



International Network for School Social Work

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The State of the World's School Children

UNICEF has released **The State Of The World's Children 2016, A Fair Chance For Every Child**. It can be downloaded in 3 languages at <http://www.unicef.org/sowc2016/>. Chapter 2 *Education: levelling the playing field* on pages 40–67 provides data and analysis illustrating how a holistic approach (as used by social workers who work in schools) is the key to successful learning. This holistic approach to giving a fair chance to every child is also applied in Chapter 1 on *Child Health, a fair start in life* and Chapter 3 on *Poverty, breaking the vicious cycle*. The 172 page report includes examples from many countries, statistics on variables including health, gender, education, child protection, nutrition, poverty and more, and concludes with uncomfortable truths about how inequity stemming from factors families cannot control blights the lives of millions of children.



Education

Table 5 starting on page 134 gives the literacy rate for youth, mobile phone/internet users per 100 population, pre-primary school participation, primary and secondary school participation (all according to gender) for about 200 countries and a summary of these factors for 9 regions. The total youth literacy rate is 93% for boys and 89% for girls. Pre-primary participation is 54% for both boys and girls. Nine percent of children of primary school age are not enrolled. Enrollment in secondary school is still only at 67% for boys and 65% for girls.

The report cites the factors, so familiar to school social workers, that result in poor educational outcomes: poor nutrition, poverty, lack of stimulation, stress, violence, child abuse, humanitarian emergencies, living with conflict and discrimination based on ethnic origin and disability. It goes on to describe the key to success by providing comprehensive interventions involving all sectors and focusing on protection, stimulation and quality care to infants and young children.

Poverty

School social workers in most countries know that living in poverty is the biggest contributor to inequity and lack of success in school. The indicators of poverty used in Vietnam show the inequity that comes from poverty and that prevents children from reaching success in life: lack of education, poor nutrition, inadequate housing, lack of health care, poor sanitation, child labor,

family unemployment and lack of amenities such as toys and books. School social workers' efforts in many countries are spent on relieving these factors; they often supply school clothing, food, school supplies and even toys. They work with families to achieve better health care and strive to keep children in school with encouragement and frequent reinforcement. The International School Social Work Survey that is currently being updated for 2016 shows that school social workers in most countries provide for children's material needs as part of the effort to keep them attending school.

Goal 2.A. of the Millennium Development Goals is to ensure that all children complete primary education. There has been progress, but there is much left to do to level the playing field, not only in primary education, but through secondary and into tertiary education. Some of the remaining tasks are to help children in the poorest households to stay in school, prevent dropping out in countries affected by conflict, increase pre-school enrollment, reduce violence in schools and to work with school systems to create schools that are more inclusive and friendly towards children.

The State Of The World's Children 2016, A Fair Chance For Every Child has information useful to school social workers in every country. Below are some valuable lessons offered in the report from Vietnam and Brazil (page 63) where there have been positive educational results even for those children who live with the greatest disadvantages.

BOX 2.3 BRAZIL AND VIET NAM: MAKING THE GRADE

Brazil and Viet Nam offer valuable lessons on reforming education systems. In 2012, students in Viet Nam achieved mathematics and reading scores in the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) that were far higher than expected given the country's income level. Fifteen-year-olds performed on a par with their peers in Germany and outperformed students in the United Kingdom and the United States. This achievement resulted from the country's commitment to measuring success and providing resources to achieve its education goals. By 2012, Viet Nam was allocating 21.4 per cent of its national budget to education. Teachers were capable and absenteeism was very low.

In Brazil, meanwhile, success was recorded in enrolment, increased equity and learning outcomes. Between 2003 and 2012, enrolment rates for 15-year-olds increased from 65 per cent to 78 per cent. Many of the children entering the school system were from socio-economically disadvantaged groups. Also between 2003 and 2012, Brazilian students' average PISA scores rose by 25 points; for disadvantaged pupils, the increase was 27 points. Brazil's successes were driven by multiple reforms that began in the mid-1990s and included the establishment of an independent evaluation body, which became the Evaluation System for Basic Education. The system now serves as a transparent reporting mechanism and a common method for measuring learning achievements. High-performing schools are allowed greater autonomy, while underperforming schools receive support for improving standards. Brazil also increased funding for education, which reached 6.3 per cent of GDP by 2012. The central government's financing facility targeted funds to schools in low-performing municipal education systems, and it now funds pre-primary education as well. Teacher training improved and equity was strengthened with Bolsa Escola, a programme that provided cash transfers to poor households.

The examples of Viet Nam and Brazil show that accelerating educational progress for the children left furthest behind can produce positive results.

Source: Bodewig, Christian, 'What explains Vietnam's stunning performance in PiSa 2012?', east asia & Pacific on the rise, World Bank blogs, 11 december 2013, <<http://blogs.worldbank.org/eastasiapacific/blogs/christian-bodewig>>, accessed 22 January 2015. The World Bank, 'Government expenditure on education as % of GdP', <<http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/Se.XPd.ToTl.Gd.ZS>>, accessed 12 february 2016. hanushek, eric a., and ludger Woessmann, *Universal Basic Skills: What countries stand to gain*, oeCd Publishing, 2015, pp. 31–33. Bruns, Barbara, david evans and Javier luque, *Achieving World-Class Education in Brazil: The next agenda*, The World Bank, Washington, d.C., 2012, pp. 7, 40, 11, 8. UneSCo institute for Statistics, database, <<http://data.uis.unesco.org/index.aspx?queryid=189>>, accessed 10 february 2016.