

Education, equity and inclusion: a policy paper for the G20

Executive summary

Recent years have seen much progress in access to education, yet clear inequalities in access, participation and learning persist, leaving the right to education of over 260 million girls and boys of school-age unfulfilled. Governments have a duty to ensure that their education policies, and practises, are based on the principles of equity and inclusion, with a strong emphasis on promoting gender equality. The G20 are committed to the SDG agenda which sets out to “leave no one behind”, with SDG 4 affirming education’s role in challenging and disrupting cycles of inequality. In practise this means valuing the participation and achievement of all learners irrespective of their characteristics; recognising the benefits of student diversity; collecting and evaluating evidence and responding to the the barriers to access, participation and achievement and engaging all education stakeholders to foster the conditions for equitable learning opportunities.

While strides have been made towards improving equity in education, the most marginalised students and their communities are still not being reached. Girls in particular face multiple barriers, especially as they reach adolescence. Although barriers to education related to gender, disability, ethnicity, conflict, disasters and poverty are largely recognised, we need to take urgent action to address them and to understand how multiple and cumulative disadvantages intersect and impact the right to education.

This policy paper offers an overview of the key issues around inequality and provides examples of where countries have worked to solve these issues. There are many positive examples of where education systems have adapted or developed cost-effective programmes to promote equitable learning opportunities. Given the problems are interlinked, the solutions must also be interlinked – domestically the education sector must work in partnership across Ministries to ensure plans are aligned and funds are available. Internationally, we must ensure that the global education financing architecture prioritizes investment in the needs of the most marginalised and vulnerable.

As leaders in education, the G20 should ensure that education policies and programmes work towards ensuring equitable inclusion for all. The G20 have substantial experience in both improving equity within their own countries and supporting other countries to improve their education systems. Continued dialogue and use of this expertise is vital to ensuring that no girl or boy is denied their right to education, regardless of their circumstances. To this end, we recommend that the following actions are considered by G20 Education Ministers:

Recommendations

- Increase political, programmatic and financial prioritization of equity seeking measures in education, recognizing that the right to free, inclusive, quality and gender-transformative life-long learning opportunities are fundamental to achieving the SDG agenda. For equity to be achieved in education, urgent action is needed to address the \$26 billion annual financing gap and ensure cohesion within the education aid architecture.
- Recognizing that girls are often the most marginalized and excluded group in the world, commit to ensuring 12 years of free quality education by addressing the specific barriers girls face to accessing and completing education.
- Improve national data systems that track children who are both in and out of school. Data should be segregated by sex, age, ability, geographic location, socio-economic, ethno-linguistic and migration status to determine where progress is being made, and where gaps in access to education and learning outcomes remain.
- Recognize the importance of teachers and other education personnel in advancing equity in and through education. Teachers and education personnel should be well trained, well compensated and well-supported in order for them to become equity champions.
- Include young people, especially girls and other youth from marginalized groups, in education policy, planning and budgeting process. Marginalized youth are best placed to advise on strategies that address their needs.

