Forum: UNICEF

Issue #UF-01: Promoting and including diversity in schools

Student Officer: Antonella Francolino

Position: Deputy President of UNICEF

Introduction

Promoting and including diversity in schools has been one of the main objectives of the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF), in view of the problems children from all around the world face when attending, or attempting to attend, educational institutions. These challenges arise from gender, poverty, geographical location, ethnic discrimination, disabilities, and sexuality, among others, all of which increase the probability of children having restricted access to education and facing harassment when at school. UNICEF has to work with various organizations, governments, and educators to ensure children's right to become students and learn in an inclusive environment, guaranteeing equity to those with higher chances of being left behind.

Definition of Key Terms

Diversity

'The fact of there being people of many different groups in society, within an organization, etc.' Cambridge.

Equity

'The allocation of different resources and opportunities to individuals in order to reach an equal outcome among them.' Lopez Diana (2021, April 12).

Equality

'Providing each individual or group of people the same resources or opportunities.' Lopez Diana (2021, April 12).

Issue Overview

Above all, to promote and include diversity in schools it is essential that every child is treated with equity, in spite of their religion, disabilities, economic situation, gender identity, ethnicity, caste, and migration or displacement status. Therefore, all of them must be able to attend education centers and learn in a harmless environment.

Historical Background

Currently, the number of children enrolled in schools is the largest in history, with 87 percent of children attending primary school as of 2019. However, these education centers fail in teaching students due to the lack of qualified teaching staff, resources, and poor infrastructure. Moreover, the personal circumstances of each student may not allow them to pay attention in class, damaging their capacity of learning.

Gender and Sexuality

There are still numerous countries where gender equality has not been achieved. For instance, this can be appreciated through schools, since primary schools in 51% of these nations, lower secondary schools in 58% of these countries and higher secondary schools in 76% of these countries do not treat girls and boys with equity. Girls are oftentimes unable to attend school on account of child marriage, gender violence, and poverty, among other factors. Moreover, male education is generally prioritized in low-income families, explaining how almost 1 in 4 girls between 15 and 19 are uneducated, whereas that figure is 1 in 10 for boys. Nonetheless, stereotypical gender roles lead boys to abandon school and start working or participating in crime groups more than girls. Thus, not including and involving boys when changing and teaching positive gender norms boosts the problems. Furthermore, teachers and educational material may promote discriminating attitudes towards women, harming their mental health and pupilage. Worldwide, 129 million girls do not attend school, and girls in conflict areas are twice less likely to receive an education.[1]

An educational system that promotes gender equity reduces gender violence in schools and harmful practices. Therefore, it provides children with valuable skills for life, that is to say, empathy and open mindedness ensuring their incorporation in society.

Furthermore, children that do not identify themselves with the traditional genders and sexual orientations are placed in a difficult and vulnerable position by most parts of society. The discrimination and marginalization they face could create an intergenerational cycle if the right measures are not taken. Nowadays, it can be clearly seen how non-traditional genders and various sexual orientations are being bullied and excluded, for instance in sexual education workshops. As a result, children may be scared of expressing themselves authentically, which can lead to depression and other mental issues, which consequently may disturb their academic and social performance. The only way to change this is by a deep transformation in how and what schools teach.

[1] Appendix I

This is of extreme importance because, above all, we are humans, so people's gender should not define how they are treated. We all must respect one another.

Low resource families

Around the world, about a billion children are multidimensionally poor which implies they are in shortage of basic needs, depriving them of education. Children from low resource households are five times more likely to sidestep school than children from richer households. Before Coronavirus, 48% of children were 'learning poor'[2], meaning that nearly half of the world's children around the age of 10 were already unable to read a simple text before the pandemic, 90% of which came from low-income countries. (World Bank, 2019). This figure is expected to increase to 58% (Azevedo, 2020). More than two-thirds of students could not access virtual learning due to a lack of electricity and digital devices, disproportionately affecting low-income children (UNICEF and International Telecommunication Union, 2020) .

Ethnicity and geographic zone

Nowadays, more countries are in conflict than in the past thirty years. Education has been threatened in 93 countries between 2015 and 2019. 'An estimated 35 million children around the world have been forcibly displaced. Nearly half of school-age refugee children are out of school.'[3] Migrant children are frequently involved in a worrying amount of challenges, which begin in their hometown, follow them in their journey, and continue in their new home. These arise from the unsafe and unregulated places they travel through. Thereupon, they lose access to education, and, generally, it is complicated for them to adapt to a new community, trying to learn a new language and habits. [4] As a matter of fact, 27 million children do not attend school in conflict areas.

