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Global Initiative on Out-of-School Children

UNICEF and the UNESCO Institute for Statistics

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UNICEF and the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS) launched the joint Global Initiative on Out-of-School Children in 2010 to accelerate efforts towards the goal of universal primary education by 2015. **The goal of the Initiative is to achieve a breakthrough in reducing the number of out-of-school children.** The Initiative builds on UIS/UNICEF's 2005 joint report *Children Out of School: Measuring exclusion from primary education*, which describes a methodology for estimating the number of primary school-age children who are out of school and presents national, regional and global estimates for this indicator.¹

The issue of out-of-school children needs to maintain its high priority within the Education for All (EFA) agenda. Without bold and sustained action on this issue, Millennium Development Goal (MDG) 2 will not be realised. MDG 2 and EFA are also fundamental requirements for achieving all other MDGs: poverty eradication; gender equality; reduction of child mortality and improvement of maternal health; elimination of HIV and AIDS and other diseases; and environmental sustainability.

UNITING EFFORTS

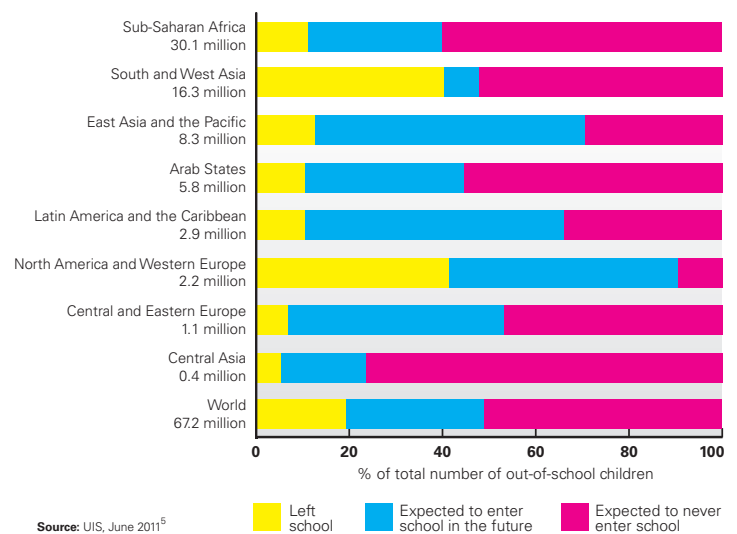
The urgent challenge of getting out-of-school children into classrooms has been reflected in the key commitments made since the international community adopted the six EFA goals in Dakar in 2000. The declarations emerging from the EFA High-Level Group meetings in Addis Ababa in February 2010 and in Jomtien in March 2011 call on governments to scale up efforts to address the problem of out-of-school children and to ensure equity in education.

The UIS/UNICEF Initiative fits within the framework of the Partnership in Statistics for Development in the 21st Century (PARIS21), the overall goal of which is "to develop a culture of evidence-based policymaking and implementation which serves to improve governance and government effectiveness in reducing poverty and achieving the Millennium Development Goals".²

CHALLENGE

A total of 67 million primary school-age children were out of school in 2009. Some 45 per cent of out-of-school children live in sub-Saharan Africa and another 24 per cent in South and West Asia. More than 35 million live in only 15 countries. Furthermore, 72 million children of lower secondary school age were out of school in 2009, pointing to further exclusion.³ There is a growing concern that the pace of progress towards universal primary education has been slowing over the last several years and that school retention was harder to maintain. It is estimated that around 10 million children in sub-Saharan Africa drop out of primary school every year. Forty per cent of out-of-school children in South and West Asia were previously enrolled but dropped out (see Figure 1). In both regions, girls are less likely to enrol than boys, and in sub-Saharan Africa, two-thirds of out-of-school girls are expected never to enrol, compared with only half of boys.⁴

Figure 1: Distribution of out-of-school children by school exposure and region, 2009 (%)



Deeply entrenched structural inequalities and disparities are at the root of such challenges facing out-of-school children. These challenges are linked to many factors,

1 UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS) and United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), *Children Out of School: Measuring exclusion from primary education*, UIS, Montreal, 2005.

