



GLOBAL EDUCATION MONITORING REPORT

2020

Inclusion and education:

ALL MEANS ALL



United Nations
Educational, Scientific and
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Global
Education
Monitoring
Report

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Foreword

It has never been more crucial to make education a universal right, and a reality for all. Our rapidly-changing world faces constant major challenges – from technological disruption to climate change, conflict, the forced movement of people, intolerance and hate – which further widen inequalities and exert an impact for decades to come. The COVID-19 pandemic has further exposed and deepened these inequalities and the fragility of our societies. More than ever, we have a collective responsibility to support the most vulnerable and disadvantaged, helping to reduce long-lasting societal breaches that threaten our shared humanity.

In the face of these challenges, the messages of the 2020 GEM Report on inclusion in education are even more poignant. It warns that education opportunities continue to be unequally distributed. Barriers to quality education are still too high for too many learners. Even before Covid-19, one in five children, adolescents and youth were entirely excluded from education. Stigma, stereotypes and discrimination mean millions more are further alienated inside classrooms.

The current crisis will further perpetuate these different forms of exclusion. With more than 90 per cent of the global student population affected by Covid-19 related school closures, the world is in the throes of the most unprecedented disruption in the history of education. Social and digital divides have put the most disadvantaged at risk of learning losses and dropping out. Lessons from the past – such as with Ebola – have shown that health crises can leave many behind, in particular the poorest girls, many of whom may never return to school.

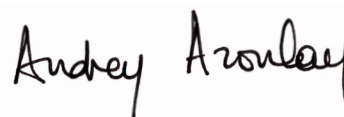
This Report's core recommendation for all education actors to widen their understanding of inclusive education to include all learners, no matter their identity, background or ability comes at an opportune time as the world seeks to rebuild back more inclusive education systems.

This Report identifies different forms of exclusion, how they are caused and what we can do about them. As such, it is a call to action we should heed as we seek to pave the way for more resilient and equal societies in the future. A call to collect better data, without which we cannot understand or measure the true scope of the problem. A call to make public policies far more inclusive, based on examples of effective policies currently in force, and by working together to address intersecting disadvantages, just as we saw Ministries and government departments are capable of when addressing Covid-19.

Only by learning from this Report can we understand the path we must take in the future. UNESCO stands ready to help States and the education community so that, together, we can develop the education the world so desperately needs and to ensure that learning never stops.

To rise to the challenges of our time, a move towards more inclusive education is non-negotiable – failure to act is not an option.

Audrey Azoulay
Director-General of UNESCO



Foreword

Education makes an essential contribution to building inclusive and democratic societies, where differences of opinion can be freely expressed and where the wide range of voices can be heard, in pursuit of social cohesion and in a celebration of diversity.

This year's *Global Education Monitoring Report* reminds us that education systems are only as inclusive as their creators make them. Disadvantage can be created by these systems and their contexts. It exists where people's needs are not taken into account.

Inclusion in education is about ensuring that every learner feels valued and respected, and can enjoy a clear sense of belonging. Yet many hurdles stand in the way of that ideal. Discrimination, stereotypes and alienation do exclude many. These mechanisms of exclusion are essentially the same, regardless of gender, location, wealth, disability, ethnicity, language, migration, displacement, sexual orientation, incarceration, religion, and other beliefs and attitudes.

The Report reminds us of continuing and disturbing education disparities, including in ensuring access to all, which should be the foundation of inclusion. But an 'all means all' approach to inclusion also means dropping any stigmatizing labels assigned to children. Adopting learning approaches on account of such labels limits their potential, ignoring the benefits that varied learning approaches can bring to all children.

Thus, how education systems are designed is critical. Countries can choose what counts in deciding whether their education system is on the right track or not. They can choose to address an inclusion agenda in a piecemeal approach, or they can tackle the entire set of challenges head on.

There are dilemmas and tensions involved in reaching the ideal of full inclusion. Moving from where we are now to having systems which cater for every learner's needs, including those with severe disabilities, is difficult. This Report does not deny that the full ideal of inclusion may have its downsides too. Well-intended efforts to include can slide into pressure to conform, wear down group identities, and drive out languages. Recognising and helping an excluded group in the name of inclusion could serve to marginalize them at the same time. There are also practical challenges in deciding on the speed of change, whether for richer countries looking to move away from systems which were originally based on segregation, or for poorer countries looking to create an inclusive system from scratch.

In full recognition of these challenges, though, the Report asks whether it really is necessary to seek justifications for inclusive education to be pursued. It notes that debating the benefits of inclusive education can be seen as tantamount to debating the benefits of the abolition of slavery, or indeed of apartheid. Inclusion in education is a process, and not only a desired end point. On that journey, many changes can be made easily – in gestures made by teachers, in the ethos school leaders create for their learning environments, in the way families make decisions when school choices are presented to them, and in what we, as a society, decide we want for our future.

Inclusion is not just a choice for policymakers. Imposed from above it will never work. So, the question you, as readers, are asked in the report is whether *you* are ready to challenge the current mindset and ready to decide that education is for everyone and must strive to be inclusive of all.

The Right Honourable Helen Clark
Chair of the GEM Report Advisory Board



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