly among youth, continue to create barriers for the region's poor families.

New challenges have also emerged through the demands of the globalizing, knowledge-oriented economy of the 21st century. With substantial increases in the cross-border flows of people, information, technologies, capital and ideas, the global economy has become much more integrated and competitive than in the past. In this context, education systems must evolve and innovate to keep pace with global trends. Expanding access to quality education, reducing dropout rates, improving learning outcomes, ensuring relevant skill acquisition and fostering job training are increasingly seen as priority conditions for improving countries' competitive advantage in the world.

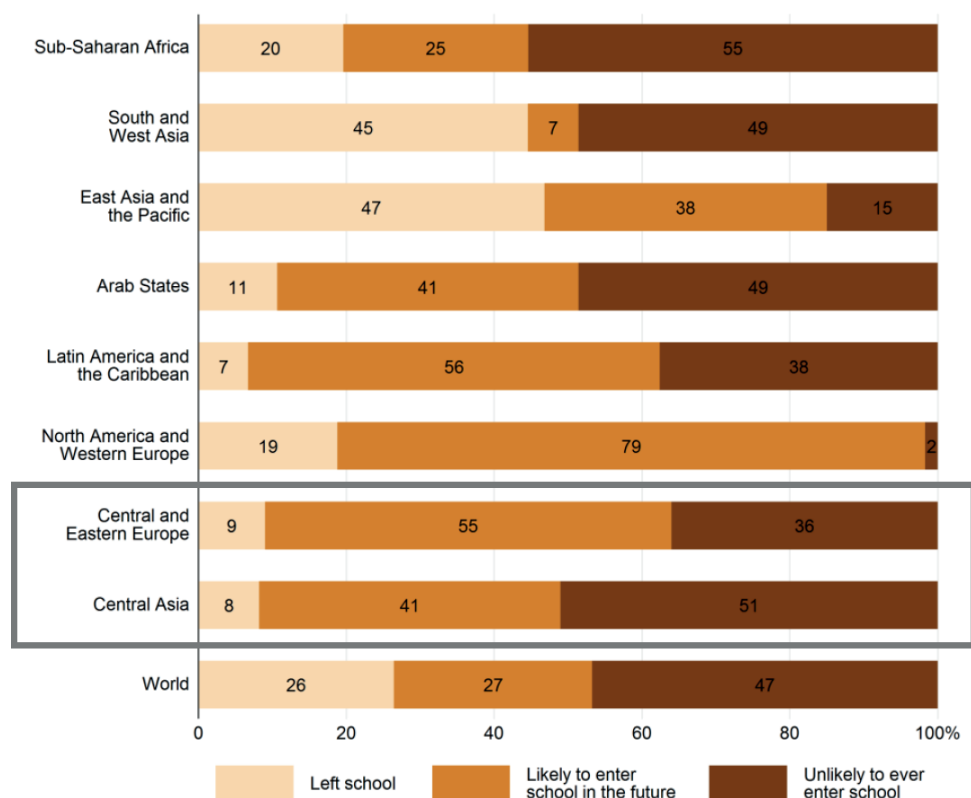
The challenge: 2.5 million children out of school in the CEE/CIS region

Education inequities leave marginalized children behind

Enrolment rates in primary and lower-secondary schools are relatively high compared with other countries at a similar economic level. However, sub-national equity gaps leave an estimated 2.5 million out of school children, approximately 1.1 million of them primary age and 1.4 million lower-secondary age. On average, 5.2 per cent of primary-age children and 6.2 per cent of lower-secondary-age children remain excluded from education. Within age groups the picture is mixed, with girls more likely to be out of school at primary age (5.4 per cent compared with 4 per cent for boys) and lower-secondary age (6.5 per cent compared with 6 per cent). On the other hand, in some CEE/CIS countries the situation is reversed and boys are more likely than girls to be out of school. Within-country differences are often greater than between-country differences and reflect the complexity of addressing the problem of out of school children.

Furthermore, although the number of out of school children has fallen in most countries over the past decade, the number of out of school children at primary level has increased over the same period in five CEE/CIS countries (Azerbaijan, Montenegro, Moldova, Romania and Serbia); there have been sharp increases in the number of out of school children in Kyrgyzstan, Ukraine and Uzbekistan (although the situation improved in 2010); and at lower-secondary age the number of out of school children has risen significantly in at least three countries (Bulgaria, Moldova and Romania⁸). Another concern is that, after sub-Saharan Africa, Central Asia is the sub-region with the highest proportion of primary-age out of school children who are expected to never enter school, a total of 51 per cent. In other regions, those children who are currently out of school are more likely to be either late entrants (who will enter school in the future) or dropouts.

Figure 1: School exposure of primary-age out of school children by region (per cent, 2010)



Source: adapted from UIS, 2012b

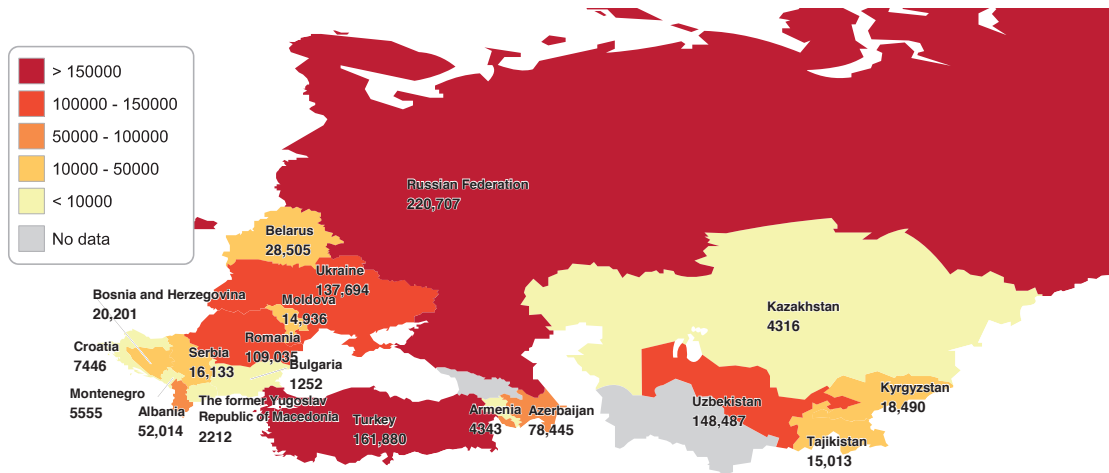
Children who are not in school are deprived of their opportunity to learn. However, many children who *are* enrolled in school are also excluded from learning. The OECD’s 2009 PISA survey found that almost half of 15-year-olds in the region do not master proficiency in basic reading, writing and mathematics skills. Children who are in school but not learning

⁸ As data on lower-secondary level not enrolled in primary or lower-secondary education is not available for seven countries, it is possible that the situation is deteriorating in more than three countries.

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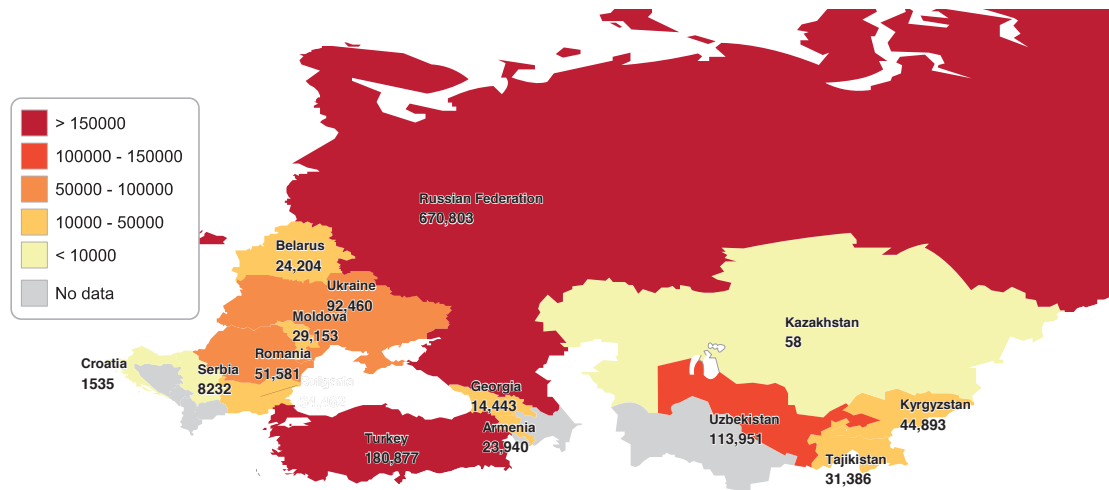
and underperforming academically are more at risk of dropping out than their better-performing peers. Urgent attention is also needed for children who are at risk of dropping out from school.

