

Out-Of-School Children Initiative (OOSCI) in Belize 2017

Summary of Report

In 2010, UNICEF and the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS) launched a global Out-of-School Children Initiative (OOSCI). The aim of this initiative is to improve the analysis around the factors affecting the exclusion of children from education, leading to more targeted and effective policies and programmatic approaches.

The Five Dimensions of Exclusion (5DE) are central to the OOSCI approach, presenting groups of children for analysis and interventions.

Three of the dimensions represent children who are out-of-school, as follows:

- Dimension 1: Children of pre-primary school age who are not in pre-primary or primary school.
- Dimension 2: Children of primary school age who are not in primary or secondary school.
- Dimension 3: Children of lower secondary school age who are not in primary or secondary school.

Two dimensions are represented by children in school but at risk of dropping out, as follows:

- Dimension 4: Children who are in primary school but at risk of dropping out.
- Dimension 5: Children who are in lower secondary school but at risk of dropping out.

The OOSCI approach uses a framework, based on the Monitoring Results for Equity System (MoRES)¹. Four major sets of barriers to school completion are identified, with a total of 10 barrier categories within the major sets. The list of barriers is presented below.

Figure 1: Barriers to Education

ENABLING ENVIRONMENT	Social norms Policy/legal framework Budget/expenditure Institutional management/coordination
SUPPLY	Availability of essential commodities/inputs Availability of adequately staffed services, facilities and information
DEMAND	Financial access Social and cultural practices and beliefs Continuity of use
QUALITY	Quality of services and goods

¹ United Nations Children's Fund, 'Monitoring Results for Equity System', Briefing Note, UNICEF, New York, 1 February 2013; open PDF at www.unicef.org/about/employ/files/MoRES_Briefing_Note.pdf.

Belize Context

There are two levels of preschool or pre-primary school in Belize. Students in Belize are not required to attend preschool. About 45% of students do attend preschool but this varies by factors such as urban/rural location and parent's SES/income. Preschools normally charge a fee for attendance. Preschool age is considered to be 3 and 4 years old.

School is compulsory up to age 14 (unless child graduates from primary school prior to age 14). There are 8 levels of primary school, Infant 1 and 2, and Standards 1 through 6. The expected age of attendance is from 5 to 12. There are four levels of secondary school – First Form to Fourth Form. The expected ages of attendance are 13 through 16.

Almost all students complete primary school in Belize, there is a significant decline in secondary school with only two-thirds of students completing school at this level. There are differences in school completion rates that occur by district, family income, rural/urban location, gender, disabilities and other factors.

The Belize Ministry of Education, Youth, Sports and Culture (MOEYSC)² developed an Education Sector Strategy for 2011-2016. Among other objectives, the strategy aims to reduce barriers to school completion by increasing the equitable access through number of schools and spaces in school, improving accountability, and improving education quality and relevance.

Belize OOSCI Study

The Belize OOSCI Study was started in 2016 and completed in September 2017. The study used a number of quantitative and qualitative data collection and analyses, as advised in the OOSCI manual.

MOEYSC data were analyzed to determine patterns by District. Additionally, MICS (2011 and 2015), MOEYSC and census data were analyzed to present profiles of excluded children according to the OOSCI methodology.

Interviews were conducted with 69 stakeholders working in the Ministry of Education, Youth, Sports, and Culture, and other agencies serving children and adolescents in Belize. Primary and secondary schools were selected in each of the six districts, to include both those with indicators of high and low numbers of children and adolescents at-risk or who had dropped out. A total of 46 schools were involved in the interviews. Interviews were conducted with principals, teachers, school counsellors, PTA members, parents, students and children and adolescents who had dropped out or who were at risk of dropping out. Finally, interviews were also carried out with clients of youth services agencies who had dropped out or who were at risk of dropping out of school.

²² The Belize Ministry of Education has recently changed from Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports to Ministry of Education, Youth, Sports and Culture. Some of the earlier documents will be under the different Ministry names but all references have been changed in this document to MOEYSC for ease of understanding. Interviewees often shorten the name to MOE.