2 Partnership in Statistics for Development in the 21st Century, 2009–2010 PARIS21 Work Programme, PARIS21 Steering Committee Meeting, 5–6 June 2008.

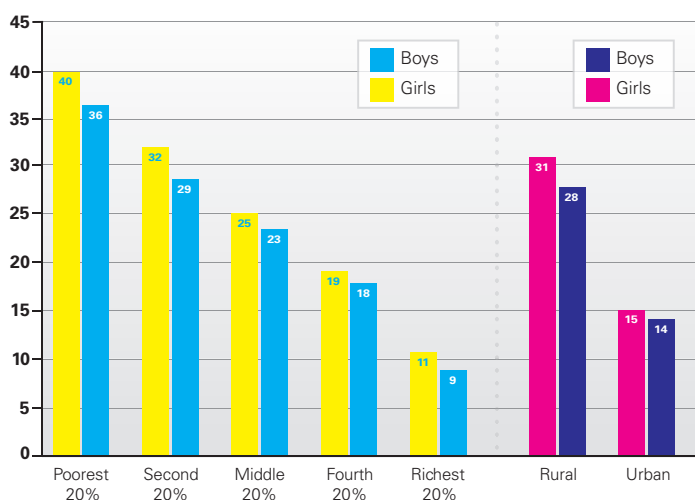
3 UIS, June 2011.

4 UIS, June 2011.

5 Regions are sorted by the number of out-of-school children in 2009.

including income poverty, exposure to child labour, conflict and natural disasters, location, migration and displacement, HIV and AIDS, disability, gender, ethnicity, language of instruction, religion and caste. Because of these disparities, even countries with promising national indicators risk falling short of universal primary education.⁶ Multiple disparities often intersect with each other, resulting in complex and mutually reinforcing patterns of disadvantage that erect barriers to schooling and erode educational opportunities. Figure 2 illustrates the intersection between out-of-school children and disparities related to household wealth, location and gender.

Figure 2: Out-of-school children by sex, household wealth quintile and area of residence, 2003-2010 (%)



Source: UIS, June 2011⁷

Policies and programmes to address the problem and reduce inequalities remain inadequate in many countries, and available resources are not always used efficiently. There has also been little systematic analysis to identify the bottlenecks and explain why well-intentioned policies are still not yielding robust results. For example, despite the movement to abolish school fees worldwide, poor families continue to bear the burden of a range of educational costs. While non-formal and alternative education strategies are frequently a common route to learning for many out-of-school children, these interventions might be of lower quality, have usually inadequate financial support, and often lack equivalence to formal education.

Furthermore, the multi-dimensionality of disparities makes it extremely difficult for countries to formulate and finance multi-sectoral policies needed to address these challenges. The most disadvantaged out-of-school children need additional targeted measures and investments, some of which are beyond the field of education and many of which are costly and difficult to manage. Social protection programmes have demonstrated a variety of impacts directly related to out-of-school children: by removing demand-side barriers to education, they reduce the need for families to rely on harmful coping strategies. However, synergies across the different parts of the social protection system are not entirely utilised. Finance and support between ministries as well as various levels of service providers are often not coherent.

Reaching the “last 10 per cent” of out-of-school children is not only more difficult, but also more expensive, because these children face multiple disadvantages, including forms of social

exclusion that are often hidden. There are few nationally-specific estimates of the costs involved in reaching these children, and education sector budgets continue to assume equal unit costs for all children, without factoring in additional expenses needed to compensate for disadvantage. There are also very few analyses of the relative cost-effectiveness of demand-side versus supply-side interventions and few comparative cost-effectiveness analyses of even various supply-side strategies.

