

Global Campaign for Education

Briefing paper on key priority areas informed by the Strategic Plan 2023-2027

Equality and Inclusion

1. Background

One in five children, adolescents and youth in the world remain entirely excluded from education and around 773 million adults are still illiterate¹. Location, age, gender, disability, ethnicity, religion, migration, or displacement status are among factors that continue to dictate and limit opportunities². Nearly 40% of children do not have access to education in a language they understand, and children with disabilities continue to be disproportionately excluded from school. Three quarters of all primary-age children (9 million) who may never set foot in school are girls. Moreover, since 2000, an upsurge in migration and displacement has led to a 26% increase of migrant and refugee children globally, making their inclusion in national education systems an imperative³.

Poverty remains as the overarching obstacle to the right to education: the poorest children are four times more likely to be out of school and five times more likely not to complete primary education⁴ compared with the richest children. However, exclusion has multiple manifestations, which are often kept hidden or are deliberately omitted for social, cultural, or ideological reasons.

Inclusive education is based on the principle that all students should learn together, wherever possible, regardless of difference. Inclusive education acknowledges that every person has unique characteristics, interests, abilities and learning needs and that those learners with disabilities, including adults, must have access to and be accommodated in the general education system.

Inclusive education, by considering the diversity among learners, seeks to combat discriminatory attitudes, create welcoming communities, achieve education for all as well as improve the quality and effectiveness of education of mainstream learners. In this way, educational systems should no longer view persons with disabilities as problems to be fixed; instead, they should respond positively to pupil diversity and approach individual differences as opportunities to enrich learning for all.

¹ <https://uis.unesco.org/en/topic/literacy>

² See: Global Campaign for Education. Nothing about us, without us: nine lessons learned from ten inclusive education initiatives designed and implemented by GCE membership. Learning Brief. August 2020.

³ <https://www.unesco.org/en/inclusion-education/need-know>

⁴ <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0024/002482/248254e.pdf>

The concept of inclusive education involves two closely related processes: on the one hand, it questions patriarchal, utilitarian and segregational education and, on the other, it refers to a specific mechanism that seeks to provide appropriate and relevant education for persons with disabilities and other groups subjected to discrimination, which is why it aspires to become a systemic and systematic model⁵.

There is a global shortage of teachers, particularly the ones who are sufficiently trained and motivated to include learners with disabilities and from other marginalised groups in regular schools.

Teacher shortage is also due to gender bias and cultural factors, not just the absence of decent working conditions. The teaching workforce needs to be more diverse, and targeted efforts are needed to ensure that women, people from minority communities and people with disabilities can train as teachers, find work, and be supported in their jobs.⁶

Gender exclusion is perhaps the one that shows the greatest incidence in the world. In fact, no country has achieved gender equality, and this shows that gender-based exclusion and violence is not mechanically linked to poverty.

The notion of gender inequality includes gender disparities related to unfair distribution of education opportunities for both men and women disrespecting their gender diversity or sexual orientation. In this regard, the notion of gender inequality acknowledges the multiple forms of exclusion and discrimination faced by members of the LGBTQI+ communities. Several obstacles need to be removed to eliminate the roots of gender disparities. Girls and women who never attended school or who abandoned it at early stages, are often amongst those who find themselves doing domestic work, caring for other children and relatives. They often live in areas far away from schools. Gender-based violence on the way to school and also at school is another obstacle to girls' and young women's education. In some contexts, the interaction of social, legal and cultural barriers such as child marriage and early pregnancy plays a major role⁷.

2. The GCE Strategic Plan (2023-2027)

GCE understands that the various forms of exclusion are based on patriarchal frameworks that establish privileges for certain groups and is sustained thanks to education systems governed by the itch for productivity and therefore tending towards standardization and homogenization.

⁵ Muñoz, Vernor. Report of the Special Rapporteur on the Right to Education. The right to education of persons with disabilities. A/HRC/4/29 19 February 2007

⁶ International Disability and Development Consortium. Teachers for all: Inclusive Teaching for Children with Disabilities. July 2013, p. 4

⁷ GCE Strategic Plan 2019-2022

These trends have led to the increasing of privatization of education, with detrimental effects on education equity and equality. Equality and inclusion particularities are addressed separately in our Strategic Plan: gender equality and transformation, disability inclusion and inclusion of historically excluded population segments and groups and racial equality.

GCE understands that gender inequality intersects with many other factors that can exclude persons from education during their life. We put pressure on the international community and governments to fulfill their commitments to provide free, inclusive, quality public education without discrimination on the grounds of gender, sexual orientation, gender expression, identity or characteristics or other grounds, including but not limited to race, disability, ethnic origin, age, language, location, religion, or belief, migrant-, refugee- or any other minority status.

We stand with:

- All women and girls who are out of school because of unfair policies and harmful gendered norms, beliefs and practices that undermine their educational choice and opportunities and career choices
- All people of non-normative sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, or sexual characteristics which are excluded or forced into invisibility; and who are harmed by restrictive education policies, content and systems and the people within it
- Everyone who stands up against all forms of discrimination – whether due to sexism and heterosexism, homophobia, racism, ableism, classism, or any other form of social and economic oppression

3. Critical challenges

The social framework of patriarchal beliefs and behavior encompassed in the concepts and models of the old industrial societies has had a dramatic impact on education, validating and reproducing stereotypes, prejudices and inequalities generation after generation, sometimes even against the will of decision-makers, subordinating myriad historical and cultural identities to a single educational project that is therefore susceptible to institutionalized discrimination.