Table 1. The SDE Groups of children by exposure to education			
Type of Exclusion	Dimension	Size of exclusion	Severity of exclusion
EXCLUDED	Dimension 1³: Children of pre-primary school age who are not in pre-primary or primary school	1489 children 4-years old not in school	20.0% of 4-year olds not in school
	Dimension 2⁴: Children of primary school age who are not in primary or secondary school	2183 children 5 to 10 years old out of school	3.82% of children 5 to 10 years old out of school
	Dimension 3: Children of lower secondary school age who are not in primary, secondary, or post-secondary	3901 children 11 to 14 years old out of school	9.48% of children 11 to 14 years old not in school
AT Risk⁵ OF EXCLUSION	Dimension 4: Children who are in primary school but at risk of dropping out	15,153 children in primary school at risk of drop out	29.13% of children attending primary were overage for the grade attended (at risk). Of these, 68.9% were at moderate risk (1-year overage) and 31.1% were at high risk (2 or more years overage) of dropout.
	Dimension 5: Children who are in lower secondary school but at risk of dropping out	12,389 children in lower secondary at risk of drop out	43.83% of children attending lower secondary were overage for the grade attended. Of these, 56.3% were at moderate risk (1-year overage) and 43.7% were at high risk (2 or more years overage) of dropout.

Profiles of Excluded Children

Profile 1: Poor, Rural children 4 years old who are not in school

Poor, rural children 4 years old and not in school comprise 46.53% of Dimension 1, equivalent to 693 children in this profile. The children in this profile were 4 years old (in school year 2014), from rural areas, and from the poorest wealth quintile. Over half of the children in this profile were males (51.06%), and were mainly from 2 districts, namely, Cayo (21.28%) and Toledo (38.3%). The ethnicity of the head of

³ Dimension 1 was quantified based on attendance in the previous school year (2014)
⁴ Dimension 2 includes children of primary school age attending pre-primary and 'other' education
⁵ Risk of drop out based on 1 or more years overage for the grade attended

household for children in this profile was reported mainly as Mestizo (40.43%) and Maya (34.04%). Based on the MICS5, 25.3% of children in this profile had disabilities⁶.

Profile 2: Poor, Rural children 5 to 10 years old who have never attended school

Poor, rural children 5 to 10 years old, who have never attended school, comprise 28.97% of Dimension 2, equivalent to 632 children in this profile. All children in this profile were from rural areas, from the 2 poorest wealth quintiles, and had never attended school. Most of the children in this profile were 5 years old (70.97%), and most were females (58.06%). Children in this profile were mainly from 2 districts, namely Orange Walk (38.71%) and Toledo (29.03%). The ethnicity of the head of household for the children in this profile was reported mainly as Mennonite (41.94%), Maya (29.03%), and Mestizo (25.81%). Based on the MICS5, 36.4% of children in this profile had 1 or more disability.

Profile 3: Out of school children 11 to 14 years who completed grade 8 of lower secondary

In 2015, 9.48% of children of lower secondary school age were out of school, equivalent to 3901 persons. Of these, 2278 completed grade 8 but did not continue further in lower secondary. OOSC of lower secondary school age who completed grade 8, comprise 58.38% of all OOSC of lower secondary age (Dimension 3). Children in this profile were mostly 14 years old (67.02%), over half (54.26%) were females. Most were from rural areas (84.04%) and from the 2 poorest wealth quintiles (69.15%). Children in this profile were mostly from 3 districts, namely Corozal (25.53%), Orange Walk (28.72%), and Cayo (21.28%). The ethnicity of the head of household for over half of the children in this profile was Mestizo (53.19%).

Profile 4: Children attending primary school who are repeating the current grade of primary education

Children repeating the current grade of primary education comprised 5.14% of all children attending primary education in 2015, equivalent to 2672 persons in this profile. Of the children in this profile, 66.4% were 1-year overage or at medium risk of drop out, and 33.6% were 2 or more years overage or at high risk of drop out. Most of the children in this profile were males (59.06%) and most were from rural areas (69.13%). Children in this profile were mostly from the 2 poorest wealth quintiles (60.40%) and were mostly from 3 districts, namely, Stann Creek (26.17%), Belize (18.12%), and Cayo (16.78%). The ethnicity of the head of household for over half of the children in this profile was Mestizo (51.68%).