Figure 2: Map of primary-age out of school children by absolute numbers (2010)⁹



Source: UIS, 2012

Figure 3: Map of lower-secondary-age out of school children by absolute numbers (2010)¹⁰



Source: UIS, 2012

⁹ Data is from 2010, except for Armenia (2007); the Russian Federation and Turkey (2009); and Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan (2011).

¹⁰ Data is from 2010, except for Armenia (2007); Georgia, Romania, the Russian Federation and Turkey (2009); and Kazakhstan (2011).

Profiles of excluded children: who are the out of school children?

Across the region there are specific groups of children who are more likely than others to face exclusion from school and from learning, particularly children from already marginalized groups. This chapter presents a profile of these children. They include children from ethnic minorities – in particular Roma children; children with disabilities; children from the poorest households; working children; children affected by gender discrimination; children performing below expected academic standards; and children belonging to multiple risk groups. Children of pre-primary age and adolescents are also more likely to be outside the education system than primary-school-age children.

One third of pre-primary-age children not enrolled: Poor and rural most excluded

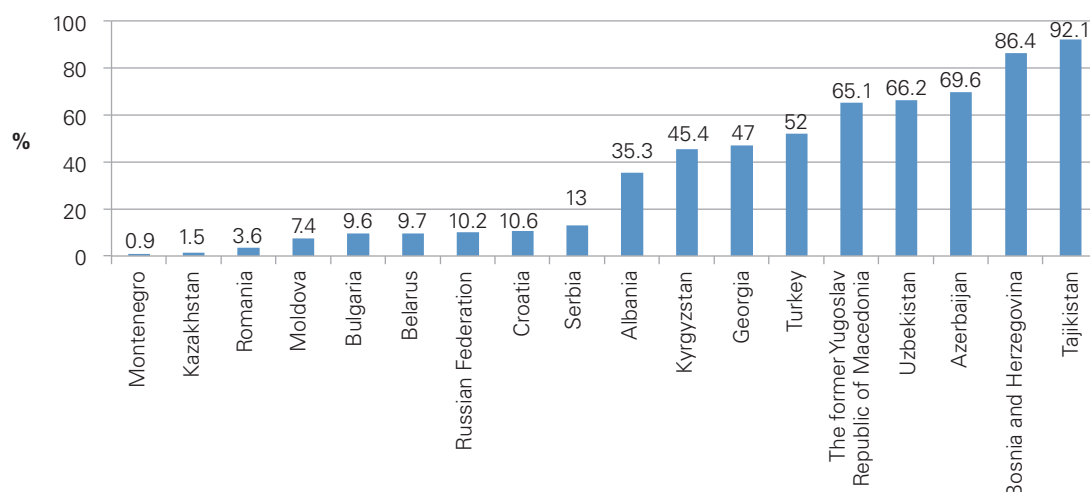
One million six hundred thousand children of pre-primary-school age (meaning one year younger than the official starting age) are not enrolled in pre-primary school. Pre-primary education is not compulsory in many countries in the region, and so these children are not considered to be officially out of school by national governments. However, pre-primary is widely recognized as a crucial preparatory stage for success in primary school and for reducing children's risk of dropping out of school later, especially for marginalized groups of children. Consequently, young children who do not have access to pre-primary school are denied the best chances of educational success.

Prior to the transition period in the 1990s, pre-primary schools were fairly well established throughout the region. Following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, however, enrolment rates in pre-primary programmes and frameworks dropped significantly.

Although pre-primary enrolment rates have steadily increased over the past decade across the region, in some countries they are still below the pre-1990 level. In many CEE/CIS countries, pre-primary enrolment levels are still far behind the levels of enrolment in primary and lower secondary. As shown in Figure 4, over 45 per cent of pre-primary-age children are not in pre-primary or primary education in Kyrgyzstan, Georgia and Turkey, and over 60 per cent of children in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Uzbekistan, Azerbaijan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Tajikistan. Tajikistan has one of the lowest pre-primary net enrolment rates in the world¹¹.

¹¹ UIS (UNESCO Institute for Statistics), Data Centre, <http://stats.uis.unesco.org>, 2011b

Figure 4: Percentage of pre-primary-age children who are not enrolled in pre-primary or primary schools (2007-11)¹²



Source: UIS, 2012

National pre-primary enrolment rates disguise important regional and sub-national differences. In general, marginalized groups of children, for example those coming from poor families and those living in remote or marginalized regions, are far less likely to enrol in pre-primary school than their wealthier, urban peers. Yet the most marginalized children are those who would benefit most from pre-primary school. In other words, those who would benefit the most have the least access.

It can be seen from Figure 5 that poverty particularly affects enrolment in pre-primary, and regional differences in pre-primary enrolment are likely to be closely related to the different poverty levels in different regions. This highlights the important role of governments in meeting the costs of pre-primary education and targeting the acute needs of children from the poorest families.

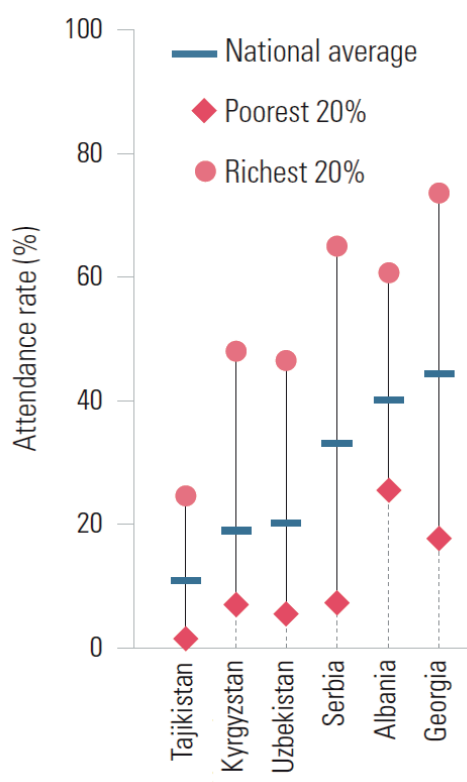
Figure 5 shows the percentage of three- and four-year-olds attending early learning programmes by level of wealth (poorest and richest 20 per cent) for a selection of CEE/CIS countries. The gaps in attendance in early learning programmes between children from rich and poor households are very large. Attendance of children in the poorest households is less than one per cent in Tajikistan, under 10 per cent in Kyrgyzstan, Serbia and Uzbekistan and under 20 per cent in Georgia. In comparison, attendance rates for the richest households are over 20 per cent in Tajikistan, over 40 per cent in Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan and well over 60 per cent in Georgia and Serbia.

Enrolment in rural areas tends to be far lower than in urban areas, and enrolment may also vary significantly between regions or districts. In Tajikistan, an estimated 25.6 per cent of

¹² Data is the latest available from 2009 to 2011, with the exception of Armenia which is from 2007. Data is missing for Armenia, Turkmenistan and Ukraine.

children aged 3 to 5 years¹³ attended pre-primary school in the capital Dushanbe in 2006 compared with just 3.6 per cent in rural areas¹⁴. There are also large differences between regions. For example, attendance rates are three times higher in the Sughd region (12 per cent) compared with the DRD region (4 per cent). In Kyrgyzstan, enrolment in pre-primary was five times higher in urban areas (24.4 per cent) compared with rural areas (4.2 per cent) in 2009¹⁵. Moreover, in some districts (rayons) enrolment was below 3 per cent¹⁶.

Figure 5: Percentage of three- and four-year-olds attending early learning programmes, by wealth, 2005–2007¹⁷



Source: Adapted from UNESCO, 2011: 34; Nonoyama-Tarumi and Ota, 2010

Ethnic minority children and adolescents face many barriers: Large equity gaps exist between Roma children and their non-Roma peers

Roma are by far the largest ethnic group in the CEE/CIS region and in general are much more likely to be out of school compared with their non-Roma counterparts.

¹³ Pre-primary school in Tajikistan is from 3 to 6 year old. These figures are therefore not an accurate reflection of pre-primary school enrolment, as inclusion of data for 6 year olds would likely lead to higher pre-primary enrolment figures.

¹⁴ Data from the Tajikistan Living Standards Survey 2007.

¹⁵ Data from UNICEF, Situation Assessment of Children in the Kyrgyz Republic, 2011. http://www.unicef.org/kyrgyzstan/Situation_analysis_ENG.pdf

¹⁶ Data from UNICEF, Out of School Children, Country Report: Kyrgyzstan, Bishkek: UNICEF Country Office, 2012.