Background

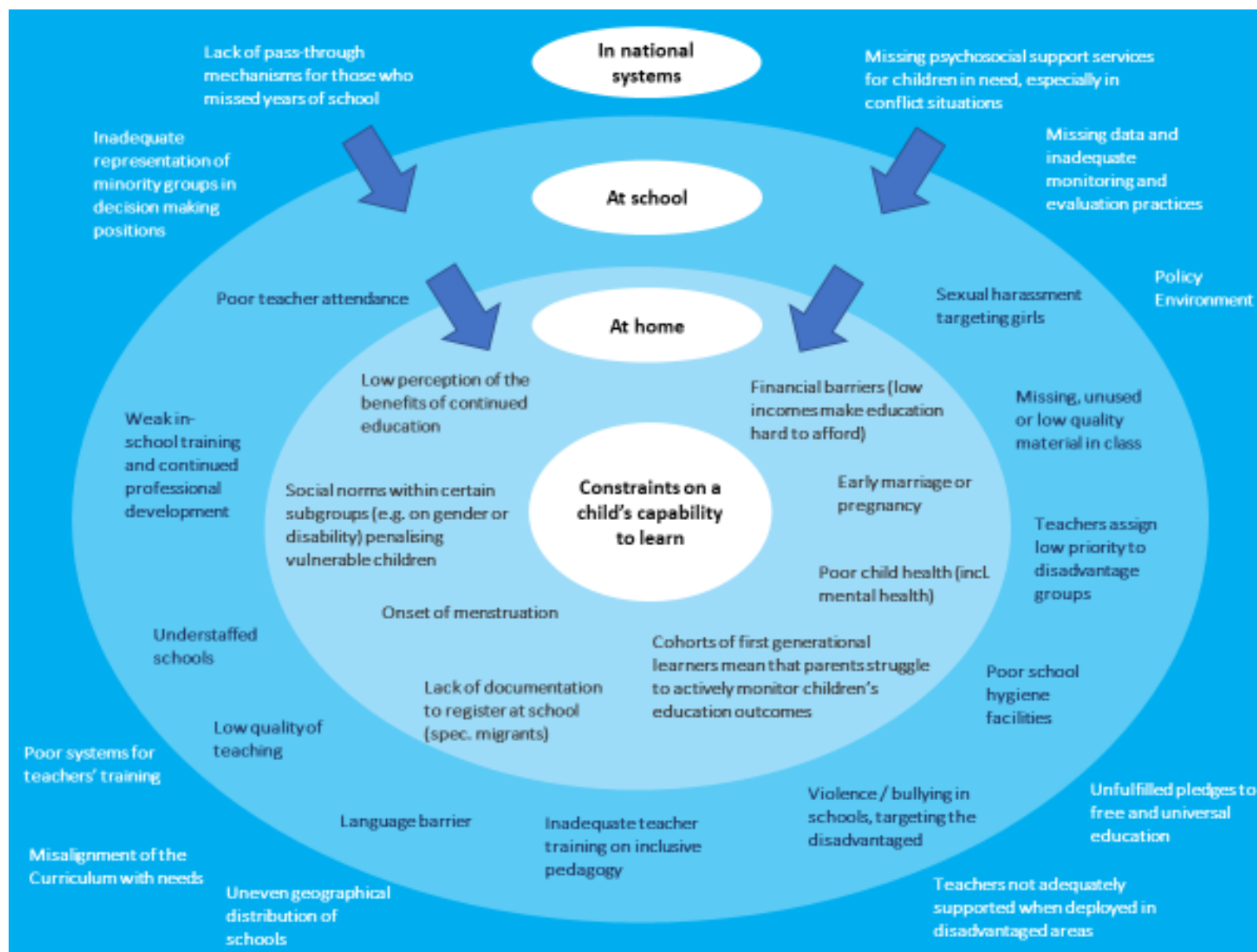
Recent decades have seen enrolment in education increase dramatically across the world. However, these increases have not been even, with the poorest and most marginalised still excluded, at substantial risk of dropping out, or at increased risk of getting a poor-quality educationⁱ. The international community has acknowledged a learning crisisⁱⁱ across the developing world, with the most marginalised and conflict affected suffering the worst. Systemic patterns of exclusion exist across a range of inter-related factors such as gender, disability, poverty and ethnicity – with many children facing multiple barriers and intersecting inequalities.

The G20 has shown its commitment to improving equity in education through the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG). SDG4 asserts that all UN Member States have a duty to “ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all”. Building on this, SDGtarget 4.5 asserts that the focus on eliminating discrimination should encompass gender disparities, persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples and children in vulnerable situations. The G20 has shown leadership, both domestically and internationally on these issues, but it is imperative that they, and others, continue and grow this support to ensure learning happens for all.

Concerns about the quality of education and subsequent learning outcomes are not new – but what is more recent is the sheer scale of the issue, with some 200m children now leaving school without the skills they need to thrive, joining the estimated 775m adults, mostly women, who are illiterate. This is a real, and growing barrier to poverty reduction, conflict mitigation and employment, and creates a burden on both the G20 and partner countries. In addition to the economic and societal benefits from ensuring equity in education, education is also a human right, as enshrined in the UN declaration in 1948 – with equitable access to Education for All a legal right across the G20 countries. Continuity of education is also protected under international humanitarian law, and most often suffers when armed conflict erupts.

This paper will begin by highlighting some drivers of exclusions, which vary by context and are inter-related. It will then discuss some of the key barriers in more detail, highlighting key trends which the G20 should be aware of, which will influence the recommendations.

The drivers of inequity are wide-ranging, interlinked and cumulative, but can be broadly summarised in the following diagramⁱⁱⁱ: In many contexts, these barriers compound, and increase over time^{iv}. For example, while poor rural girls are vulnerable, these vulnerabilities will increase during adolescence.