Profile 5: Children in grades 9 and 10 of lower secondary who are 2 or more years overage for the grade attended

Children attending grades 9 and 10 of lower secondary who were 2 or more years overage comprised 21.88% of all children in grades 9 and 10 of lower secondary, equivalent to 2737 persons in this profile. By classification, all children in this profile are at high risk of drop out (2 or more years overage). It is important to note that 20.95% of children in this profile were repeating the current grade of lower secondary. Most of the children in this profile were 15 or 16 years (71.43%), and most were males

(61.69%). Over half of the children in this profile were from rural areas (51.30%). Nearly half of the children in this profile were from 2 districts, namely, Belize (27.92%) and Toledo (20.13%). The ethnicity of the head of household for most of the children in this profile was Mestizo (41.56%) and Creole (24.68%).

Barriers to School Completion

The profiles illustrate that there are several factors associated with lack of school completion including poverty, disability, late entry and inadequate preparation for primary, living in rural areas, and other factors. The profiles were mapped against subgroups of children and adolescents at risk or who had dropped out of school, as identified through interviews. The profiles and corresponding subgroups are presented below.

Figure 2: Profiles

Profiles	Groups This May Include
Poor, Rural children 4 years old not attending early childhood education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Invisible children: children with disabilities, not enrolled ● Invisible children: immigrants not enrolled, not attending regularly ● Rural children ● Children living in poverty
Poor, Rural children 5 to 10 years old who have never attended school.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Invisible children: children with disabilities, not enrolled ● Invisible children: immigrants not enrolled, not attending regularly ● Rural children ● Children living in poverty
OOSC 11 to 14 years who completed grade 8 of lower secondary.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Rural adolescents ● Adolescents living in poverty ● Adolescents without basic academic foundations ● Adolescents with ongoing academic challenges ● Boys in gangs ● Adolescents with family stressors/challenges ● Adolescents with psychological/behavioural coping challenges ● Adolescents with family responsibilities/income earners ● Adolescents who may prefer technical or other training
Children who repeated any grade of primary education.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Rural children and adolescents ● Children and adolescents living in poverty ● Children and adolescents without basic academic foundations ● Children and adolescents with ongoing academic challenges ● Boys in gangs ● Children and adolescents with family stressors/challenges ● Children and adolescents with psychological/behavioural coping challenges

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children and adolescents with family responsibilities/income earners • Children and adolescents who may prefer or be better accommodated in technical or other training
Adolescents in grades 8 or 9 of lower secondary who are 2 or more years overage for the grade attended	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adolescents living in poverty • Adolescents without basic academic foundations • Adolescents with ongoing academic challenges • Pregnant girls/young mothers • Boys in gangs • Adolescents with family stressors/challenges • Adolescents with psychological/behavioural coping challenges • Adolescents with family responsibilities/income earners • Adolescents not accommodated in regular school system • Adolescents that don't make the transition to secondary school • Adolescents over 14 • Adolescents who want to return but can't/aren't sure how

The barriers identified through the qualitative data collection and analysis are presented below, using the OOSCI framework that classifies barriers in terms of specific domains and categories. See Figure 3.

Figure 3: Barriers

Domain	Category	Critical Barriers
Enabling Environment	Social Norms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Acceptance that education can end at age 14 • Immigrant children not registered in school (or not registered until 8 years of age)
	Legislation/Policy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Compulsory school age only 5 to 14 • MOEYSC mandated oversight focused mainly on primary school • MOEYSC financed or subsidized education focused mainly on primary school (and first two forms) • School-level policies and disciplinary measures lead to school absences (e.g., pregnancy)
	Budget/Expenditure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Education only partially subsidized • Varying levels of school fees (and costs) depending on schools, locations etc. • Need for more school counsellors at primary and secondary levels
	Management/Coordination	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited staffing at District level (especially truancy and officers working with children with disabilities) • Schools not reporting truancy data in a timely manner to District offices • Children not tracked through the system

