

A Future Stolen:

Young and Out-of-School

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This is a critical moment in history. The global youth population is growing rapidly, and if current trends hold, the number of adolescents aged between 10 and 19 years old will rise to more than 1.3 billion by 2030, an increase of 8 per cent from today.¹

The majority of this burgeoning population lives in low-income and lower-middle-income countries. Access to a quality education is perhaps the single most potent equalizer of opportunity for these individuals, yet as the new data presented in this factsheet reveal, the magnitude of the challenges they face is enormous. Without a dramatic increase in investment in education for these children and young people, their situations will only deteriorate, and the world will see an increase in unskilled and unprepared youth unable to embrace new technology and tackle the challenges of a rapidly changing global economy.

By acting now, we can change the current trajectory and achieve the ambitions set out in the Sustainable Development Goals – to get every child and young person in school and learning by 2030. Children entering school now must be given the support they need to stay on course and complete the full 12 years of education.

Education: A Critical Investment in Our Global Future

Every child and young person has the right to go to school and learn. When that right is fully realized, education provides children and young people with a path out of poverty and the prospect of a stable and promising future. For nations, investment in quality education, starting from the early years, establishes the foundation for more peaceful and prosperous families, communities and economies.

With equitable and effective investment in high-quality learning experiences that begin in early childhood and continue through to adolescence, governments, donors and civil society can help the next generation grow into young entrepreneurs, productive individuals, trained professionals, committed leaders and engaged citizens. According to a recent World Bank study, women who have completed secondary education are more likely to work, and when employed, earn almost twice as much as women without education.²

Investment in education is also key to reaching the ambitious goals set out in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (Sustainable Development Goals, or SDGs). In particular, SDG Goal 4 calls on governments to “ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.” None of these outcomes can be achieved without adequate funding for systematic support to system re-building, improving access to education and providing quality education through properly trained teachers. Currently, an annual gap of US\$1.8 trillion exists between available funding and the US\$3 trillion a year needed in low- and middle-income countries to achieve SDG Goal 4 by the 2030 deadline.³

In countries where the working age population is growing faster than the dependent population, investment in education can yield a demographic dividend. If educated workers can participate in an economy with steady macro-economic growth, they have a better chance of employment, increasing overall productivity and raising living standards. This in turn will lead to improved public financing for countries' social sectors, resulting in more money being devoted to sustainable and equitable growth for all.

1. United Nations Population Division, 'World Population Prospects 2017', <https://esa.un.org/unpd/wpp/DataQuery/>, accessed 7 August 2018.

2. <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/bitstream/handle/10986/29956/HighCostOfNotEducatingGirls.pdf?sequence=6&isAllowed=y>

3. The Learning Generation, Education Commission (2017)

New Data, New Insights

Newly obtained data have shed light on three key challenges that must be addressed to avoid the negative outcomes that will result from failure to adequately prepare the world's youth for the future, namely weak educational attainment, poverty, and conflict or disasters.

1. Low Rates of Educational Attainment

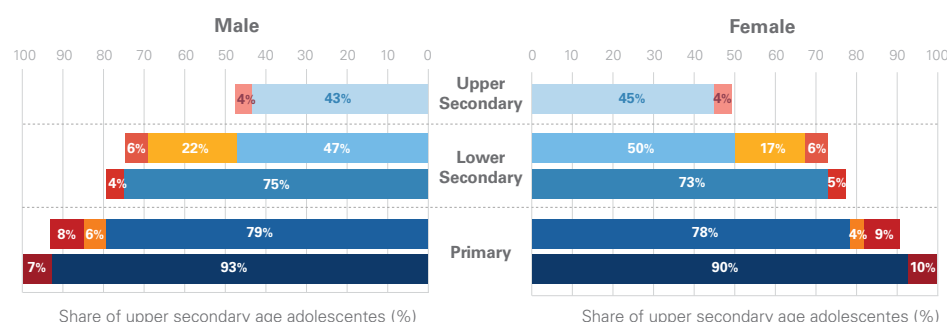
Globally, less than half of upper secondary school-age children – 43.3 per cent of adolescent boys and 45.1 per cent of adolescent girls at the upper secondary school age – are enrolled in or completed upper secondary education. In addition, many young people of upper secondary school age still attend lower education cycles, i.e., 1 in 5 are still enrolled in lower secondary school, and 1 in 20 still attend primary school. Having these over-aged children in lower education cycles puts additional pressure on resources that often are already stretched thin.