Inequality in education: Overview of main issues

Despite modest progress in recent years, equity in education has not yet been attained. Gender, wealth, socio-economic status, location, disability, displacement, language and ethnicity have been shown to pose barriers to education for many children worldwide. We discuss the status and trends in these key areas below.

Gender

There is widespread agreement that girls' education is one of the best investments a nation can make, with a wide range of economic, social and health returns. Girls' education leads to increased economic growth, higher wages, as well as reducing infant and maternal mortality, reducing child marriage, HIV/AIDS and malaria. It comes with improvements in agricultural productivity, greater resilience to natural disasters, and women's empowerment^v.

While there has been a moderate reduction of the gender gap in access to education globally, gender disparities are still wide, especially in South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa, where even at primary the gender parity rate for enrolment is 0.95, falling to 0.90 for lower-secondary and 0.86 by upper secondary. These averages again mask disparities, with the primary enrolment gender parity rate as low as 0.76 in the Central African Republic and Chad and secondary school rates even lower with countries such as South Sudan (0.46) being extreme examples. Disparities in learning outcomes, (conditional on attendance) are less pronounced, though when gender and wealth intersect, it is often poor girls who fail to learn the basics^{vi}. Girls often face discrimination in the classroom that hinders their learning and ambitions. In fact, in many contexts curricula, pedagogy and textbooks reinforced gender inequality instead of challenging it.

Many G20 members have experience in promoting gender equality in education domestically, and internationally. For example, initiatives like the UK's Girls' Education Challenge and "No Girls Left Behind" provide valuable evidence on how to improve girls' education in marginalised communities^{vii}. Initiatives like the Malala Funds Gulmaki initiative, or Plan International's "Because I'm a Girl" campaign have shown how girls' how partnering with girls and building their agency can advance gender equality in education in both G20 member countries and beyond.

It is internationally agreed that improving gender equality in education is imperative. We also know that it is possible, with substantial expertise available to help countries achieve this. To do so requires a holistic and transformative approach that tackles the negative social norms and stereotypes that perpetuate gender inequality. Holistic approaches must include a focus on school, community and government to overcome the range of barriers girls face – organisations such as CAMFED have shown that we know how to do this, and that it is a cost effective investment^{viii}.

Gaps emerge early, driven by wealth

Inequalities start early, widen as children age, and are strongly related to wealth^{ix}. This begins with access to early childhood education and development, where children from poorer families are far less likely to be enrolled. Children who attended early childhood education and development programs have lower chances of dropping out of primary school and better exam results. Furthermore, wealthier children are less likely to enter school late and progress more slowly through school^x. Children from the poorest quintile of households are four times more likely to be out of school compared with those from the wealthiest households (40 per cent vs. 10 per cent). When

multiple exclusion factors exist, the average numbers of years of education can decrease to virtually zero^{xi}.

It is important to note that early childhood development programs and pre-primary education is of critical value for the socialisation of gender equality and inclusion. It is during early childhood and during the very first years of school that discriminatory social norms are formed. Pre-primary education must be gender-sensitive and actively reject harmful gender stereotypes.

In low income countries wealth inequalities emerge in terms of both access and attainment, whereas in G20 countries the impact is focused on attainment, since barriers to primary school attendance have been virtually removed. Studies in France, Hungary and Singapore, where lower secondary completion rates are very high, show that students from low socio-economic backgrounds are about 3.5 times more likely to underachieve than students from non-disadvantaged backgrounds^{xii}. Conversely, in low-income countries, students from the poorest backgrounds are much less likely to access secondary education and are less likely to learn once there. This has obvious intergenerational effects, as children who drop out of school are more exposed to the risk of unemployment and poverty, thus perpetuating social inequities.

Location

Globally, wealthy males in urban areas – are the most educated group, followed by wealthy, urban females; poor rural females or particular ethnic groups are the least educated^{xiii}. In the worst cases, these subgroups have nearly zero years of average education. In low-income countries the issue is compounded at the secondary level by a lack of local schools offering quality secondary education, and low incentives on behalf of qualified teachers to serve in remote areas. Globally, the quality of schooling often reflects the socio-economic background of the neighborhoods or locations in which they operate, with high quality schools often found in wealthier areas, where parents can afford supplemental support and extra-curricula activities.

