

## **QUALITY OF EDUCATION INSUFFICIENT TO ACHIEVE EDUCATION FOR ALL BY 2015**

Geneva, November 8 – More children are going to school than ever before, but many drop out before grade 5 of primary school or graduate without mastering even a minimum set of cognitive skills, concludes the 2005 Education for All Global Monitoring Report launched today in Brasilia (Brazil).

The Report, which monitors progress towards the six Education for All goals\* set by over 160 countries at the World Education Forum in Dakar (2000), finds that significant efforts are being made to increase resources, broaden access to school and improve gender parity. However, exhaustive analysis of research data shows that the quality of education systems is failing children in many parts of the world, and could prevent many countries from achieving Education for All by the target date of 2015.

In one-third of countries with data, for example, less than 75 percent of students reach grade 5. National and international assessments also show that performance levels are very weak in low- and middle-income countries and among disadvantaged groups in some industrialized nations.

“Overcrowded classes, poorly qualified teachers and ill-equipped schools with scant learning materials remain all too familiar pictures in many countries,” said UNESCO Director-General Koïchiro Matsuura. “Yet, achieving education for all fundamentally relies on assuring decent quality: what children learn and how they learn can make or break their school experience and their subsequent opportunities in life.”

The importance of quality is reflected in the report’s EFA Development Index (EDI), which measures the overall progress of 127 countries towards EFA. The Index is based on indicators for the four most measurable Dakar goals: universal primary education, adult literacy, education quality (using survival rate of pupils to grade 5 as a proxy) and gender parity.

According to the EDI, 41 countries are relatively close to achieving the goals. They comprise mainly industrialized and transition countries, but they also include such countries in the Latin America and the Caribbean region as **Argentina, Cuba** and **Chile** together with five small island states.

They are followed by another 51 countries, headed by **Romania, Bulgaria** and **Costa Rica** and including many of the Arab States and countries in Latin America, which are well on the way to achieving some of the goals, but are being held back by slow progress on others, notably quality.

Finally, a third group of 35 countries, 22 of them in sub-Saharan Africa, but also including the high population countries of **Bangladesh, India** and **Pakistan**, are “very far

from achieving the goals”, with “multiple challenges to tackle simultaneously if EFA is to be assured.”

The report provides a detailed analysis of the key factors influencing the quality of education, including financial and material resources for schools, the number of teachers and their training, core subjects, pedagogy, language, the amount of actual learning time, facilities and leadership.

There is a clear upward trend on many of these fronts. Education spending, for example, has increased over the past decade in many developing countries, and access to education continues to improve. But there are still 103.5 million out-of-school children, a figure that is declining too slowly to achieve universal primary education by 2015. The report also emphasizes that improved access has not been matched by an expansion of educational facilities and resources.

This situation is most notable, for example, with teachers who, the report emphasizes, “are the strongest influence on learning.” In many low-income countries, teachers do not meet even the minimum standards for the profession. In **Togo**, for example, only two percent of teachers met the minimum national standard of lower secondary education. In **Botswana**, where the standard was an upper secondary education for teaching in primary schools, only 10 percent of teachers made the grade. Similarly, a recent study of seven Southern African countries, cited by the Report, “found that some primary school mathematics teachers possessed only basic numeracy and actually scored lower than students on the same tests.”

Too often, these poorly trained teachers must also face over-crowded classrooms. The report finds that in countries with the highest pupil/teacher ratios, “barely one third of students who start primary reach grade 5.” In many countries of sub-Saharan Africa and South and West Asia, where education has expanded rapidly over the past decade, pupil/teacher ratios have actually risen. In most countries of these regions, the number of pupils per teacher exceeds 40 in primary education and climbs above 60 in several cases, including Malawi, Mozambique, Central African Republic and Chad. Furthermore, in many low-income countries, teachers’ real wages have declined relative to average incomes and their earnings are too low to provide an acceptable standard of living.

The HIV/AIDS pandemic is another factor “severely undermining” the quality of education, states the report. In **Zambia**, for example, an estimated 815 primary school teachers died of AIDS in 2001, “corresponding to 45 percent of teachers trained that year.” Across sub-Saharan Africa, “more than 11 million children under the age of 15 have lost at least one parent to HIV/AIDS”. The report points out that “Their opportunities to learn are often curtailed by the need to care for sick family members or contribute to household income.”

The Report presents case studies from 11 countries (**Bangladesh, Brazil, Canada, Chile, Cuba, Egypt, Finland, Republic of Korea, Senegal, South Africa and Sri Lanka**) showing how both rich and developing nations are tackling the quality issue.

It also proposes a series of policy measures to improve the quality of education, emphasizing that although “there are no universal recipes, a robust long-term vision for education, strong government leadership and a motivated, well-supported teaching corps are conditions for successful qualitative reforms.”

The international community has a crucial role to play in supporting this process. Presently, international aid to basic education is estimated to be around *US\$ 1.5 bn* per year. Recent pledges may increase this amount by an additional *US\$ 2.0 bn* per year over the next few years, but this figure still falls far short of the estimated additional *US\$ 5.6 bn* per year required for achieving universal primary education by 2015.'

The Education for All Global Monitoring Report is prepared by an independent international team based at UNESCO Headquarters in Paris (France). It is part of the follow-up to the World Education Forum held in Dakar, Senegal, in April 2000, and benefits from the advice of an international editorial board. It is funded by UNESCO and a number of bilateral agencies. Its findings will serve as the basis for discussions at the Fourth High-Level Group Meeting on Education for All (Brasilia, November 8-10). This small, flexible group comprising high-level leaders from governments and civil society in developing and developed countries, plus UN agencies and other international organizations, serves as a lever for political commitment and technical and financial resource mobilisation for EFA. Informed by the Global Monitoring Report, it also provides an opportunity to hold the global community to account for commitments made at the Dakar Forum.

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\*Over 160 countries attending the World Education Forum (Dakar, Senegal, 2000) pledged to achieve by 2015:

1. wider access to early childhood care and education;
2. universal primary education;
3. improved youth and adult learning opportunities;
4. a 50 percent improvement in adult literacy rates;
5. gender equality;
6. an improvement in all aspects of the quality of education.

The full version of the *EFA Global Monitoring Report 2005: The Quality Imperative* is available in PDF at: [www.efareport.unesco.org](http://www.efareport.unesco.org) For more information on Education For All: [www.unesco.org/education/efa](http://www.unesco.org/education/efa)

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