Among adolescents from countries affected by emergencies or natural disasters, only 26.6 per cent reach upper secondary school. In countries

not affected by emergencies, 54.8 per cent of adolescents graduate from lower secondary schools, but in countries affected by emergencies the proportion is only 28.9 per cent, and 18.4 per cent never even attend primary school. The root causes of weak educational attainment at the upper secondary level are usually limited initial access to education, and/or dropping out from primary and lower secondary education.

Every young person who is not in education, training or employment is at risk of being unprepared to contribute to his or her country's economic and social development, and is likely to face a life of limited opportunity and uncertain futures.

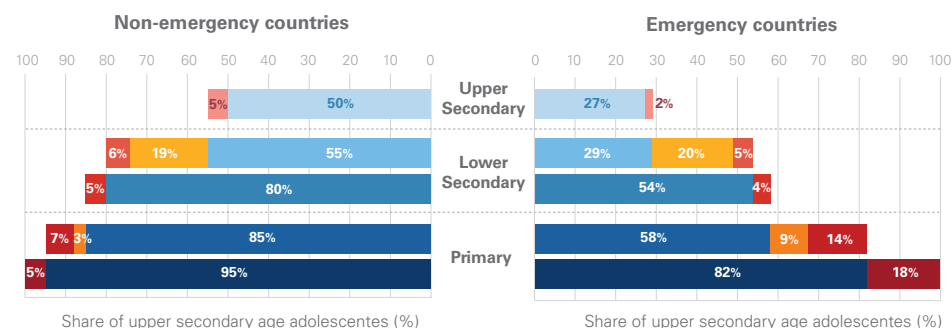
Figure 1: Educational pathways of upper secondary school age adolescents by gender



Data Source: UNICEF Education Database, 2018

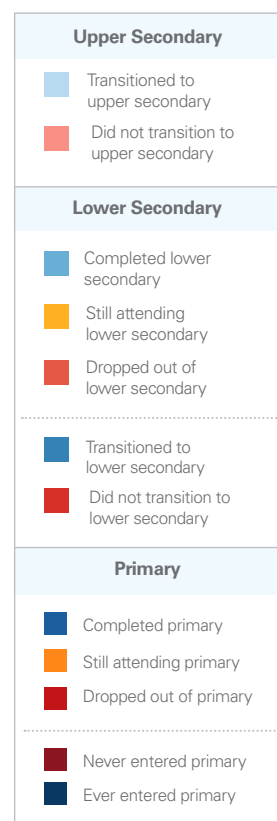
Note: Global estimates are simple averages across countries.

Figure 2: Educational pathways of upper secondary school age adolescents by emergency status



Data Source: UNICEF Education Database (2018) and countries where UNICEF has a humanitarian appeal – considered emergency countries/ countries affected by conflict or disaster

Note: Global estimates are simple averages across countries.





2. Poverty is a Prescription for Poor Educational Attainment

Poverty denies children and young people of their right to a quality education and a better future. In fact, a child's socio-economic status is the single biggest determinant of their educational attainment. School age children for primary to upper secondary education from the poorest wealth quintile are nearly four times more likely to be out of school than those of the same age from the richest wealth quintile.

Although the gender gaps in attendance may appear small at the global level, in some countries, especially those dealing with emergencies, adolescent girls are much less likely attend lower secondary schools. For example, girls are 2.5 times more likely to be out of school in countries with conflict⁴, and the Gender Parity Index for adjusted net attendance rates of lower secondary education in Central African Republic, Afghanistan, Mali and Niger are 0.56, 0.59, 0.76 and 0.75 respectively based on the most recent data available.

4. Nicolai, Susan, et al., Education Cannot Wait: Proposing a Fund for Education in Emergencies, ODI, London, May 2016, p.10, <https://www.odi.org/sites/odi.org.uk/files/resourcedocuments/10497.pdf>.