The G20 faces these challenges, with countries like India, Indonesia, Brazil, Russia and China covering vast areas of land. In China, concerted efforts^{xiv} have been made to narrow the urban/rural gap in education. Initiatives such as the “Special Teaching Post Plan for Rural Schools” and the “Free Pre-Service Teacher Education Programme” offered rural teachers better remuneration and benefits to attract teachers. In addition to policies attracting teachers to rural locations, an alternative is to more actively recruit local qualified teachers – *especially* female teachers, and teachers with knowledge of local language and culture. Teachers from within the communities have been found to connect more with children, suggesting a role for decentralization of teacher recruitment.

Long-distance learning programmes have long used technology to overcome challenges of rural schools, though the evidence on them is mixed. These include distance teacher training, or web-based trainings for teachers, or even using master trainers and satellite connections in rural schools, which was found to improve learning outcomes in Ghana^{xv}.

Disability

This policy paper recognises that disability, is complex, dynamic, multidimensional, and contested^{xvi}. We follow the definition of disability provided by the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), which has been signed by the G20, and describes persons with disabilities *as those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with*

others, and allows them equal access to all human rights, including education, on an equal basis with other children.

Disability poses a significant barrier to both accessing school and learning when in school. For students with physical disabilities, even getting into schools can be an issue. Once there, teachers often lack the resource, training and support mechanisms needed to support children with special educational needs.

Students with disabilities are less likely to have ever attended school, and women with disabilities are more likely to be illiterate than disabled men. Persons with disabilities are also less likely to complete primary or secondary education, they are found to have fewer years of schooling, and are less likely to possess basic literacy skills^{xvii}. In many countries, education system data on children with disabilities are weak, and data available is limited to physical disabilities – this means that there is a reliance on census or survey data to even ascertain the extent of the issue, which severely limits our ability to consider trends in outcomes over time or disaggregate by types of disability^{xviii}. Recent advances in this area, such as the Washington Group on disability, are welcomed, but we are still far from even having the information to assess these issues, and further still from ensuring education for all children.

For example, a study in Uganda^{xix} found that despite policies on Universal Primary Education, specific issues were keeping those with disabilities out of school. These included physically inaccessible schools, poor teacher training around disability, and a lack of assistive devices and appliances adapted to support learning, mobility and communication. This is confounded by stigma and attitudes in communities, which can often lead to those children with disabilities being hidden. It is widely recognized that disabled girls are one of the most marginalized groups. They are more socially isolated and dependent than disabled boys and as such are much more vulnerable to exclusion and exploitation both in and out of school.

Racial, ethnic, linguistic and religious minorities

Ethnic, religious and language minority groups are largely unidentified in statistics and the most recent research highlights issues of definition and identification. This data gap makes it difficult to isolate trends, but language barriers are believed to pose the most significant challenges. Students from households where the language of instruction is not used at home are far less likely to reach their full potential in academic assessment. In addition, parents who do not speak the language of instruction, even if they have sufficient literacy levels in another language, will be unable to monitor, participate or aid their children's learning – or communicate with school leadership and advocate for their children.

The educational systems should be oriented to eliminate all discrimination based on ethnic-racial reasons and to reduce the dropout rate of students. In this sense, educational and curricular plans must be reviewed from an ethnic racial perspective to avoid perpetuating stereotypes and discriminatory biases, and special measures must be considered to promote and guarantee their right to education. Brazil, for example, has passed specific legislation that has made it compulsory to study Afro Brazilian and African History and Culture, in both public and private school systems.

Curriculum has a critical role to play – the content of education can overlook these groups and reinforce inequalities. For example, in the Brazilian Semi-Arid region, pupils often take 11 years to finish the 8 grades of primary school, which has been attributed in part to the lack of curricula and education content that are adapted to the day-to-day reality of the children in the region^{xx}. The

language of the curriculum also matters, with many children not learning in their mother tongue. Taking minority groups into account in curriculum design is key, with policy makers needing to avoid elite capture of curriculum, which has been highlighted^{xxi} as an issue as education systems rapidly expanded to include cohorts of first-generational learners. In addition more flexibility should be given to teachers and school to interpret and adapt the curriculum based on students' interested and learning needs.