Moreover, children from the countryside have more than twice as many chances of not going to education centers than urban children. Owing to the long distance and the absence or precarious means of transport provided to arrive at school, which in many cases is not prioritized because kids are needed to work.

Furthermore, in certain nations where natural catastrophes are common, children are even more likely to miss school. During this crisis the critical situation of many families aggravates, education centers structure may get destroyed, as well as the paths to schools. Ergo, it can be inferred that geographic locations have a remarkable impact on children's capacity to attend school, conditioning the ability of schools to achieve diversity.

---

[2] World Bank Group. (2020, March 04). Learning Poverty. Retrieved from
http://worldbank.org/en/topic/education/brief/learning-poverty#
[3] Education in emergencies. (2020, April 28). Retrieved from
https://www.unicef.org/education/emergencies
[4] Appendix III

Disabilities

Children with disabilities can suffer discrimination in several ways. This can be seen by the lack of disability-friendly infrastructure and poor inclusivity in the education system. The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities establishes that 'States Parties shall take all necessary measures to ensure the full enjoyment by children with disabilities of all human rights and fundamental freedoms on an equal basis with other children.', and emphasizes the relevance of 'guarantee[ing] an inclusive education system at all levels and lifelong learning' (CRPD, 2020, April 30).

Latest Events

Covid-19

The pandemic brought forth school closures, aggravating the existing learning disparities within and among countries, mostly because of uneven access to technology. The most affected region was Latin America and the Caribbean, with 80% of school time interrupted because of full educational centers shutdown, followed by South Asia, where the loss was about 57% for the same reason, meanwhile the Middle East and North Africa lost 51%. Records from The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), 'estimated more than 55 million students are affected by school closures in 14 countries, without any in-person learning' [5]

Major Parties Involved

UNICEF

'Children should be safe from violence and be able to grow up. They shouldn't have to miss school. They shouldn't be discriminated against because of where they come from.' [6] . UNICEF strives for children's access to an innovative, solid and useful education system regardless of their gender, capacities, economic status, and social circumstances. 'The potential of education is irrefutable. It is where children learn about the world, their interests, and their capabilities. Education can reinforce existing norms or challenge and transform them, not just for children, but for their parents, communities, and nations.'[7]

---

[5] Appendix V
[6] Migrant and displaced children. (n.d.). Retrieved from
https://www.unicef.org/migrant-refugee-internally-displaced-children?964201@=
[7] Author UNICEF, & Unicef. (2021, December 01). Gender Transformative Education. Retrieved from
https://www.unicef.org/reports/gender-transformative-education

Timeline of Events

Date	Description of Event
December 11th, 1946	The UN General Assembly initiated UNICEF.
November 20th, 1959	The UN GA adopts the Declaration of the Rights of the Child, which recognizes, among other rights, children's rights to education.
November 20th, 1989	International leaders agreed to commit to the world's children by adopting the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.
September 25th, 2015	The UN GA set up the Sustainable Development Goals to be accomplished from 2016 to 2030

Relevant UN Treaties and Events

In 1995, the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action was signed, being the most comprehensive policy for gender equality. Since then, the progress achieved regarding this issue has been outstanding. As an example, a significantly bigger number of girls are completing school instead of getting married or becoming mothers at a young age.

Out-of-School Children Initiative (OOSCI), with the help of UNICEF and UNESCO Institute for Statistics, increases the number of children in school after identifying obstacles in policies and programs and making recommendations to arrange and avoid these problems. More than 90 countries follow this initiative by upgrading their educational plans.

Attacks on schools have increased on a disturbing scale. With this in mind, the Security Council decided to add the right to be educated safely and peacefully to the human rights list. Thereafter, the Security Council resolution on children and armed conflict from 29 October 2021 (S/RES/2601)[8] was approved, being the first one absolutely dedicated to the protection of schools.

---

[8] Appendix V

Past Action

Plan International, Transform Education, United Nations Girls' Education Initiative (UNGEI) and UNICEF Education are highlighting the importance of Gender Transformative Education. This program 'utilizes all parts of an education system to transform stereotypes, attitudes, norms and practices by challenging power relations, rethinking gender norms and binaries, and raising critical consciousness about the root causes of inequality and systems of oppression.'[9] It has shown its potential to improve communal relations by guiding children towards a more open-minded and inclusive perspective.