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Disciplinary practices at school discretion result in absences and early school leaving
Supply	Availability of Essential Inputs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Overcrowded classrooms make individualized instruction impossible • Preschools are not available in many rural communities • Schools at all levels turn students away based on space, grades and other factors
	Access to Adequate Staffed Services, Facilities and Information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Insufficient staff and training to work with children with disabilities in schools • Insufficient number of preschools • Insufficient transportation • Some schools in poor condition with limited supplies and equipment • Alternative (trades) education not available in all communities; not provided in some schools • Insufficient accommodations for children with disabilities
Demand	Financial Access	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Direct and indirect costs of education exceed family capacity • Family need for children to work to contribute income • School costs (fees and other) at all levels of educational system (pre-school, primary school, secondary school) exceed family capacity
	Social and Cultural Practices and Beliefs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Compulsory school age ends at 14 and some families consider this the appropriate age to withdraw • Taking time out of classes to earn income for the family is considered appropriate • Gangs make children fearful of walking to school • Drugs, gangs, are considered alternative paths
	Timing and Continuity of Use	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Compulsory school age ends at 14 • Fees higher in secondary school; makes transition more difficult • Not having access to/not attending preschool • Leaving early but wanting to return at a later age • MOEYSC/Schools do not have system in place to track (and facilitate) transition from Standard 6 to First Form

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adult education options not adequately matched with students
Quality	Quality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students enter primary and secondary school not adequately prepared academically • Students face language barriers that are not addressed in the school setting • Students are promoted to higher grades even when they do not have the basic academic knowledge to be successful in subsequent grades • Teachers not always equipped to deal with children with disabilities (e.g., preferential treatment and stigma) • Schools don't cater to a variety of interests and learning styles

The above list of barriers was further reduced and clustered, and applied to the profiles. The final list of barriers are as follows:

Barrier	Dimensions Affected
Barrier 1: Restricted Age Range for Compulsory Education	1, 3, 4, 5
Barrier 2: Affordability of Education	1, 2, 3, 4, 5
Barrier 3: Insufficient MOEYSC and School Staff (Truancy, Children with Disabilities, School Counsellors)	1, 2, 3, 4, 5
Barrier 4: Need for Increased MOEYSC Oversight (Tracking, Monitoring, Disciplinary Practices)	1, 2, 3, 4, 5
Barrier 5: Low Learning Outcomes and Limited Access to Remedial and Alternative Options	1, 2, 3, 4, 5
Barrier 6: Insufficient Supply (Preschools, Primary and Secondary Classrooms)	1, 2, 3, 4, 5
Barrier 7: Parental/Social Norms and Values Not Supportive of Education	1, 2, 3, 4, 5
Barrier 8: Insufficient Tracking of and Intervention for Students Who Drop Out	2, 3

Recommendations

Recommendations to reduce barriers to school completion address funding, policy, training, tracking and monitoring, and program development. These are clustered by dimension.

Several recommendations relate to all five OOSCI dimensions. These address the need for educational costs to be subsidized for families in need, extending the age range for compulsory education, increasing quality and service delivery through training, improving tracking of students through the system, and implementing standardized disciplinary practices across the system.

Recommendations specifically addressing Dimension 1 focus on increasing preschool spaces, standardizing the preschool curriculum (and including ESL, reading) and conducting outreach and working

with parents. These recommendations also include the collection of data on children with disabilities based on UNICEF/ Washington Group questions, either at the country or at the school level.

Recommendations specifically addressing Dimension 2 focus on increasing primary school spaces, standardizing acceptance and disciplinary practices, and having a process to intervene if space is unavailable at the start of the year.

Recommendations for Dimension 3 are similar for Dimension 2 but address the secondary school level, and include increasing secondary school spaces, standardizing acceptance and disciplinary practices, and having a process to intervene if space is unavailable at the start of the year.

Recommendations for Dimension 4 include emphasizing learning of language and reading skills in the first primary school years, increasing school counsellors and MOEYSC staff working on truancy and accessibility for children with disabilities, and providing alternative courses such as trades and agriculture in the primary school curriculum.

Recommendations for Dimension 5, of which many of the previously mentioned recommendations also address: increasing skilled school counsellors to work with adolescents and parents; providing timely remedial education to ensure basic foundations in English, reading and math; increasing anti-bullying programs and programs to address gangs, drugs and alcohol; and continuing to strengthen programs that help out-of-school adolescents to return to school; and increasing on-line learning and adult education options.