Conflict, displacement and migration

The disruption of education because of conflict and violence is systematic and lack of education is closely correlated with the duration of conflict. As a public service used daily by nearly all families in communities and as the basis for economic growth, stability and opportunity, the systematic erosion of education opportunities for children renders whole communities bereft of choices and the means to provide for themselves. This reliance on others for support or migration, or taking up arms as an economic alternative have devastating consequences globally.

Achieving the necessary reading and mathematical skills is often especially difficult for migrants, who often face additional barriers – most obviously language and obtaining equivalence for previous studies, but also trauma and psycho-social issues due to displacement. Migrants and minority groups are less likely than others to participate in education, more likely to be in special education and more likely to drop out or end up in low-status streams. Across OECD countries, first and second-generation immigrant students display worse performance compared to their native counterparts in mathematics, science and reading^{xxii}. This is not always the case, with studies arguing that the “London Effect”^{xxiii} on test scores in the UK being explained by the mix of ethnicities which live in London^{xxiv}.

The needs of migrant children will vary by context – though those who are displaced by conflict often suffer from additional trauma, or psycho-social needs which require specialist expertise. These require a high level of expertise, and additional support from teachers, who may have also faced similar traumas. However, there are a large number of example programmes around the world, including within the G20, which have been designed to help children recover. The G20 should closely monitor and respond to breakdown in education as a result of armed conflict and violence and take measures to provide immediate support to strengthen systems in such countries through such programmes and others.

Equitable education system design

We have identified above some highlights of specific interventions, or programming opportunities, that G20 countries and their partners (often with the support of the G20) have undertaken to promote equality. In addition to this, there are key design challenges faced by education systems which can help reinforce inequality.

One of the biggest challenges in promoting equality within education systems is identifying and tracking children who are out-of-school. In developing countries, often there are no national systems for tracking children and youth who are out of school, or systematic ways of identifying those who are at risk of dropping out. Fighting inequality is a data-intensive process, so investments in data systems cannot be bypassed. Data can be leveraged to conduct equity-seeking activities to support re-entry in the school system, develop early warning systems to detect patterns of exclusion before the latter reach a certain scale, and establish school-specific or district-specific development plans

(with targets) to maximise retention. This data can be used to inform national education policy documents and education sector plans. Statements of principles at the highest policy level will generate debate around equity in education and build the foundation for consensus building, in addition to generate the policy space to operate.

Achieving gender equality in the education is crucial. In this regard, curricula should include this perspective in order to eliminate gender stereotypes and ensure equal rights and opportunities in all stages of education. All difficulties and factors that disproportionately prevent girls and women from claiming and enjoying their basic human right to, within and through education (gender stereotyping in curricula, textbooks and teaching processes, violence against girls and women in and out of school and structural and ideological restrictions) must be addressed and eliminated^{xxv}.

Countries have worked to balance local autonomy with accountability to help disadvantaged students. Decentralising funding to local authorities can increase responsiveness to local needs, especially when combined with increased transfers for marginalised groups, as is the case in many G20 countries – for example the UK has a pupil-premium, and extra funding for those children identified as having Special Educational Needs.

Given the importance of early childhood development to inequalities in later life, strong systems invest in strengthening early childhood education and care for disadvantaged groups. There is strong evidence from around the world that early education explicitly targeted at the disadvantaged may help offset future barriers^{xxvi}. The G20 has experience in expanding pre-primary schooling, ranging from which can help their partners. In Germany, the concepts *Bildung* (education), *Betreuung* (care) and *Erziehung* (upbringing) are deeply intertwined^{xxvii} and this is reflected in the planning and policies on early education, yielding near universal access. In England, initiatives such as *Sure Start*, which echoed *Head Start* in the US and Australia, were found to have small but positive impacts on children's life potential^{xxviii}. These lessons can be distilled and shared with partners who the G20 support who are beginning to build their systems of pre-primary schooling.

We can't do this alone

While the Education system is the main point of support for Governments to help improve equitable outcomes for children, the multi-faceted, cumulative nature of the inequalities highlighted previously mean that the education system cannot solve these problems alone. Other actors are key to improving this – as the Ministry of Finance ultimately hold the purse strings, ensuring they are actively involved with the education sector is important to ensuring that SDG 4.5 is adequately funded, including the commitment to 12 years of quality education.