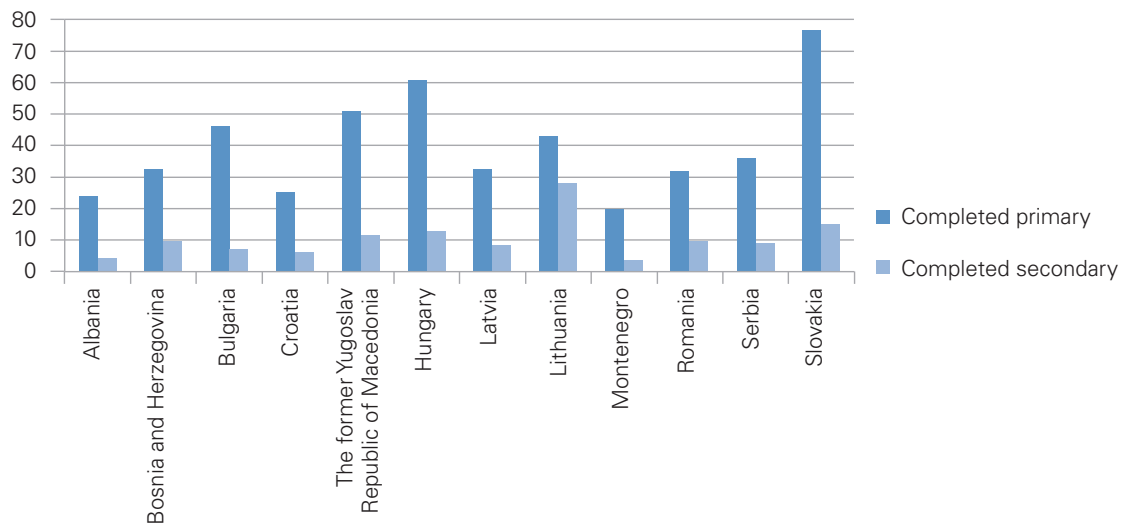
¹⁷ Data is for the most recent year available during the period specified.

Reliable education statistics on Roma are particularly scarce. The data that is available, however, shows conclusively that Roma children are far less likely to be enrolled in and complete primary and secondary education. In central and eastern European countries, only around 20 to 25 per cent of Roma children attend secondary school¹⁸. In addition, Roma children who do enrol are more likely than non-Roma children to drop out before completing basic education¹⁹. Moreover, because of language differences, discrimination and mistaking ethnic, linguistic and behavioral patterns for learning disabilities, many Roma children are tracked to 'special' schools and classrooms which are normally intended for children with disabilities. This has led to a large equity gap in the quality of education between Roma and non-Roma children, in addition to the large access gap.

There is evidence that gender differences in school enrolment are much higher among Roma compared with the general population. For example, in Croatia and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, for which data is available separately for Roma girls and boys, Roma girls are much more likely to be out of school than Roma boys. This shows that gender dynamics in Roma communities have an important role to play in Roma children's educational opportunities.

It is clear that in addition to Roma there are other ethnic groups who are marginalized in the CEE/CIS region, many of whom remain invisible to the public eye. Each minority ethnic group faces a different situation and some confront more challenges than others.

Figure 6: Percentage of Roma aged 15 and above who completed primary and secondary education



Source: Open Society Institute, 2006

The Lyuli ethnic minority community in Kyrgyzstan, for instance, is very poor and from an early age children are involved in child labour to support their families. In addition, the

¹⁸ Data from UNESCO, EFA Global Monitoring Report 2010: Reaching the marginalized, Paris: UNESCO, 2010.

¹⁹ Data from UNICEF, The Right of Roma Children to Education: Position Paper, Geneva: UNICEF Regional Office for Central and Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States (CEE/CIS), 2011.

community is highly marginalized and the prospect of discrimination and bullying reduces further the likelihood of Lyuli youth continuing education outside their communities. The result is that only around 40 per cent of school-age Lyuli children are enrolled in school, which does not go beyond 9th grade. In a community of around 4,000 people, only 80 people have completed 10th grade and only two have completed higher education.

Children with disabilities widely excluded

Children with disabilities are often excluded from mainstream education and segregated into 'special' schools and classes, residential institutions or home-schooling programmes. Even worse, large numbers of children with disabilities, particularly those with intellectual disabilities and those with disabilities from birth, are not enrolled in any school or education programme and thus are completely excluded from education.

There is a great shortage of data on children with disabilities, making it difficult to analyze the situation in depth as many children with disabilities are invisible to education systems. While 1.5 million children are recognized as having a disability in the region, between 1 million and 3.6 million children with disabilities are still not recognized, based on international estimates. This indicates that the needs of many, if not most, children across the broader range of disabilities and educational needs are not being addressed.

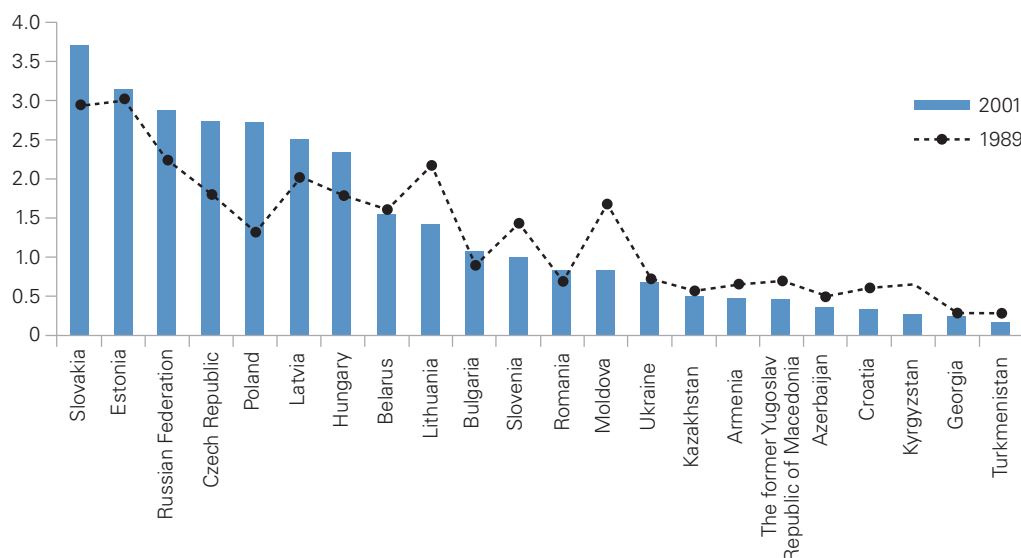
Globally, it is estimated that about one third of children out of school have a disability. In the CEE/CIS region, of the total 1.5 million children who are registered with a disability only 219,000 (14.5 per cent) attend 'special' schools. It is likely that the remaining 1,281,000 children registered with disabilities – as well as the estimated up to 3.6 million children with disabilities who are not registered – encompass a large portion of those who are out of school or at risk of dropping out.

In this regard, progress across the region has been uneven. Disability is still largely treated as a medical condition with little differentiation made between impairment, illness and disability. Although there is a gradual shift towards a 'social model' of disability and towards inclusive education, where children with disabilities are included in mainstream schools, progress is patchy and currently large numbers of children with disabilities remain excluded from education. Enrolment at pre-primary school and secondary levels is particularly low.

UNICEF estimates that a child with a disability is almost 17 times more likely to be institutionalised than a child without a disability in the CEE/CIS region²⁰. In spite of on-going reforms, the number of children separated from their families and placed in formal care is increasing in some countries. Such family separation often happens because parents cannot access the support they need to take care of their children at home. As a consequence, children with disabilities represent a large proportion – over one third – of children in residential care.

²⁰ UNICEF, *The Right of Children with Disabilities to Education: A Rights-Based Approach to Inclusive Education*. Geneva: UNICEF Regional Office for Central and Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States (CEE/CIS), 2012.

Figure 7: Enrolment in basic special-education programmes, 1989 and 2001 (rates per 100 of all children of basic education age)



Source: UNICEF, 2005a: 19

Adolescent boys and girls affected by gender discrimination

Gender and educational opportunity have a complex and dynamic relationship that can have a profound impact on children's access and success in school; gender barriers are often overlooked or forgotten in national policies. Differences in enrolment by gender vary greatly throughout the region, with boys more likely to be out of school in some countries and girls more likely to be out of school in others. However, the largest gender differences are in countries where girls are more likely to be out of school.

In Tajikistan, for instance, girls of primary-school age are more likely to be out of school (4 per cent of girls compared with 0.5 per cent of boys), while a similar pattern emerges in Turkey (3.3 per cent of girls compared with 1.8 per cent of boys) and Uzbekistan (8.5 per cent of girls compared with 5.9 per cent of boys). This gap between genders can widen considerably at lower-secondary level, as is the case in Turkey, where up to the age of 12 there is little difference in enrolment rates between the genders²¹. However, from 13 years old there is a marked reduction in girls' enrolment compared with boys' in Turkey. It is at age 13 that large numbers of children start to drop out from school.

