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MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA
OUT-OF-SCHOOL CHILDREN INITIATIVE



SUMMARY

JORDAN

COUNTRY REPORT ON OUT-OF-SCHOOL CHILDREN

OCTOBER 2014



unite for
children

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Summary

In 2010, UNICEF and the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS) launched the Global Out-of-School Children Initiative (OOSCI). Jordan was selected to participate in a Middle East and North Africa (MENA) regional effort to study the situation of out-of-school children, which has generally been unexplored. This study provides important data and data analysis that uncovers the reality of the lives of these children and can serve as a foundation for effective programming in the future.

In order to formulate effective and innovative strategies for the most disadvantaged and marginalized groups, it is essential to identify more precisely who and where out-of-school children are, and why they may be excluded or at risk of dropping out.

At the foundation of this study is the following data: The total number of children (not including Syrian refugee children) at the pre-primary level is about 291,700 and the total number of children in both the primary and lower secondary levels is approximately 1,411,800 (EMIS, 2012). More than 59 per cent of pre-primary age children (age 5) and more than 96 per cent of primary children (ages 6-11) and lower secondary children (ages 12-15) are currently enrolled in school. About 45,862 five-year-old children and 30,895 children of primary and lower secondary ages are out of school.

Numbers and rate of out-of-school children in pre-primary, primary and lower secondary levels of education, by Dimension

	Girls		Boys		Total	
	Number	Per cent	Number	Per cent	Number	Per cent
Out-of-school children						
Dimension 1: Children 5 years old (Kindergarten 2, pre-primary)	21,541	40.3	24,356	41.7	45,862	41
Dimension 2: Children 6-11 years old (primary)	2,573	0.6	7,190	1.6	9,661	1.1
Dimension 3: Children 12-15 years old (lower secondary)	9,678	3.9	11,327	4.4	21,234	4.2
Total out-of-school children (5-15 years old)	33,792	44.8	42,873	47.7	76,757	46.3
Children at risk of dropping out						
Dimension 4: Children enrolled in primary	12,866	3.0	13,032	2.9	25,470	2.9
Dimension 5: Children enrolled in lower secondary	18,115	7.3	9,525	3.7	28,313	5.6
Total children at risk of dropping out	30,981	10.4	22,557	6.6	53,783	8.5

Source: MoE-EMIS Database, 2013.

Study overview

This study examines the detailed profiles of out-of-school children in Jordan in order to highlight the major barriers to school access and participation; analyse existing and emerging education policies and strategies to tackle key bottlenecks; and provide recommendations for improvement at various levels (policy, planning and programming). The goal is to introduce a more systematic approach to address the issue of out-of-school children and to guide concrete education sector reforms towards a more equitable coverage of basic education in Jordan. The analysis used is based on the Five Dimensions of Exclusion Model.¹ The model presents five target groups of children for the data and policy analysis that span three levels of education: pre-primary, primary and lower secondary; and two different population groups: children who are out of school and those who are in school but at risk of dropping out. Both quantitative and qualitative research methods were employed for this analysis. While the quantitative tools consisted of analysing data collected from different statistical databases, including the Education Management Information System (EMIS) and Department of Statistics (DOS) databases, the qualitative part of the study was completed by conducting several focus group discussions and interviews with key informants/stakeholders, including parents and students.

Profiles of out-of-school children

A major finding of the statistical analyses is that school enrolment has increased substantially between 2003 and 2012, and as a result, significantly fewer children aged 6-15 remain outside of the system. The increase in participation for the youngest children is beginning to manifest in completion at the higher grades, i.e. more children are starting school on time and as a result they are getting further by the time they are 10-15 years old. Over 98 per cent of children aged 10-15 were in school in 2012 as compared to 96 per cent in 2003.

Despite these gains, a significant number (45,862 or 41 per cent) of five-year-old children at pre-primary school age are still out of school, 9,661 (1.1 per cent) of primary school aged children are still out of school, and 21,234 (4.2 per cent) of lower secondary aged children are out of school.