Underlying the policy gap is a **data gap** stemming from the need for rigorous tools and methodologies to identify out-of-school children, to measure the scope of exclusion and multiple disparities, to assess the reasons for exclusion, to monitor progress towards universal primary education and to inform policy and planning. Above all, greater consensus is needed on estimates of the number of children out of school. This requires improving the quality of data collected through administrative records and household surveys and making more effective use of such data sources. Education Management Information Systems provide a largely supply-side perspective, which is essential for managing education systems, and household surveys provide a needed demand-side perspective.

Data reported by governments may understate the number of out-of-school children because of problems in collecting data from schools, or it may overstate the number by leaving out children attending independent private schools that are not registered or recognised. Coverage of non-formal learning activities is also limited in existing statistics.

On the demand side, disaggregated data of better quality are needed to provide an evidence base for increasing the visibility of the marginalised and for the development of policies targeting disadvantaged groups. More and better information is crucial to revealing who the out-of-school children are, where they live, why they are out of school and what forms of exclusion and disparities affect them.

GOAL AND ACTIVITIES

The goal of the Out-of-School Children Initiative (OOSCI) is to address these challenges and to support countries in achieving a breakthrough in reducing the number of out-of-school children. The specific objectives are to:

- **improve the statistical information and analysis** regarding out-of-school children and develop complex profiles of these children that reflect the multiple deprivations and disparities they face in relation to education; and
- **identify bottlenecks, analyse existing interventions related to enhanced school participation and develop context-appropriate policies and strategies** for accelerating and scaling enrolment and sustaining attendance rates for the excluded and marginalised.

The OOSCI has **country, regional and global dimensions** and is designed to have research- and action-oriented and capacity-development-related outputs. It will yield country and regional studies, a global report on out-of-school children and a guidance document to countries on a methodology to address the problem of out-of-school children. Twenty-five countries from seven regions are presently engaged in the Initiative. Country-level activities are undertaken by country teams representing the diverse stakeholders in education and led by government partners. These

⁶ In many countries, national averages mask high disparities that exist at sub-national levels and among particular population groups.

⁷ Household survey data from 31 countries with more than 100,000 out-of-school children. Mean values are unweighted.

activities will contribute to on-going education sector planning and reform efforts as well as annual sector and budget reviews, within the framework of EFA Fast Track Initiative processes as well as other sector-wide approaches.⁸ Understanding Children's Work (UCW), an inter-agency research cooperation initiative

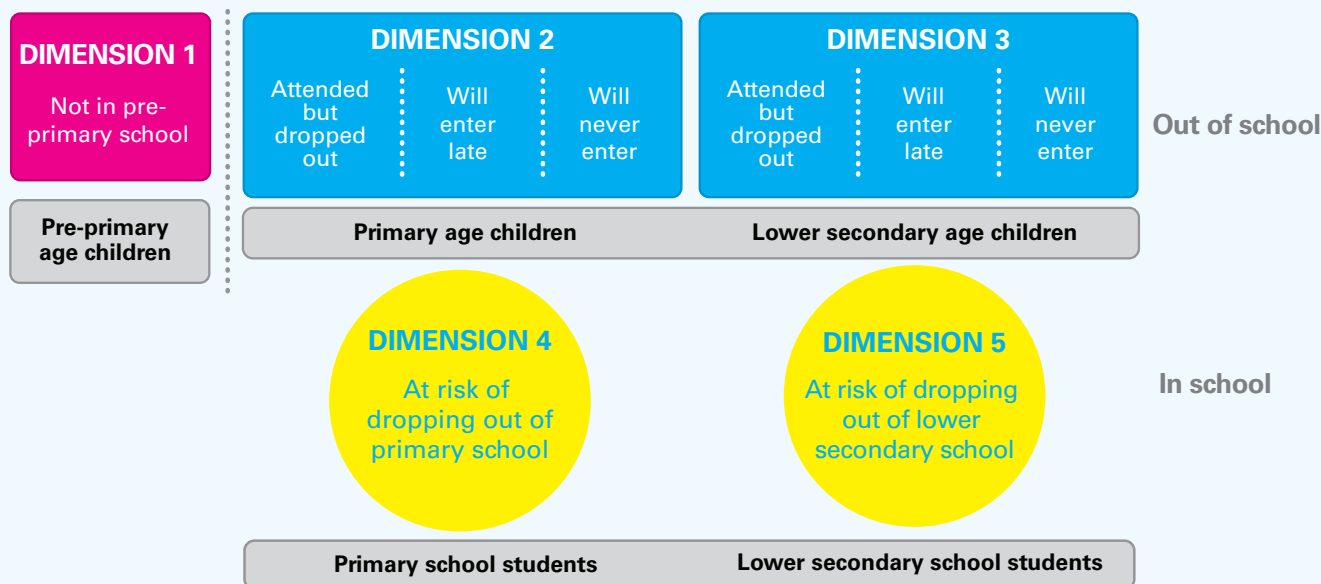
between the ILO, UNICEF and the World Bank, will support analytical linkages with child labour.⁹ Advocacy activities will accompany the work at country, regional and global levels, and a global conference is planned for early 2012 to share lessons learned and roll out the work in additional countries.