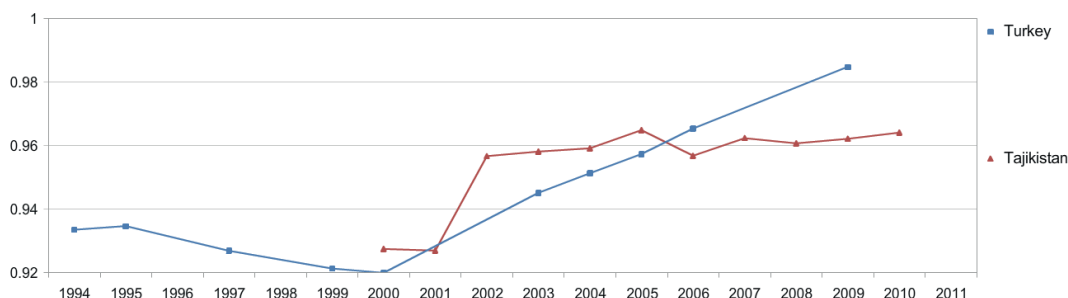
While gender is often seen as a barrier affecting primarily girls, boys also face gender-specific barriers; in some countries barriers facing boys, at certain ages, have a more important impact on their schooling than for girls. Countries where boys of primary-school age are more likely to be out of school include Armenia (5 per cent of boys compared with 2.4 per cent of girls), Bulgaria (0.7 per cent of boys compared with 0.3 per cent of girls), Croatia (5.2 per cent of boys compared with 3 per cent of girls), Kazakhstan (0.6 per cent of

²¹ The original source of this data is the Milli Eğitim İstatistikleri (National Education Statistics) in Turkey, and the data is from 2010.

boys compared with 0.3 per cent of girls) and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (2.7 per cent of boys compared with 0.8 per cent of girls).

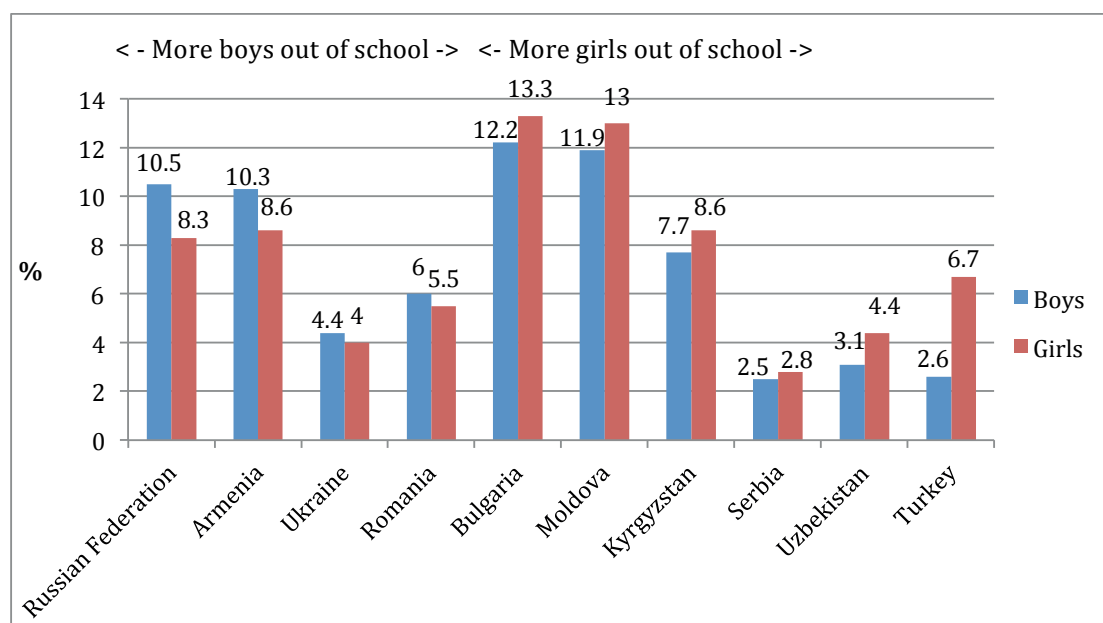
In a number of CEE/CIS countries the gender gap at primary level has narrowed in the last decade, notably in Tajikistan, though it still has the highest gender gap in primary enrolment, and Turkey, where the gap is seen to be closing rapidly. For those countries where data is available²², the biggest discrepancy at lower-secondary level is in Turkey, where overall 6.7 per cent of girls are out of school compared with just 2.6 per cent of boys. As Figure 9 shows, the biggest discrepancy in favour of girls is in the Russian Federation, where 10.5 per cent of boys are out of school compared with 8.3 per cent of girls.

Figure 8: Gender Parity Index for primary net enrolment rate in Turkey and Tajikistan (1994-2011)



Source: UIS, 2012

Figure 9: Percentage of lower-secondary-school-age children out of school, female and male (2010)²³



Source: UIS, 2012

²² In the CEE/CIS region, data is available for Azerbaijan, Bulgaria, Georgia and Uzbekistan only.

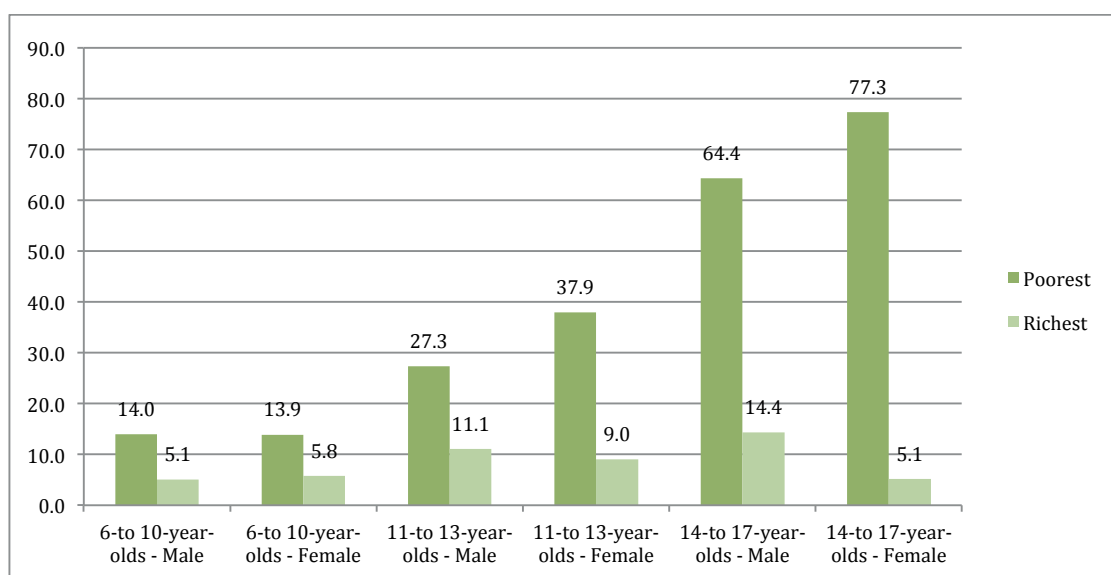
²³ Data is from 2010, except for Armenia (2007), Romania, the Russian Federation and Turkey (2009).

Children from the poorest households more likely to be out of school

Children from the poorest households are more likely to be out of school than their wealthier peers. They are more likely to drop out because they need to work to support their families and themselves, and indeed child labour is an important cause of dropping out. Children from poor families are also more likely to not attend or stop attending school because the costs of schooling cannot be met. In addition, socio-economically disadvantaged children in the region are more likely to attend schools which are poorly staffed and resourced – and thus more likely to experience lower quality education compared to socio-economically advantaged children²⁴. The impact of poverty is often complex, however, and associated with one or more of the other risk factors that lead to exclusion, making it important to look at a combination of characteristics of out of school children.

An examination of poverty in relation to sex and age highlights this complexity. Data from Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Turkey show how poverty affects girls and boys differently in different countries. In Tajikistan, girls are more affected by poverty than boys in terms of their likelihood of being out of school²⁵. In the poorest 20 per cent primary-age girls are more likely to be out of school than boys, whereas in the wealthiest 20 per cent boys are more likely to be out of school. This is a reflection of prevailing socio-cultural attitudes towards girls' education in Tajikistan among poor families.

Figure 10: Percentage of out of school children by age level, sex and wealth quintile in Turkey



Source: UNICEF, 2012d, in press, based on DHS 2008 data

The situation is very different in Kyrgyzstan, where boys are more affected by poverty than girls, at least at lower- and upper-secondary levels. In the poorest households at lower-

²⁴ Schleicher, A., *Preparing Teachers and Developing School Leaders for the 21st Century: Lessons from around the world*. OECD Publishing, 2012.

²⁵ UNICEF, *Out of School Children, Country Report: Tajikistan*, Dushanbe: UNICEF Country Office, 2012, in press (2012-2013).

secondary-age level around twice as many boys are out of school compared with girls. In Kyrgyzstan, the gap between rich and poor grows for boys as they get older. By the time boys reach upper-secondary age, almost a quarter of the poorest 20 per cent are out of school compared with less than 10 per cent of the wealthiest 20 per cent of boys.

In Turkey, girls from the poorest households are more likely to be excluded from education, except at primary-school age, as illustrated in Figure 10. Poverty affects older children more than younger children, and this is the case for both girls and boys. Children from the poorest 20 per cent are more likely to be out of school as they get older – suggesting that they drop out. Poor girls in particular are likely to be out of school as adolescents.