In many cases, adolescence brings challenges that interfere with education. Girls face barriers that include child marriage, gender-based violence, inadequate water, sanitation, and hygiene, and the heavy burden of household chores. For boys, barriers range from pressure to earn money to stereotypes around masculinity that encourage truancy.

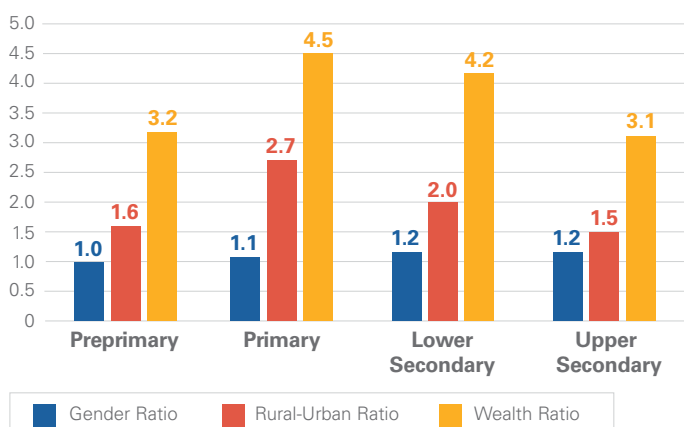
Table 1: Percentage of out-of-school children and young people based on socio-economic group

	Global	Urban	Rural	Richest	Poorest
Primary	11.9	6.6	17.6	5.2	23.4
Lower Secondary	15.1	10.0	19.6	6.7	28.2
Upper Secondary	32.3	24.9	36.9	16.2	50.4

Source: UNICEF Education Database 2018.

Note: Averages are calculated based on relevant school age population.

Figure 3: Ratio of out-of-school children and young people among different socio-economic groups



Source: UNICEF Education Database 2018.

Note: Preprimary refers to education one year before primary education (SDG4.2.2)

Gender Ratio = OOSC ratio (Girls) / OOSC ratio (Boys)

Rural-Urban Ratio = OOSC ratio (Rural) / OOSC Ratio (Urban)

Wealth Ratio = OOSC ratio (the poorest quintile) / OOSC ratio (the richest quintile)

The value of 1.00 indicates absolute parity, and values between 0.97 and 1.03 are considered to be an acceptable parity level.

3. Conflict and Disasters Exacerbate Countries' Out-of-School Burden

Countries affected by conflict and disasters bear a heavy burden in terms of their out-of-school population. Nearly 1 in 3 of all out-of-school children aged around between 5 and 17 years old – an estimated 104 million young people – live in countries affected by emergencies. When it comes to out-of-school children at the primary level, more than half of out-of-school children live in emergency countries.

For those living in countries affected by protracted conflicts and complex humanitarian emergencies, quality education is particularly critical as it provides them with the stability and structure required to cope with the trauma they have experienced, and equips them with the knowledge and skills they need to rebuild their country once the conflict or disaster is over.

Shortfalls in funding for education in emergencies have a devastating impact on children and young people's hope for a better future, yet less than 4 per cent of global humanitarian appeals are dedicated to education⁵. Unless the provision of education in emergencies is prioritized, a generation of children living in countries affected by conflict and disaster will grow up without the skills they need to contribute to their countries and economies, exacerbating what is already a desperate situation for millions of children and their families.



Education can make or break the futures of children and young people. Urgent investment is needed to get these children and young people – who are already living in the most challenging of circumstances – into safe school and learning.

Among countries with available data, Niger has the highest rate of out-of-school among secondary school age young people (76 per cent), followed by Central African Republic and South Sudan, with 67 per cent and 65 per cent respectively not in lower- and upper-secondary school.

5. OCHA FTS database: <https://fts.unocha.org>

Table 2: Percentage of out-of-school children and young people globally, and in countries affected by conflict and disaster

	Global Average (%)	Average of Emergency Countries (%)
Primary	8.9	20.0
Lower Secondary	15.9	29.3
Upper Secondary	36.3	43.8

Source: Calculation based on UNESCO Institute for Statistics database (2018), UNICEF Education database (2018), and a list of countries where UNICEF has a humanitarian appeal – considered emergency countries/ countries affected by conflict or disaster.