THE APPROACH

A Conceptual and Methodological Framework was developed by the OOSC Initiative in order to guide the work at the country level. This framework introduces a new approach (drawing on the CREATE model¹⁰) for analysing the problem of OOSC through Five Dimensions of Exclusion (5DE) that capture excluded children from pre-primary to lower secondary school age across a range of disparities and degrees of exposure to education. It also supports a more systematic linkage and leveraging between three main components: (i) profiles of excluded children capturing the complexity of the problem of OOSC in terms of magnitude, inequalities and multiple disparities around the 5DE; (ii) barriers and bottlenecks to clarify the dynamic and causal processes related to the 5DE; (iii) policies and strategies to address the 5DE-related barriers and bottlenecks within education and beyond, especially as related to social protection systems.

The 5DE model represents an innovative approach that provides **a broader, more complex and equity-oriented view of exclusion from education** than is addressed by the MDGs, with key implications concerning barriers and policy development. By generating data on out-of-school children

of pre-primary, primary and lower secondary school age, the model underlines the importance of a life-cycle approach and of effectively linking the provision of education to children with different developmental needs at different stages in life. The model draws attention to patterns and forms of exposure to schooling of out-of-school children (early school leavers, children who will enter in the future, children who will never enter school). The disparity analysis within the 5DE is also key for a better understanding of multiple and overlapping forms of exclusion and barriers to inclusion, for increasing the visibility of marginalised groups, for more effective tracking and targeting of disadvantaged groups and areas (while working on universal access) and for improving the linkage between education policies and social protection systems. Finally, the 5DE framework covers children who are currently in school, but at risk of leaving before completion, potentially identifying at-risk groups who may become the out-of-school children of tomorrow. This is a key feature in linking equity in access to quality education, demand-driven poverty-focused policies to supply-side provision of quality (especially in relation to school-level processes) and policies for out-of-school children to policies for children in school.



COUNTRIES

Twenty-five countries from seven regions are engaged in the Initiative:

- *East Asia and the Pacific:* Cambodia, Indonesia, Philippines, Timor-Leste.
- *South Asia:* Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka.
- *Central and Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States:* Kyrgyzstan, Romania, Tajikistan, Turkey.
- *Middle East and North Africa:* Morocco, Sudan (North and South).

- *Eastern and Southern Africa:* Ethiopia, Mozambique, Zambia.
- *West and Central Africa:* Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ghana, Liberia, Nigeria.
- *Latin American and the Caribbean:* Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Mexico.

These 25 countries reflect the magnitude of the problem of out-of-school children as well as high disparities in education (See Table on the following page).

⁸ 9 of the 25 OOSCI countries are EFA Fast Track Initiative (FTI) countries.

⁹ See www.ucw-project.org [accessed 15 April 2011].

¹⁰ Consortium for Research on Educational Access, Transitions and Equity: www.create-rpc.org [accessed 15 April 2011].