Child labour linked to children and adolescents dropping out

Child labour is an important cause of children and adolescents' absenteeism and dropping out of school in the region. This is particularly the case in rural communities, where many children are engaged in some kind of work in the agricultural sector. The kind of work influences the risk of exclusion from education. In Tajikistan, for instance, urban working children are more than three times as likely as rural working children to be out of school. This could be because of the nature of work in urban compared to rural areas of Tajikistan. In rural areas children generally tend to do unpaid seasonal agricultural work, whereas in urban areas children who work are more often family bread winners who frequently need to work all year round. There can also be significant regional variation in child labour rates. For example, in Kyrgyzstan the percentage of children involved in child labour ranges from as low as 0.5 per cent in the capital Bishkek to 62.5 per cent in the relatively remote Issyk-Kul province

Children with poor academic achievement are more at risk of dropping out

Education exclusion should not be construed as a simple dichotomy – between those who have access to learning opportunities and those who do not. Children who attend school but do not achieve a basic level of learning are, in a sense, as excluded as those who do not attend. In the CEE/CIS region, it is clear that some children who are in school have much greater opportunities for learning than others. Children who are in school but not learning are more likely to drop out than their higher-achieving peers. In schools where educational quality is poor, students are more likely to drop out or withdraw from school. This equity gap in learning is of great concern to education policymakers in the region.

In the majority of CEE/CIS countries participating in the OECD's 2009 PISA survey, more than 20 per cent of 15 year olds fail to complete tasks above the 'baseline' reading level²⁶; in four of the countries more than half the pupils are unable to perform tasks above this level: in Albania the figure was 57 per cent; in Azerbaijan, 72.7 per cent; Kazakhstan, 58.6 per cent; and Kyrgyzstan, 83.3 per cent. The education system has failed these

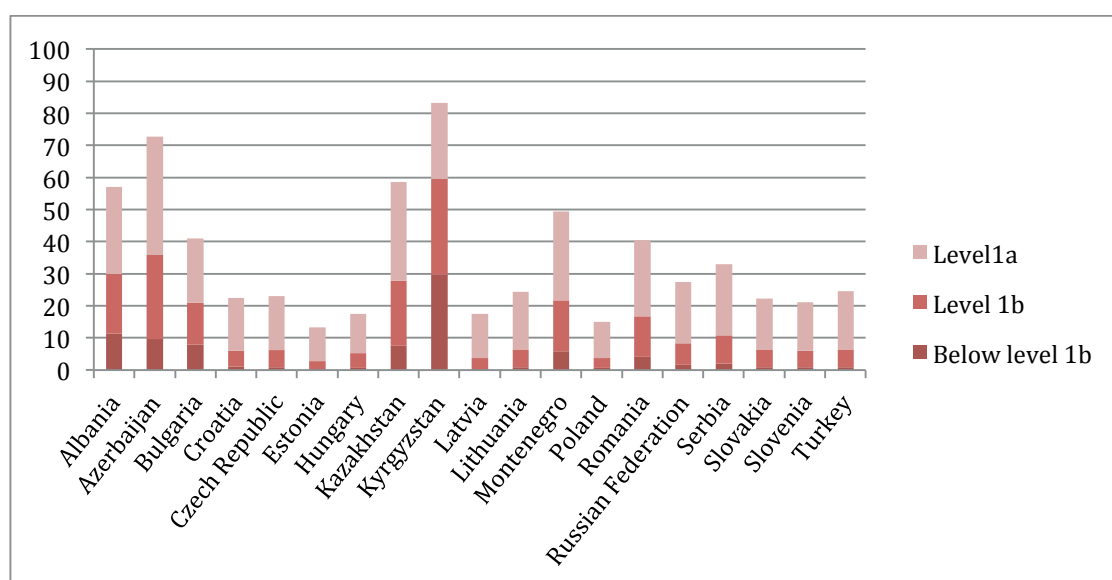
²⁶ To help interpret what student scores in the PISA survey mean the scale used is divided into seven levels, which correspond to ascending difficulty of tasks (Levels 1b, 1a, and 2 to 6), with Level 1b being the lowest and Level 6 the highest. In the PISA study, each proficiency level identified is defined by benchmark skills and subject areas. Level 2 is identified as the 'baseline' level of proficiency.

children, as they do not have the basic literacy skills needed to participate fully and meaningfully in society. In addition, in Albania, Azerbaijan and Kyrgyzstan those taking the PISA tests were those who had already passed through a selection process, as by age 15 a proportion of children, most likely those who were performing the most poorly and those with the most disadvantage, had already dropped out in these countries.

In general, performance in PISA tests is much lower in rural areas than in urban areas, and gets progressively lower in ever smaller and more remote communities.

The low level of learning outcomes reflects the low level of quality of the education system and the lack of support for students falling behind.

Figure 11: Percentage of pupils who are below PISA Reading Level 2 (2009)



Source: PISA, 2009

Adolescents are more likely to be out of school than primary-aged children

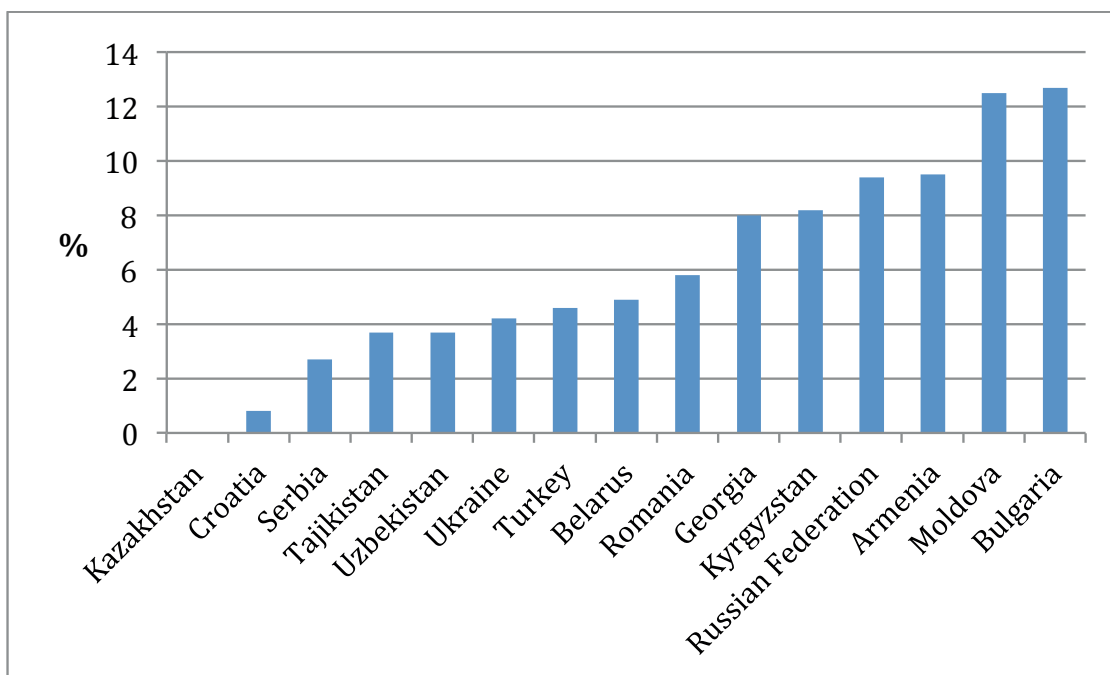
At primary-age level the proportion of out of school children is relatively low in most CEE/CIS countries, and it is mainly at the end of lower-secondary level that larger numbers of children begin to drop out. While overall the number of out of school adolescents has declined over time, the rate of out of school adolescents of lower-secondary-school age has actually increased in at least eight CEE/CIS countries²⁷: Armenia, Belarus, Bulgaria, Kyrgyzstan (following a decrease from 2004 to 2008), Moldova, Romania, Serbia and Uzbekistan. There has been a particularly concerning increase in three countries: Bulgaria, where the rate of lower-secondary-age out of school children increased more than five-fold between 2003 (2.3 per cent) and 2010 (12.7 per cent); Moldova, where the rate more than doubled between 2000 (5.1 per cent) and 2010 (12.5 per cent); and Romania, where,

²⁷ It is possible that the rate increased in more than eight countries, as data is not available for some countries.



following a period of steady decline, the rate went up from 1.7 per cent in 2007 to 5.8 per cent in 2009 – representing a three-fold increase in just two years.