The results also indicate that children who are attending lower secondary school level have a higher risk of dropping out (5.6 per cent) than children attending primary school level (2.9 per cent) due to several factors, such as child labour and low performance.

The profiles of out-of-school children as identified by the study are:

- refugee children (not included in the statistics), children of migrant workers with illegal status;
- children from poor socio-economic backgrounds;
- child labourers; and
- children with disabilities.

Those that share multiple profiles are more vulnerable and therefore more likely to be out of school.

¹ Conceptual and Methodological Framework of the Global Initiative on out-of-School Children (UNICEF and UIS, 2011). http://www.unicef.org/education/files/OOSCI_flyer_FINAL.pdf

Barriers and bottlenecks

The study looks into the causes of exclusion that are related to the various Dimensions of Exclusion for out-of-school children. The analysis aims to identify major barriers and bottlenecks that prevent children from attending and completing basic education in Jordan from socio-cultural, economic, educational, political and institutional perspectives, as summarized in the following paragraphs.

Family disintegration and parents' multiple marriages are highly significant socio-cultural barriers to child enrolment and the completion of basic education. When parents (both male and female) are getting married for the second and third time, they are unable to provide their children the attention they need and, consequently, children drop out of school and take on responsibilities that would normally be in the hands of their parents.

Poverty is a significant economic factor that pushes children out of school. Direct and indirect costs of education, including the payment of school fees, were the most common reasons cited for non-enrolment and non-attendance in pre-primary and primary schools. The problem is apparent in the pre-primary school level, where the government is unable to provide universal access to kindergarten (KG). Therefore parents need to pay high fees to private schools for both Kindergarten 1 and Kindergarten 2. The problem diminishes somewhat at the primary school level, where the government offers free education to all children. However, poor parents may suffer from the costs of transportation, notebooks, pencils and food. These burdens reduce the enrolment rate in the primary level as well as push students to drop out of school.

Disability was identified as a major barrier for school enrolment and participation despite the fact that the Ministry of Education (MoE) reported 16,870 children with disabilities enrolled in its public schools. In fact, the number of out-of-school children with disabilities is unknown, resulting in a significant gap in data collection and reporting. On the supply side, the list of barriers to enrolment for children with disabilities includes accessibility, poorly trained teachers and poorly adapted curricula. On the demand side, the stigma and negative perception of children with disabilities by students, teachers and parents are still prevalent, often causing parents of children with disabilities to be hesitant about enrolling them in school. In addition, there is a lack of a positive enabling environment to support inclusive education for children with disabilities: policies are weak, criteria for public school eligibility is poorly defined and definitions guiding disabilities only take into consideration physical disabilities, not the intellectual disabilities.

Child labour is another constraint that contributes to school dropout incidence and is closely linked to poverty and adult unemployment. As confirmed by the Ministry of Labour (2010), 70 per cent of the families of working children are living beneath the extreme poverty line and 40 per cent of their fathers are unemployed. Furthermore, child poverty is on the increase, reaching 19 per cent in 2012.

Due to the immediate financial outcome of child labour, poor parents may encourage and in some cases force their children to take on jobs, usually in the informal sector such as agriculture, domestic work and street vending. Working children end up falling under the radar of the protective laws that regulate the age and the conditions of labour. Changes in household living arrangements, especially those related to the death of a parent, can force children to drop out of school in order to earn an income for themselves and other family members.

Migration can also contribute to long absences from school, low academic performance and eventual drop out. Children of parents who migrate outside their original settlement in search of livelihood activities face a greater risk of dropping out. This is particularly visible in Jordan's Badia and Ghor regions.

Poor quality education is a barrier that is reinforced by inefficient educational resources in most rural regions across the country. This results in the exclusion of children across all Five Dimensions of the UNICEF/UIS model. Overcrowded classrooms, child absenteeism and the lack of teacher accountability are the major quality barriers to achieving universal access and retention in basic education.