There is an urgent need to radically increase investment in education through domestic budgets and international funding. The Incheon Framework for Action recommends at least 4%-6% of GDP and 15-20% of national budgets should be spent on education, with the Global Partnership for Education further recommending a 45% allocation to primary schooling. To do this, Ministries of Education need to work with Ministries of Finance to clearly showcase the benefits from education. Furthermore, the G20 can use its position as the worlds leading economies to support reforms in the global tax system to enable countries to expand their tax base to increase domestic budgets for education.

Transparency on national budget allocations to education allows for strengthened accountability of decision makers and allows citizens to advocate for increased spending in education. Ideally these

data should be submitted alongside education data to UNESCO. Countries can also work to ensure that the non-fee costs to education, which are routinely a barrier to access, can be supported through partnerships with other Ministries, to ensure their social safety nets can help poor families with the indirect costs of education, such as transportation to and from school, purchase of materials and school supplies, and support the most marginalised families who rely on child labour for survival.

Internationally, there are opportunities to use the current momentum around the recent GPE replenishment and the International Financing Facility for Education (IFFED) to ensure international support for targeting funding to the most marginalised, including financing gender equality. Given the increasing indebtedness of many poor countries, IFFED in particular, should include safeguards against unsustainable debt and ensure additionality to and alignment with existing multilateral financing mechanisms.

Finally, as children often don't face various barriers in silos, any strategies and responses should be intersectional in nature. Too often countries adopt a purely sectorial approach in their programmes; since barriers to education may be health-related or be rooted in economic hardship, a cross-sectorial effort is necessary. Without such effort, countries will run the risk of having standalone project-based solutions working at multiple speeds in different sectors, which may reproduce social inequalities instead of addressing them.

Recommendations

Based on the areas and discussions above, this note presents several recommendations to policy makers within the G20, and across the National Governments they support or partner with.

- Improve national data systems that track children who are both in and out of school. Data should be segregated by sex, age, ability, geographic location, socio-economic, ethno-linguistic and migration status to determine where progress is being made, and where gaps in access to education and learning outcomes remain.
- The G20 should lead by example and encourage national Governments to include strong and explicit policy and budget commitments in alignment with SDG 4.5.
- Increase political, programmatic and financial prioritization of equity seeking measures in education, recognizing that the right to free, inclusive, quality and gender-transformative life-long learning opportunities are fundamental to achieving the SDG agenda. For equity to be achieved in education, urgent action is needed to address the \$26 billion annual financing gap and ensure cohesion within the education aid architecture.
- Recognizing that girls are often the most marginalized and excluded group in the world, commit to ensuring 12 years of free quality education by addressing the specific barriers girls face to accessing and completing education.
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- Include young people, especially girls and other youth from marginalized groups, in education policy, planning and budgeting process. Marginalized youth are best placed to advise on strategies that address their needs.

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Individual references are in the end notes.

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ⁱⁱ <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0022/002238/223826e.pdf>

ⁱⁱⁱ Figure adapted from UNICEF (2017): “Girls’ education is improving, but not for all girls – how can we accelerate change?”

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^{xi} UNICEF (2015), “The investment case for education and equity”.

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^{xiii} <https://www.education-inequalities.org/>

^{xiv} <https://www.oecd.org/china/Education-in-China-a-snapshot.pdf>

^{xv} <https://www.varkeyfoundation.org/what-we-do/programmes/making-ghanaian-girls-great/>

^{xvi} http://www.who.int/disabilities/world_report/2011/report.pdf

^{xvii} UNESCO (2018), “Education and Disability: Analysis of Data from 49 Countries”

^{xviii} <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/396291511988894028/pdf/121762-replacement-PUBLIC-WorldBank-GapsInEdAttainmentLiteracy-Brief-v6.pdf>

^{xix} https://www.leonardcheshire.org/sites/default/files/LCD_InclusiveEd_012713interactive.pdf

^{xx} http://www.ungei.org/infobycountry/brazil_1104.html

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^{xxii} <https://www.oecd.org/education/Helping-immigrant-students-to-succeed-at-school-and-beyond.pdf>

^{xxiii} This refers to the debate around the causes of the rapid increase in school quality in London in recent years.

^{xxiv} <http://www.bristol.ac.uk/media-library/sites/cmpo/migrated/documents/wp333.pdf>

^{xxv} CEDAW/C/GC/36. General recommendation No. 36 (2017) on the right of girls and women to education

^{xxvi} <https://www.thelancet.com/series/ECD2016>

^{xxvii} <http://www.oecd.org/education/school/ECECDN-Germany.pdf>

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