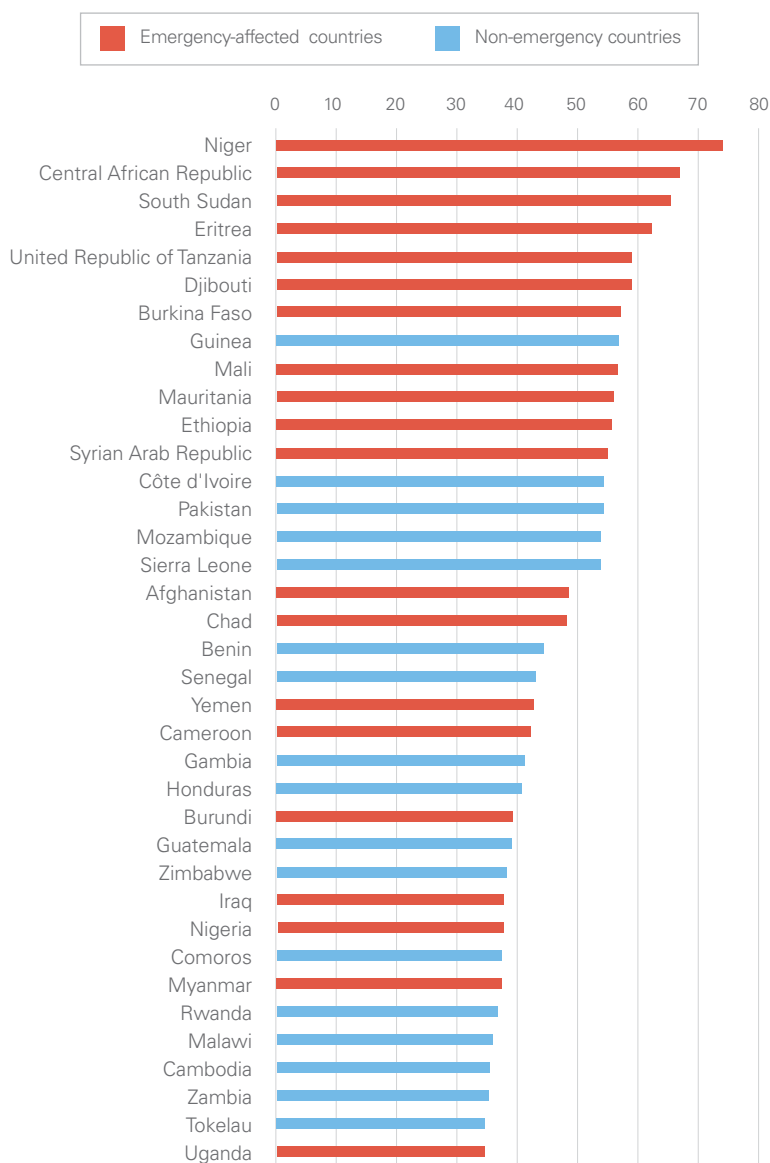
Note: Data does not include Libya, Somalia and Madagascar due to data unavailability. Averages are weighted based on relevant school-age population.

Table 3: Number of out-of-school children and young people living in countries affected by conflict and disaster

	Estimated # of OOSC in emergency countries (in millions)	Total # of OOSC in the World (in millions)	Estimated share of OOSC in Emergency Countries
Preprimary (one year before primary only)	15.3	39.7	39%
Primary	32.9	63.3	52%
Lower Secondary	23.7	61.1	39%
Upper Secondary	32.3	138.5	23%
Total	104.2	302.7	34%

Source: Calculation based on UNESCO Institute for Statistics database (2018), UNICEF Education database (2018), and countries where UNICEF has a humanitarian appeal – considered emergency countries/countries affected by conflict or disaster.

Figure 4: Countries with the highest out-of-school rates at the secondary education level



Data Source: Calculated based on UNESCO Institute for Statistics database (2018), UNICEF Education database (2018), and UNICEF classification of Emergency Countries.

Note: Red indicates emergency countries. Data does not include Libya, Somalia and Madagascar due to data unavailability.