Relaxed enforcement of certain education laws and implementation of policies and programmes, especially those that target out-of-school children, have neither been fully implemented nor resourced in order to ensure their execution. These include the complementary basic education policy, the early childhood development policy, and the inclusive education for all children regardless of their nationality as well as legal, health and intellectual status.

Policies and strategies

Several demand-side socio-cultural policies and strategies such as community mobilization and participation, which include awareness raising, addressing stigmatizing attitudes towards out-of-school children, partnership with community and civil society organizations (CSOs), are key programmes that need more attention from policy makers. Although the MoE is currently executing some of these programmes in collaboration with international support agencies through the National Reform Project (ERfKE), there is a need to reach all parents across the country to raise awareness on the importance of kindergarten and basic education for their children.

A better understanding of the barriers that push children out of school is needed. It is more effective to pay greater attention to students who are at risk of dropping out than to get those students back to school once they have already dropped out. Strengthening the collaboration and coordination between the MoE and other local self-governance bodies, such as mosques and local councils, is needed to combat the drop out problem. Investing in advocacy efforts through mosques' weekly sermons has proven to be an effective way to raise awareness of the serious social problems that affect the enrolment of children in schools. Examples of the subjects that Imams (Islamic preachers) can address through their sermons are discouraging early marriage for girls, condemning school violence and addressing security issues that face communities and schools, as well as informing communities about the service providers who take care of and educate children with disabilities.

Recommendations

1. Increase the access to and quality of pre-primary education

Enrolment in pre-primary education is still very low, but important steps have been taken to enhance that rate. Several studies emphasize the importance of investing in children from a very young age, as the early years of a child's life are crucial for future development. The significant, positive effect of high-quality early childhood programmes for cognitive development is well established and the impact has been found to be greater for younger children (ages 2 to 3 years old). Studies also emphasize that quality pre-primary education is the most cost-effective period to invest in with respect to cognitive and non-cognitive benefits, and future economic returns. Investment becomes less cost-effective with increasing age (Heckman, 2006).² Early interventions can also reduce future disparities in achievement between pupils of both genders and those of different socio-economic levels.

² http://jenni.uchicago.edu/papers/Heckman_Science_v312_2006.pdf

The significance of improving pre-primary enrolment is furthered as studies have shown that children without any pre-primary experience are at a higher risk of dropping out and on average do not do as well at school (OECD, 2013).

- Increasing the mandatory years of schooling in the national education system by adding the Kindergarten 2 as one additional year to the system.
- Establishing Kindergarten 2 centres (not attached to schools) in urban areas where there is a large number of Kindergarten 2 aged children and where schools do not have the capacity to accommodate the need.
- Providing specialized professional development programmes for pre-primary teachers.
- Expansion of the Better Parenting Programme to educate parents of proper rearing practices and to encourage them to send their children to kindergarten.

2. Initiate/scale up actions to address issues of non-Jordanian out-of-school children

This study indicates that amongst the children who are most excluded from education are the non-Jordanian children lacking documents that are deemed mandatory by the government for registration. These children may or may not be refugees and include, though are not limited to, Palestinians, Syrians, Somalis and Iraqis. To enable vulnerable non-Jordanian children to access school, the following key actions are needed.

- Calling on the international community to support Jordan's MoE to better serve Syrian refugee children. This action is needed to enable the MoE to continue enrolling them in school and to maintain the quality of education provided for all children in public schools.
- Reviewing and simplifying the current MoE admission policy that regulates the admission of refugee and non-Jordanian children to public schools, while taking into account the circumstances of those who enter the country and enrol after the beginning of the academic year.
- Provide out-of-school children with flexible alternative informal education programmes.
- Provide vulnerable refugee families with assistance that is conditional to their children's school enrolment and attendance.

3. Address the issues hindering children from poor socio-economic backgrounds

While realizing that addressing poverty, family disintegration and child labour is not easy and will require the efforts of various entities and community members at different levels, particularly interventions at the social policy level, the following recommendations are proposed.