In several countries, social protection is enforced and expanded by UNICEF to children who are particularly in greater danger of exclusion and discrimination, through the supply of everyday resources, with education being understood as one. This includes supporting the development of national programs which ensures every family has access to education and well being, even during humanitarian emergencies. Although it can not be denied UNICE's support is extremely helpful, the organization cannot provide all the resources needed to help every child in the world. Sometimes, the only assistance it can provide is the recollection of data and giving recommendations. Even though they are paramount in child safety, it still leaves significant action in the hands of each nation, which in many cases does not take children's education as a priority.

UNICEF also became extremely involved in education during the pandemic to ensure that every child could continue learning, even if that entails technological devices. For instance, it developed the 'Learning Passport', a global platform launched with Microsoft to support children affected by COVID-19 to continue studying at home. This development had incredible benefits for children who would have normally experienced difficulties accessing academic resources during the pandemic. Hence it helps maintain diversity in the classrooms.

---

[9] Author UNICEF, & Unicef. (2021, December 01). Gender Transformative Education. Retrieved from https://www.unicef.org/reports/gender-transformative-education

Possible Solutions

As revealed by this report, there are still many issues which need to be eradicated in order to achieve diversity in schools, which would not only benefit children but society as a whole.

A possible solution could be creating school programs that promote inclusion and diversity, such as extracurricular activities ranging from arts to sports. With such, students would be able to generate bonds with their peers and create a sense of community between them. Additionally, schools could reinvent their curricula to include gender identity and sexual orientations, disabilities, and different socioeconomic backgrounds in a way that is respectful yet informative. They may also decide to tackle traditionally taboo issues, such as sexual education, providing students with more tools when facing such situations in the future.

Another aspect to take into account is to improve the infrastructure of education centers, as well as the accessibility of its facilities for any child, such as providing ramps and inclusive bathrooms. Schools should acknowledge different disabilities and ensure they are capable of adapting their teaching for these students.

It is also important to provide school access to all students no matter their geographical location, therefore fomenting the development of schools in remote areas. Improving pre-existing road infrastructure and public transport lines to schools is also crucial. Access to technology is also key in connecting remote students to teachers, and, not only that, but may foment intercultural relationships with people from other nations and/or regions, which is proven to increase children's open-mindedness.

Lastly, the successful and adequate preparation of educators and school staff is essential as they must keep track of children and inform their families of their progress. They should adapt their way of teaching in order to ensure every child learns with equity.

Bibliography

Gender equality. (n.d.). Retrieved from https://www.unicef.org/gender-equality

Girls' education. (2020, January 19). Retrieved from
https://www.unicef.org/education/girls-education

Author UNICEF, & Unicef. (2021, December 01). Gender Transformative Education. Retrieved from https://www.unicef.org/reports/gender-transformative-education

Education. (n.d.). Retrieved from https://www.unicef.org/education

Education in emergencies. (2020, April 28). Retrieved from
https://www.unicef.org/education/emergencies

World Bank Group. (2020, March 04). Learning Poverty. Retrieved from
http://worldbank.org/en/topic/education/brief/learning-poverty#

Child poverty. (2021, December 08). Retrieved from
https://www.unicef.org/social-policy/child-poverty

Migrant and displaced children. (n.d.). Retrieved from
https://www.unicef.org/migrant-refugee-internally-displaced-children?964201@=

Social policy. (2021, December 08). Retrieved from https://www.unicef.org/social-policy

Education. (2020, April 30). Retrieved from https://sites.unicef.org/disabilities/index_65316.html

Author UNICEF, & Unicef. (2021, December 01). Digital Learning for Every Child. Retrieved
from https://www.unicef.org/reports/digital-learning-every-child

Author UNICEF, & Unicef. (2021, December 01). Preventing a lost decade. Retrieved from
https://www.unicef.org/reports/unicef-75-preventing-a-lost-decade

Keeping the world's children learning through COVID-19. (2020, April 20). Retrieved from
https://www.unicef.org/coronavirus/keeping-worlds-children-learning-through-covid-19

History of child rights. (n.d.). Retrieved from
https://www.unicef.org/child-rights-convention/history-child-rights

Security Council adopts 'first of its kind' resolution on protecting classrooms from conflict || UN
News. (n.d.). Retrieved from https://news.un.org/en/story/2021/10/1104482