Figure 12 – Percentage of out of school children of lower-secondary age in CEE/CIS countries (2010)²⁸



Source: UIS, 2012

At upper-secondary²⁹ level, enrolment rates are much lower than they are at lower-secondary level. Nevertheless, although gross enrolment rates at upper secondary have fallen in several countries across the region, overall they have increased significantly³⁰. Among those countries which have seen a substantial increase are Tajikistan, where the upper-secondary gross enrolment rate increased from 45.2 per cent in 2000 to 61.3 per cent in 2010; Albania, where the rate almost doubled from 42 per cent in 2000 to 81.3 per cent in 2010; Moldova, where – following a significant decline in 2000 down to 58.1 per cent – the gross enrolment rate increased rapidly to 86.3 per cent in 2010; and Romania, where the rate increased steadily from 69.9 per cent in 2000 to 98 per cent in 2010. Countries where there have been sharp declines include Ukraine, where the gross enrolment rate fell from around 100 per cent in 2000 to 78.3 per cent in 2010; and Kyrgyzstan, where the gross enrolment rate fell from 87.3 per cent in 2000 to 61.5 per cent in 2010.

²⁸ Data is from 2010, except for Armenia (2007), Georgia, Romania, the Russian Federation and Turkey (2009), and Kazakhstan (2011).

²⁹ Upper-secondary gross enrolment rate is the number of pupils enrolled in upper-secondary, regardless of age, expressed as a percentage of the population in the theoretical age group for upper-secondary education.

³⁰ UIS (UNESCO Institute for Statistics), Data Centre, <http://stats.uis.unesco.org>, May 2012 release.

Gender inequality is one issue which can impact the out of school rate. But although gender inequality increases at upper-secondary level, all countries in the region are seen to be moving towards gender parity. There is disparity in the numbers of girls going on to upper-secondary education, with girls being more likely to continue to the upper tier in certain countries, including Belarus and Azerbaijan, and less likely in others, such as Tajikistan and Turkey.

Children in multiple OOSC risk groups more likely to be out of school

As discussed earlier in this chapter, the reasons for children's exclusion from education are complex. Children from ethnic minority groups, children with disabilities, children from the poorest households, working children, children affected by gender discrimination and adolescents are more likely to be out of school.

However, those children with more than one of these characteristics are even more likely to be out of school. Numerous household surveys show that the risk of being excluded from education rises for children belonging to more than one out of school risk group, and rises further for children belonging to more than two risk groups³¹. For example, while children from poor households are more likely to be out of school in Tajikistan, girls from poor households are particularly likely to be out of school. Similarly, while Roma children are more likely to be out of school in Romania than their non-Roma peers, Roma children from poor households are particularly likely to be out of school.

The Lyuli ethnic minority community in Kyrgyzstan is an example of how belonging to multiple out of school risk groups compounds the risk of exclusion from education³². The Lyuli community is very poor and from an early age children are involved in child labour to support their families. Only around 40 per cent of school-age Lyuli children are enrolled in school. In addition, those children who do attend school often do so irregularly. Of those children who do enrol in first grade, only a fraction make it to ninth grade; in 2012 over three times as many children were enrolled in first grade compared with ninth grade.

Gender discrimination is reflected in the fact that more than twice as many boys are enrolled compared with girls (277 boys compared with just 120 girls). Early marriage is one of the reasons why girls are more likely to drop out.

What are the biggest challenges to achieving equitable access to education and learning?

Many countries in the CEE/CIS region are facing common challenges in their attempts to provide equitable access to quality education. Issues range from inefficient management of education systems – a reflection of the weakened administrative structures and more

³¹ The sample size of household survey limits the levels of disaggregation that can be accurately reported. Although four or more OOSC profile characteristics could be combined, the sample size would generally be too small to produce meaningful estimates of education participation.

³² Information on the Lyuli community is based on UNICEF, Report on the Assessment of the Lyuli community, Bishkek: UNICEF Country Office, 2011, as well as information (such as enrolment data) obtained during a May 2012 visit to the Lyuli community school.

limited financial resources that have characterised the region since transition – to the continuing exclusion of children from poor families, ethnic minorities, Roma communities and those with disabilities.

This chapter seeks to identify and emphasize those policy areas where CEE/CIS countries are facing the greatest challenges in providing equitable access to quality education. It draws on data from the broader research study, which investigates some of the major causes of exclusion from education and links them to certain profile groups. It should be noted that the analysis focuses in particular on the participating countries in the out of school children initiative – Kyrgyzstan, Romania, Tajikistan and Turkey – and so should not be seen as a comprehensive summary of all barriers and bottlenecks leading to exclusion from education in the CEE/CIS region, but rather as an attempt to explore the issues which are broadly relevant across the region.

The research frame identifies four types of barriers and bottlenecks: those which influence a household's decision to enrol a child (called 'demand-side' socio-cultural barriers, and 'demand-side' economic barriers); and those which involve the ability, or willingness, of education systems to deliver education to all (called 'supply-side' barriers; and political, governance, capacity and financial bottlenecks). In reality, it is often a combination of these barriers which cause children to be out of school or at risk of dropping out.

Socio-cultural and economic barriers impede children's access to school

There are a number of socio-cultural practices in the household, community and school which act as barriers to education for particular groups of children, including girls, Roma children and children with disabilities.

Roma children face many different kinds of barriers. Among them are those of a socio-cultural nature including discrimination, early marriage for girls and the language spoken at home, as well as social exclusion and poverty and related problems such as lack of birth registration. It is this combination of factors of exclusion which make Roma children particularly likely to be out of school, and also makes their situation particularly difficult to address.

'Even if school is supposedly free, there are many indirect costs of education which can make it prohibitively expensive for families living in poverty'

Children with disabilities face widespread discrimination in the region – including from teachers. Fear of social stigma can prevent parents from having their child assessed and make them reluctant to seek help. Socio-cultural attitudes towards disability are a crucial obstacle to overcome in registering children with disabilities, and in recognizing their rights and needs. Disability also makes families more vulnerable to poverty, because of lost wages from having to take care of children with a disability, as well as associated medical and other costs.

There is often a complicated interplay between barriers and bottlenecks that makes it difficult to generalise about why children do not enrol in, or drop out of, schools. Gender

discrimination is a case in point. In general, girls in the CEE/CIS region are more likely to be out of school than boys, and the largest gender differences are in countries where girls are more likely to be out of school. However, the pattern is not universal and in some CEE/CIS countries boys are more likely to be out of school than girls. The trends also change over time as children move from one stage of education to another, such as from primary to lower-secondary, and within each country trends may vary significantly according to region and socio-economic characteristics. In Tajikistan, for example, girls in wealthy families and those living in urban areas are not much more likely than boys to be out of school, but are far more likely to be out of school if they are from a poor family or live in a rural area.

Analyzing the causes is also not straightforward. On the one hand, in some countries in the region practices and attitudes favouring men over women are on the increase, such as arranged marriages and child marriage. On the other hand, the gender gap in countries where girls' enrolment was much lower has narrowed in the last decade, notably in Tajikistan and Turkey.

It is useful to also consider demand-side economic barriers; according to the World Bank, poverty rates in terms of the population living under US\$2 a day (at Purchasing Power Parity) have declined significantly in both Tajikistan and Turkey. With reduced financial pressures, families may decide to keep both girls and boys in school. At the same time boys also face socio-cultural pressures to drop-out from school to support their families financially. In Armenia, for example, boys are more likely to work in unskilled jobs such as construction, whereas girls – having fewer such opportunities – have a greater incentive to stay in school.

Even if school is supposedly free, there are many indirect costs of education which can make it prohibitively expensive for families living in poverty. This includes the cost of school uniforms, textbooks and other school materials, lunch money, transportation costs and even informal payments. Children of migrant families are particularly vulnerable because they often do not have the required registration documents.

Poverty is closely linked to child labour, and particularly in Central Asia and the Caucasus many children from low-income families need to earn money to support their families. Children may even be the only breadwinners in some families, placing a huge burden on them. Even though working children may still attend school, their level of engagement is not likely to be the same. Work may cause them to be absent for long periods and less likely to be able to do homework. Financial pressures and long work hours can interfere with their ability to concentrate in school. All these factors increase their chances of dropping out.

Lack of infrastructure and resources reduces education quality

Good infrastructure and resources are the foundations upon which a quality education system is built. At pre-primary level, a lack of infrastructure and resources is one of the key reasons underlying the generally very low rates of enrolment in the region. Worryingly, in several countries – particularly in those poorer countries of the former Soviet Union – important infrastructure such as crèches, nurseries and other pre-primary school institutions has actually deteriorated in the last decade. In Tajikistan, for instance, the number of pre-primary school institutions dropped from 944 in 1991 to just 485 in 2008.

At levels beyond pre-primary, other supply-side barriers are more important than infrastructure problems alone. Nevertheless, the absence of even basic infrastructure such as adequate water and sanitary facilities in schools is one supply-side barrier which discourages enrolment, particularly among adolescent girls. Again, in several countries the situation has worsened since 1990. Many schools in Tajikistan, particularly those in rural areas, have only simple pit latrines and lack water-supply systems. Besides the facilities themselves, privacy is also an issue. In many schools there are no separate toilets for girls and boys, which particularly discourages teenage girls from going to school.