- Providing material support and transportation for poor primary students to reduce the cost burden on their families. This could be implemented through conditional cash assistance programmes administrated by the National Aid Fund for Jordanians and the Zakat Fund for other nationalities. Conditional cash assistance can also benefit families that rely on child labour.
- Increasing families' awareness regarding the potential risk of multiple marriages on the education of their children.
- Enforcing laws on child labour.
- Providing alternative/flexible education services for working out-of-school children along with psychosocial support.

4. Enhance/enforce measures to prevent school dropout

A combination of several interrelated factors contributes to increasing rate of school dropout: poverty, late school enrolment, lack of pre-primary experience and extended absence from school. Supply-side policies and strategies alone are insufficient to ensure that children who face these barriers will not drop out of school. Targeted actions and programmes are urgently needed to increase the awareness of children in this group about the significance of continuing their schooling. School feeding programmes have been effective around the world in increasing enrolment and reducing absenteeism in schools. Therefore, implementing such programmes on a large scale in poor areas could be successful in reducing the number of out-of-school children. Moreover, enforcing the implementation of several policies that prevent child labour are also needed to encourage school enrolment and to alleviate the risk of drop out. Examples of such programmes are:

- Providing specific professional development programmes for teachers to enhance their capacity to deal with students who are at risk of dropping out.
- Providing remedial education programmes for low performing children to prevent their dropping out.
- Enhancing the role of school counsellors in dealing with the academic and psychosocial issues of low performing children.
- Reviewing the dropout policy within MoE by specifically reviewing and harmonizing the definition of what constitutes dropping out.
- Strengthening the implementation of the Ma'An Campaign to reduce violence in schools.

5. Enhance the access to and quality of education provided for children with disabilities

As UNICEF recommended in its 2008 report, *Assessment of the Situation of Children with Disabilities*, moving from a medical model to a rights-based model of disability is crucial to improving the lives of children with disabilities. This would require the review of policies, procedures, programmes, service delivery, research and legislation to be more inclusive of children with disabilities. This move to a rights-based model is also needed to shift public perception of and attitudes towards disabilities.

As previously mentioned, children with disabilities face many challenges in accessing schools due to physical bottlenecks, social issues and the low capacity of teachers to cater to their needs. Addressing these barriers requires a coordinated effort of key stakeholders at various levels of society such as:

- Reviewing/enforcing laws and legislation on disability in Jordan to better serve children with disabilities.
- Launching national awareness campaigns on the importance of education for and potential of children with disabilities. The campaigns apply to teachers, school administrators, students both with and without disabilities, families of all students and the whole community.
- Establishing a national centre to comprehensively diagnose disabilities that children may have. This diagnosis is intended to assess a child's capacity not only from a medical point of view, but from an intellectual one as well.
- Enhancing the coordination, networking and collaboration amongst different concerned entities to better serve disabled people: the Higher Council for Affairs of Persons with Disabilities (HCD), the Directorate of Statistics, the Ministry of Social Development, the Ministry of Health and vocational training centres.

6. Improve the national monitoring and reporting system on out-of-school children or those at risk of dropping out

Several reports show serious discrepancies on the figures of out-of-school children. For example, the UIS figure for out-of-school children includes pre-primary children, while pre-primary levels are not official stages in the national education system of Jordan. It is important, therefore, that the causes of these inconsistencies are identified and resolved, as these figures present very different views of the out-of-school children situation in Jordan. In addition a coordinated effort between the MoE and MoI is crucial in order to know how many children who are being calculated as out-of-school children are, in fact, no longer living in Jordan.

The following steps are needed to improve the current national system for monitoring out-of-school children.

- Updating or adding new indicators to the EMIS and DOS databases for monitoring out-of-school children according to the Five Dimensions of Exclusion.
- Scaling up and utilizing school-based monitoring and action programmes to enable school management and communities to work together on preventing and addressing reasons for dropout at earlier stages.
- Sharing and utilizing various sources of data on out-of-school children to enable the MoE to track them more effectively.

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