Strengthening education systems and innovation. (n.d.). Retrieved from
https://www.unicef.org/education/strengthening-education-systems-innovation
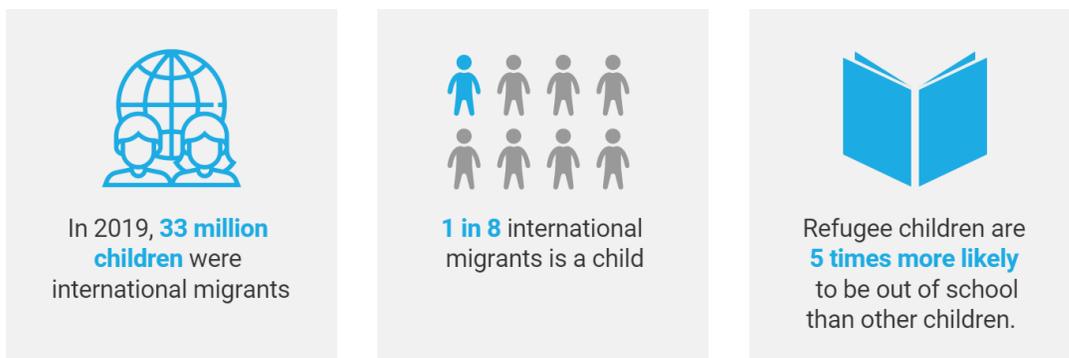
Appendix or Appendices

Appendix I - Comparison diagram form UNICEF
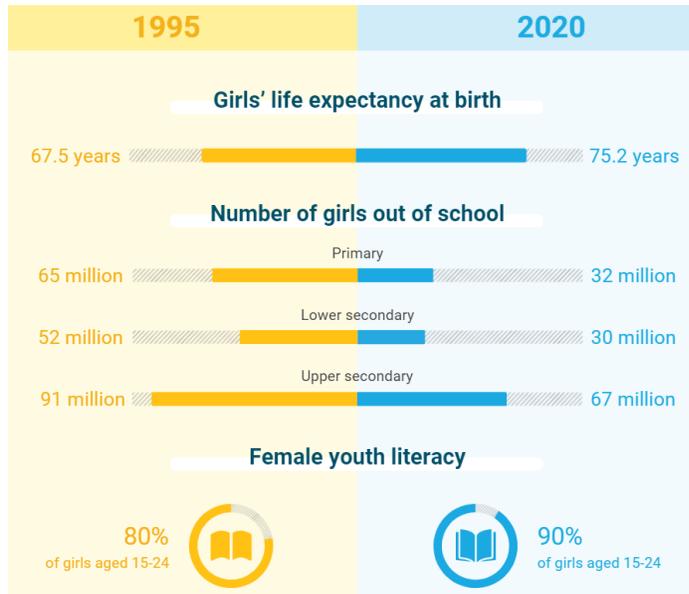
Appendix II - UNICEF inclusive program

Author UNICEF, & Unicef. (2021, December 01). Gender Transformative Education. Retrieved from https://www.unicef.org/reports/gender-transformative-education