The social framework of asymmetries and disparities we identify as patriarchy predates the education systems and continues to have a decisive influence on the factors that produce social exclusion in education and learning. This social framework is an obstacle to egalitarian relations between men and women and to the full development of the human personality, in the terms set forth by the international human rights law⁸.

In addition to gender inequality, patriarchy impedes social mobility and stratifies social hierarchies, having a negative impact on the realization of human rights, development, peace and security, since it controls economic resources and assigns social and cultural values that are essentially unfair. Patriarchy is not a structure of autonomous oppression, concentrated in

⁸ Muñoz, Vernor. Report of the Special Rapporteur on the Right to Education. E/CN.4/2006/45 8 February 2006, parg.12-19

the subordination relations of women to men, but rather an undifferentiated set of oppressions, of sex, race, gender, ethnicity and social condition⁹.

Human Rights based education is the primary way to fight patriarchalism and to generate cultural change for equality. When it is not properly organized, education has the opposite result, perpetuating injustice and discrimination.¹⁰

One of the ideal ways of transforming education for equality, is implementing comprehensive sexual education, which is especially important in ensuring the enjoyment of women's right to live free of violence and gender discrimination. In order to be comprehensive, sexuality education must pay special attention to diversity, since everyone has the right to deal with his or her own sexuality without being discriminated against on grounds of sexual orientation or gender identity¹¹.

Unfortunately, there are still several reservations against sexuality education, coming from social and political groups fed by historical prejudices and limited perspectives on sexual and reproductive health and rights.

Prejudices are not confined to gender issues, as exclusion and violence based on race and ethnicity continue to harm many cultural minorities, particularly - but not only - migrant communities, refugees and internally and cross-border displaced persons.

Indigenous and minority populations continue to fight for educational systems that include and value their cultures and languages, emphasizing the importance of mother tongue education.

The struggles of minority peoples often have as a reference racial justice, which we understand as a vision and transformation of society to eliminate racial hierarchies and advance collective liberation and have the dignity, resources, power, and self-determination to fully thrive¹².

However, the marginalization of minorities is never the product of just a single factor. It is often the product of complex forces which affect individuals at particular points in their lives. While factors relating to income and livelihoods have been identified as the important economic causes of exclusion, the cultural and social factors that lead different groups to experience and value education differently are important explanatory issues¹³.

Finally, the fight for the right to inclusive education, waged by people with disabilities and their families and organizations, has made notable progress, considering the provisions of Article 24

⁹ PDHRE. Transforming the patriarchal order into a human rights system toward economic and social justice for all (www.pdhre.org).

¹⁰ Muñoz, Vernor. Report of the Special Rapporteur on the Right to Education. A/65/162 23 July 2010, parag. 8

¹¹ Ibidem, parag. 23-32

¹² <https://www.raceforward.org/about/what-is-racial-equity-key-concepts>

¹³ Sayed, Yusuf. Overcoming exclusion in education. State of the World's Minorities and Indigenous Peoples 2009.

of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) and Sustainable Development Goal 4.

Many countries have made progress in the adoption and implementation of inclusive systems and in overcoming segregating models of special education. However, the UNESCO-UIS data show that this progress has slowed in recent years, leaving some 258 million children, adolescents, and youth still not in school, and more than 617 million children and adolescents not achieving minimum proficiency levels in reading and mathematics. It is also important to note that only half of the world's children receive pre-primary education, a failure that limits children's futures and deepens inequities in later learning. In developing and least developed countries, the low access to higher education of young people living in socioeconomically disadvantaged contexts and/or who are vulnerable for various reasons, is one of the most dramatic gaps in unequal opportunities. This holds back the overall development of these nations.¹⁴

Persons with disabilities and organizations of persons with disabilities (OPDs) bear critical knowledge, experience and expertise that can make humanitarian action and education in emergencies and protracted crises more inclusive and relevant for affected populations. Greater engagement of persons with disabilities and OPDs, which remains untapped, would help address socially shared beliefs and attitudes that diminish the agency and capacities of persons with disabilities. Their engagement would also bring to bear the diversity of persons with disabilities who are instead often portrayed as homogeneously "vulnerable"¹⁵.

4. Way forward

Advocacy action for inclusion and equality is at the heart of GCE. Our strategic plan does not start from scratch. It includes previous experiences and there is a political and instrumental heritage that nourishes our work at the national, regional, and global levels.

Thanks to our partnerships, GCE has strategic visions that are fed by the international women's movement and our association with organizations that work for the rights of people with disabilities, allow us to direct effective advocacy in multiple areas and levels.

GCE will continue to call governments to account regarding the right to inclusive education and progress in gender-transformative systems.

¹⁴ <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000374246>

¹⁵ Education Cannot Wait. Policy and accountability Framework on Disability Inclusion. New York, May 2022, p.2.