



International Network for School Social Work

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The State of the World's Education

The Right to Education

Since the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1948 (United Nations, 1948), the international community has refined *Article 26, The Right to Education* (UN, 1948), in an ongoing series of declarations and conventions (UN, 1976, UNICEF, 1990).

In 1990, the World Conference on Education for All (EFA), with delegates from 155 countries, strengthened the Right to Education by establishing a framework for child, family and adult education with goals and specific targets (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 1990). The *Millennium Development Goals* for primary education and gender equity parallel the EFA goals. In 2000 targets were set for 2015, with specific objectives for early childhood education, free and compulsory primary education, youth and adult education programs, eliminating gender disparity in primary and secondary education and improving the quality of education with measurable outcomes (UNESCO, 2000). 164 governments pledged to reach the targets by 2015. The *Global Monitoring Report* of 2010 provides information about significant gains in each of the targeted goals. For example the number of primary school children out of school dropped from 113 million to 72 million, with less gender disparity.

While progress was being made, wide gaps remained in access to education between countries and among various populations. Among disadvantaged groups, children living in poverty, working children, children with disabilities and children in fragile states engaged in armed conflict stood out as needing extraordinary educational supports in order to reach the goals. However, there was progress in each of the five EFA goals. The Education for All Development Index is a composite measure of the EFA goals. It showed that 62 countries, including many developing countries, had achieved or were close to achieving the goals. Thirty-six countries had made some progress and 30 countries, 17 of them from Sub Saharan Africa, had low enrollment, gender disparity, and low literacy. Even once children were successfully enrolled in school, especially children from socially marginalized groups, they often did not reach a satisfactory level of literacy or numeracy (UNESCO).

2015 Global Education Monitoring Report

The Report showed that the 2015 deadline was not met, but progress was made towards Education for All and the 6 goals that were agreed on in 2000, as quoted here from the report.

Early Childhood Education *Forty seven percent of countries reached the goal and another eight percent were close. Twenty percent were very far from the goal. Yet, in 2012, nearly two-thirds more children were enrolled in early childhood education than in 1999.*

Universal Primary Education *Fifty-two percent of countries achieved this goal; ten percent are close and the remaining thirty-eight percent are far or very far from achieving it. This leaves almost 100 million children not completing primary education in 2015. A lack of focus on the marginalized has left the poorest five times less likely to complete a full cycle of primary education than the richest and over a third of out of school children living in conflict affected zones.*

Youth and Adult Skills *Forty-six percent of countries reached universal lower secondary enrolment. Globally, numbers in lower secondary education increased by 27% and more than doubled in sub-Saharan Africa. Nonetheless, one third of adolescents in low income countries will not complete lower secondary school in 2015.*

Adult Literacy *Only 25% of countries reached this goal; 32% remain very far from it. While globally the percentage of illiterate adults fell from 18% in 2000 to 14% in 2015, this progress is almost entirely attributed to more educated young people reaching adulthood. Women continue to make up almost two-thirds of the illiterate adult population. Half of sub-Saharan African women do not have basic literacy skills.*

Gender equity *Gender parity will be achieved at the primary level in 69% of countries by 2015. At secondary level, only 48% of countries will reach the goal. Child marriage and early pregnancy continue to hinder girls' progress in education, as does the need for teacher training in gender sensitive approaches and curriculum reform.*

Quality of Education *The numbers of pupils per teacher decreased in 121 of 146 countries between 1990 and 2012 at the primary level, but 4 million more teachers are still needed to get all children into school. Trained teachers remain in short supply in one third of countries; in several sub-Saharan African countries, less than 50 percent are trained. However, education quality has received increased attention since 2000; the number of countries carrying out national learning assessments has doubled.*

The goal for 2030 is to “ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all”.

More primary school children are out of school in 2017 than in 2015. The gap between achievement of rich and poor is still very obvious. International aid to education that could bring resources to the poorest and other vulnerable groups has slowed. According to UNESCO, the world will miss its goal of a quality education for all by 2030 if the present trends continue. There is much for school social workers to do in prevention, intervention and advocacy.

<https://en.unesco.org/gem-report/report/2015/education-all-2000-2015-achievements-and-challenges>. Go to the 2015 report and watch the PowerPoint and videos.