Appendix III - Refugee children data
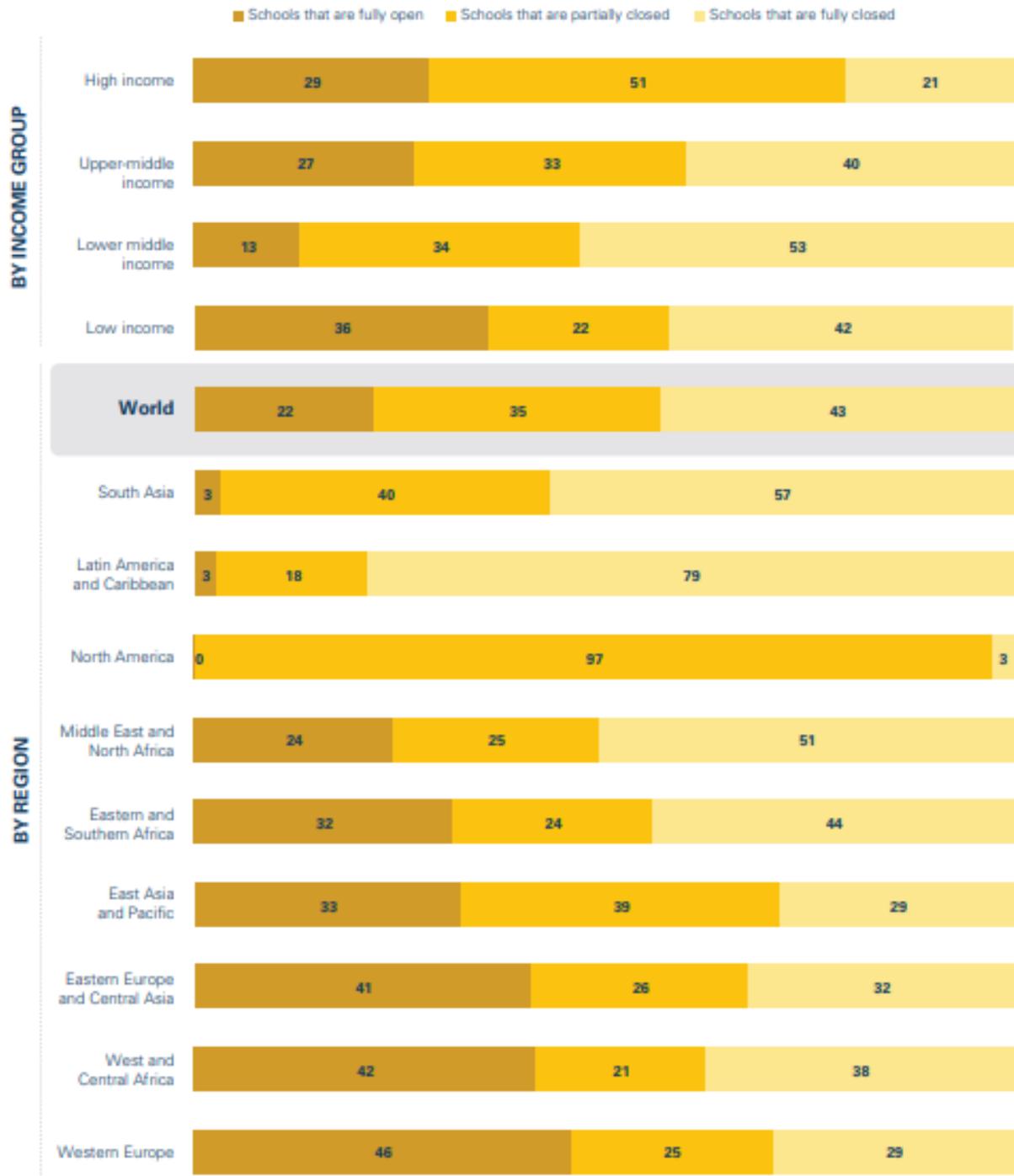

Appendix IV -

Save the Children (2002) Schools for All Including disabled children in education http://www.eenet.org.uk/resources/docs/schools_for_all.pdf

UNICEF (2012) The right of children with disabilities to education: A rights-based approach to Inclusive Education

https://sites.unicef.org/disabilities/files/UNICEF_Right_to_Education_Children_Disabilities_En_Web.pdf

Appendix V - Comparison graph regarding school closure depending on countries income

FIGURE 3   **A higher percentage of in-person instruction time was disrupted by full school closures in low- and lower-middle-income countries**

Legend: ■ Schools that are fully open   ■ Schools that are partially closed   ■ Schools that are fully closed

BY INCOME GROUP

	Fully open	Partially closed	Fully closed
High income	29	51	21
Upper-middle income	27	33	40
Lower middle income	13	34	53
Low income	36	22	42
World	22	35	43

BY REGION

	Fully open	Partially closed	Fully closed
South Asia	3	40	57
Latin America and Caribbean	3	18	79
North America	0	97	3
Middle East and North Africa	24	25	51
Eastern and Southern Africa	32	24	44
East Asia and Pacific	33	39	29
Eastern Europe and Central Asia	41	26	32
West and Central Africa	42	21	38
Western Europe	46	25	29

Percentage of in-person instruction time disrupted by school closures over the first year of the pandemic (11 March 2020 – 11 March 2021)

Note: Schools are considered 'fully closed' if the closures institutionalized by the governments affect at least 70 per cent of the students (in pre-primary through upper secondary education) in a country; subnational school closures affecting a smaller share of students are considered as partial.

Appendix VI - Security Council resolution on children and armed conflict, 29 October 2021 (S/RES/2601)

Security Council resolution 2601 (2021) [on children and armed conflict]. (n.d.). Retrieved from https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/3946523?ln