The low quality of education is a major challenge in many CEE/CIS countries and leads to a lack of engagement in school, increasing the risk of children dropping out. As discussed earlier, this is a particular issue in rural areas and is indicative of the large inequities within countries with respect to the quality of schools. Out-dated curricula and teaching practices are also significant obstacles to improving the quality of education. In some countries, particularly Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, the low salary levels and prestige of the teaching profession are key issues, resulting in a loss of qualified individuals from the teaching profession to more attractive professions as well as to other countries. The lack of qualified teachers is one of the most significant supply-side barriers in the CEE/CIS region.

Children with disabilities face particular issues due to a lack of appropriate services, infrastructure and resources. Education provision for children with disabilities in the region is defined by the concept of 'defectology'³³, which continues to influence the design of education provision for children with disabilities. It is rooted in a medicalised approach in which children with disabilities are considered 'defective' from the norm. This has led to the mass institutionalization of children with disabilities, with many children being confined to homeschooling or condemned by pedagogical committees as being 'uneducable'. Schools are generally poorly resourced and lack teachers and support staff who are able to implement inclusive education; and public transport is often not accessible to children with mobility problems. Many countries lack good curricula for children with disabilities.

Roma children in many countries in the region have been disproportionately segregated into special schools. This has been justified in terms of the 'socialization defects in the family', language issues, and other socio-cultural factors which have led to the mistaken evaluation that these children are unable to follow a standard education in regular schools. Even those Roma children who attend regular schools have often ended up in Roma-majority schools, remaining segregated geographically from non-Roma children.

Inefficient governance and financing systems hinder inclusive education

The centralized nature of the education system in some countries in the region acts as a significant barrier to reforms and the adoption of policies and strategies which could reduce exclusion from education. Local authorities do not have the power and flexibility for independent decision making and responding to local needs. At the same time, moves towards decentralization, if poorly implemented, can worsen the situation of children

³³ UNICEF does not support the use of this term.

who are excluded or at risk of exclusion. New procedures and responsibilities can lead to mismanagement of funds, even corruption, if not accompanied by adequate training. Moreover, decentralization initiatives which are not carefully monitored, managed and coordinated can further open up opportunities for corruption. Empowering communities can also further widen the gap between schools in socio-economically advantaged and socio-economically disadvantaged communities.

‘Even in those countries committed to reform, progress has been sporadic and inclusive education policies are generally not harmonized with general education planning’

The distribution of education financing is an important consideration in identifying supply-side barriers. Spending is often uneven and unbalanced, unfairly benefitting certain geographical areas or levels of education. Moldova, for example, has a very high proportion of education expenditure going to upper-secondary level and a very low proportion going to primary level compared with other countries in the region. At the same time, it has one of the highest rates of primary-age children out of school in the region.

In terms of vertical equity – the application of differential funding levels for recipients whose needs differ – the results for countries participating in PISA reveal glaring inequalities between socio-economically advantaged and socio-economically disadvantaged schools. Rather than providing additional or better resources to socio-economically disadvantaged schools – as is the case in countries such as Estonia, Hungary, Germany and Poland – the opposite is the case in the CEE/CIS countries examined, with the exception of Serbia. Socio-economically disadvantaged schools are in general less likely to have full-time teachers, in particular full-time teachers with a university-level degree. They also tend to have much lower levels of educational resources.

Even in those countries committed to reform, progress has been sporadic and inclusive education policies are generally not harmonized with general education planning. They lack budgetary support, action frameworks, indicators and implementation committees, and there is still confusion between the concepts of integration and inclusion. In addition, there is a gulf between policy and what happens in practice on the ground. Lack of resources is often cited as a barrier to change, even though evidence suggests that the provision of inclusive education is cost-effective.

As discussed previously, it is often a combination of barriers which leads to exclusion from education. A good example is the case of Roma children in Romania. The wealthiest 20 per cent of Roma here were found to be no more likely to be out of school than non-Roma children. On the other hand, many Roma children are also poor, lack access to or cannot afford pre-primary education, attend poorly resourced schools, do not speak the language of instruction at home, and may be more likely to be involved in child labour. It is this combination of factors, rather than ethnicity in and of itself, which greatly increases their likelihood of being excluded from education. In the same way, other barriers, such as those related to poverty, disability and gender, are not necessarily a significant barrier on their own – but become significant in combination with other compounding factors and education system bottlenecks that prevent children from getting the support they need.



The role of policy is critical

Many countries in the CEE/CIS region are facing common issues that are hindering attempts to provide equitable access to quality education, including the continuing exclusion of children from poor families, ethnic minorities, Roma communities and those with disabilities. At the same time, each country also has its own set of unique challenges that require special prioritization and policy initiatives.

In response to these challenges, many countries have pursued various educational reforms, legal initiatives and public policies. The past two decades have been a period of significant reform to educational structures and curricular contents, followed by steps towards more coordinated policy 'frameworks'. These initiatives, which often followed external models, have since been brought into closer alignment with national priorities.

Educational reforms that have taken place include the development and implementation of learning assessments, the introduction of more choice and flexibility in terms of school types, corresponding educational pathways and curricular offerings, and the recognition of the right to education as a fundamental human right as enshrined in article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Recognizing, exposing and opposing the violations of human rights in education remains a challenge, however. At the same time, political instability and rapid changeover of high-level education decision-makers has characterized some CEE/CIS countries, leading to uneven implementation of reform and even reversals of existing policies.

This chapter provides a brief overview of some of the policies and strategies that address the out of school profiles and patterns discussed earlier, and aim to overcome the barriers and bottlenecks in education that are preventing children from gaining equitable access to quality education. It emphasizes those policy areas where CEE/CIS countries are confronting the greatest challenges.

Strategies and policies addressing the needs of out of school children

Although enrolment in pre-primary school is very low throughout the region, a number of countries have introduced a compulsory preparatory year of pre-primary education, or else lowered the entrance age of primary by one year. The evidence is clear that pre-primary education plays a crucial role in narrowing the learning gaps between children from different socio-economic groups, gaps which tend to widen as children progress through different grades. Introducing pre-primary is a vital investment. In the long term it is expensive *not* to invest in pre-primary, as it is the most cost-effective period in which to invest in a child's life.

A number of innovative strategies have been adopted across the region which address the exclusion of Roma children from education. In Romania, for example, where Roma children from poor households are particularly likely to be out of school, social and media campaigns have been implemented to combat prejudice and stereotyping of Roma. Furthermore, school inspectorates have been established for monitoring and advising on issues specific to Roma, and inclusive and inter-cultural education has been incorporated as part of teacher training. Albania launched a summer-school programme for disadvantaged Roma and other

marginalized children in collaboration with various partners. It aimed to bring 'invisible' children who do not attend school into the system, as well as to engage children at risk of dropping out.

In reducing barriers to education for children with disabilities, a significant step has been made by many countries in the region by being signatory to the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Not all countries have ratified the Convention, however, and even though laws or legal resolutions are an important first step, there is a long way to go in practice. For example, educational institutions need to be made accessible to children with disabilities, and suitable transportation to school needs to be organized. Laws and regulations are useless if they are not being implemented, and implementation may be ineffective if it is not closely monitored. Changing deeply engrained attitudes and practices towards children with disabilities takes a multi-pronged effort involving governments, NGOs, civil society, the private sector and media organizations. It also requires a conceptual shift from an approach to disability based on defectology and medical intervention, which emphasizes segregation, to a child-centred, family-focused, inclusive approach to education.

'Laws and regulations are useless if they are not being implemented, and implementation may be ineffective if it is not closely monitored'

Gender discrimination takes different forms in different countries. In some countries in the region girls are more likely to be out of school, whereas in others the reverse is true, and this also changes by level of education and by factors such as poverty and location. Strategies and policies need to take into account the context-sensitive nature of gender discrimination. It is important to have gender-specific strategies and policies for *both* girls and boys in order to address the specific reasons why girls and boys are out of school or drop out.

There is no straightforward approach to improving the outcomes of children performing poorly in school. School factors which influence the quality of education are heavily debated, but the evidence shows that teacher quality is consistently the most important single school factor affecting pupils' learning achievement. Any strategy to improve teacher quality should consider how to improve the level of prestige of the teaching profession to attract top candidates. Another important strategy is the equitable distribution of resources to schools through funding by formula, which should at the very least close the currently large discrepancies between socio-economically advantaged and disadvantaged schools.

Many families simply cannot afford the cost of education, in particular pre-primary school. The abolition of fees for compulsory education is a first step to reducing economic barriers to education, but is far from sufficient. Free pre-primary school – whether compulsory or not – should also be considered. In addition, the indirect costs of education can be significant, including transportation, school uniforms and education materials, as well as unofficial costs due to corruption.

Poverty, child labour and exclusion from education are closely related. The cost of schooling may not just be considered in terms of the direct and indirect costs, but also in terms of earnings lost due to the child not working. For the poorest families the contribution of child labour can be substantial – even crucial. The same policies and strategies which aim to reduce poverty are therefore also effective in reducing child labour.

Strategies and policies to improve governance and finance inefficiencies

As discussed above, inclusive education – for all learners regardless of their difficulties or their differences – requires a conceptual shift, in particular when it comes to children with disabilities. It requires a shift from the consideration of the disabling aspects of the *child* to the disabling aspects of the child's *social and physical environments*. Inclusive education involves recognizing the diverse needs of children and developing appropriate curricula, classroom arrangements, educational strategies and learning styles. The implementation of inclusive education does not necessarily involve huge costs. Strategies include converting special schools into resource centres serving mainstream schools, adjusting teacher-training programmes to incorporate inclusive education issues, and collaborating with NGOs and civil society to promote inclusive education in schools.

An inclusive education strategy also requires a robust information management system in order to monitor children, identify and target at-risk children, and organize appropriate, early intervention. Several CEE/CIS countries have recently undertaken initiatives to improve the monitoring of excluded children and children at risk of exclusion. In Turkey, a sophisticated e-School Management Information System was established which was successfully used to identify a large number of non-enrolled children. Using such web-based school management information systems offers numerous advantages for identifying excluded and at-risk children.

The computerization of information is also essential to the orderly running of a more decentralized education system. Such systems can lead to greater transparency in decision making, more efficient and flexible resource management, more community involvement and greater autonomy. But they also open up opportunities for misuse of funds. For this reason, decentralization efforts need to go alongside capacity development such as training, controls and financial regulations, and the monitoring of information and financial flows to identify and prevent corrupt practices.

What can be done to promote equitable access to quality education?

This report has sought to highlight those policy areas where CEE/CIS countries are facing the greatest challenges in providing equitable access to quality education. We have identified the main barriers and bottlenecks causing inequities in education and make the following recommendations to address them:



Advance inclusive education

Inclusive education is an approach to education aimed at including and recognizing the needs of all children regardless of their differences. It responds to individual needs and welcomes diversity.

An inclusive education system needs to take into account the multi-dimensional nature of barriers to education. An effective strategy of inclusive education requires the following: legislation committing educational authorities to inclusive education; shifting mindsets away from defectology and toward an inclusive approach to education; removing the requirement of birth registration documents to register for school; development of programmes to counter discrimination and meet the different needs of marginalized children; ensuring that children with disabilities are recognized and receive appropriate support in schools; closing special school and residential institutions that separate and label children; ensuring that all children have access to inclusive school systems that support their individual learning needs; an inclusive school curriculum; and reform of teacher-training programmes.

Improve the monitoring of excluded and at-risk children

A robust information management system and monitoring strategy is an essential first step in reaching out to excluded children and children at risk of exclusion. School-based management information systems are now being introduced in some CEE/CIS countries, which ideally should help authorities identify and monitor out of school children, track those who are at risk of dropping out and use this information to provide targeted intervention.

However, even with a school-based information management system in place information may not reach those organizations which can provide support. Schools may deliberately enter false information, or else lack the capacity to enter information on a regular basis. It is therefore crucial that monitoring systems be introduced with strong capacity development programmes and that procedures and measures be put in place to minimize errors during data entry and fix data problems, which inevitably arise, through a process known as 'data cleaning'.

It would also be a major step forward if more comprehensive data was made available by governments, including such information as region, sex, residence, ethnicity and language. There is a particularly striking lack of data on Roma children and children with disabilities. These problems hinder efforts to analyse the situation and provide evidence-based recommendations.

Engage innovative strategies to reduce barriers

Inclusive schools alone are not enough to give every child access to quality education, as social and economic barriers keep many children out of school. We also need innovation!

The abolition of school fees is only a first step, as many families cannot afford indirect costs such as transportation, school uniforms and education materials. Social protection systems are not always enough, and need to be carefully monitored to make sure they reach those people who need it most. In countries like Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, where

financial constraints act as a significant barrier, the innovative financing strategies employed in other countries may serve as inspiration.

There are also many examples of innovative strategies employed in the region which can be used to successfully combat stereotyping and prejudice. Examples include social and media campaigns in Romania to raise public awareness of and counter discrimination against Roma; or Turkey's 'Hey Girls Let's Go to School' campaign, which has helped raise awareness of the value of education.

Improve the quality of education

It is vital that attention is paid to the provision of quality education, making sure that all children, while at school, acquire relevant knowledge and skills to help them achieve good learning outcomes. Improving learning outcomes increases the economic returns to schooling as much as, if not more than, higher enrolment levels³⁴. Such efforts should therefore be made at the same time as those to reduce the numbers of out of school children.

One crucial pathway to quality education is through recruiting, motivating and retaining effective teachers. This involves creating incentives to engage talented individuals to join the teaching profession through, for example, higher wages or bonuses for working in rural areas. Another pathway is reforming the curriculum and placing greater emphasis on higher-order thinking skills, rather than rote memorization. In some subjects there is a real need to review the curriculum with an eye to the knowledge and skills required of school graduates once they enter the labour force.

The implementation of such policies requires a cross-sector, multiple-stakeholder approach, involving government authorities in the social protection, health and education sectors as well as civic society.

Invest strongly in pre-primary education

Limited access to quality pre-primary education in the majority of CEE/CIS countries indicates the neglect of this crucial stage in children's development. The collapse of pre-primary infrastructure in the early transition years has yet to recover in some countries. In some regions very small percentages of children attend pre-primary programmes and, in some cases, the pre-primary programmes that exist are of such poor quality that they have limited impact on child outcomes. The long-term cost of this neglect is high, not only in terms of cognitive benefits and future economic returns for the individuals involved, but also at the societal level in terms of greater educational efficiencies and economic productivity.

There is mounting evidence, both economic and social, in favour of investing in quality pre-primary programmes. That they help reduce crime rates and welfare outlays, and increase tax revenues on higher future incomes, underscores a simple point: rather than being

³⁴ From the OECD, *The High Cost of Low Educational Performance: The Long-Run Economic Impact of Improving PISA Outcomes, 2010*.

expensive to invest in pre-primary education, it is expensive for governments *not* to invest in pre-primary education. Indeed, pre-primary education is the most cost-effective period in which to invest in a child's life.

Implement equitable decentralization and financing reforms

Highly centralized education systems are still prevalent in the region and act as a major barrier to the adoption of policies that could reduce exclusion. However, moves towards decentralization have not necessarily led to improvements to the situation of excluded and at-risk children, and in some cases have made it worse. Decentralization needs to coincide with capacity development to ensure that decision-makers have the ability to deal with the more complicated processes involved. It needs to coincide with computerization and automation of information and management systems. It needs to coincide with adequate monitoring mechanisms, financial regulations and controls. In addition, it needs to coincide with equitable and clear funding to schools on a formula basis which compensates for socio-economic disadvantage. And finally, it needs to engage and empower parents and civil society, while supporting socio-economically disadvantaged communities to have equal opportunities in contributing to the education and welfare of their children.

Conclusion

The issue of out of school children is one of key importance for achieving the unfinished business of the Education for All movement and the Millennium Development Goals and for the post-2015 development goals. Education is a fundamental child right and requirement for poverty eradication, gender equality and advances in public health, including the reduction of child mortality, improvement of maternal health, and the elimination of HIV and AIDS and other diseases.

Compared to countries with similar levels of socio-economic development, children in the CEE/CIS are generally in a better position than many when it comes to the opportunity to learn. But although enrolment rates are relatively high, especially at primary level, a great deal more needs to be done. Across the region, exclusion rates for particular groups remain high, especially for children with disabilities and the Roma. The situation is compounded by deep-rooted social, cultural, economic and political issues, many of which impact on the ability or willingness of parents to send their children to school. Many issues are complex and interacting, and some prevent or discourage certain groups of children from enrolling in school, while others put pressure on children to drop out.

The recommendations outlined above would go some way towards securing the kinds of positive educational outcomes the young people of the CEE/CIS region deserve. To achieve them, we need to intensify efforts to facilitate equitable access to learning, especially in the low-income countries. This must involve a conceptual shift towards an approach to education that recognizes children's needs whatever their differences. Education systems need to take account of the multi-dimensional nature of the many barriers to education. The efficient management of information would be the first step in achieving this, providing the opportunity to develop evidence-based recommendations. Innovation must drive

efforts to give every child access to quality education – this means the development of strategies to overcome economic and social barriers. Particular attention needs to be paid to the provision of pre-primary education, not least because the early years are the most cost-effective period in which to invest in a child’s life. Finally, there needs to be a process of careful decentralization of education systems across the region, coupled with capacity development to make sure that the people making the decisions are able to cope with the complicated tasks they face.

To realize every child’s right to education, and to meet the growing demands for a technically literate, flexible and adaptable workforce, equity gaps in education participation and learning must be closed. Governments and their international and national partners must work together to ensure that all children are included in quality learning.



Commissioned by the UNICEF Regional
Office for Central and Eastern Europe and
the Commonwealth of Independent States
(UNICEF RO CEE/CIS)



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