

Goal 2

Achieve universal primary education

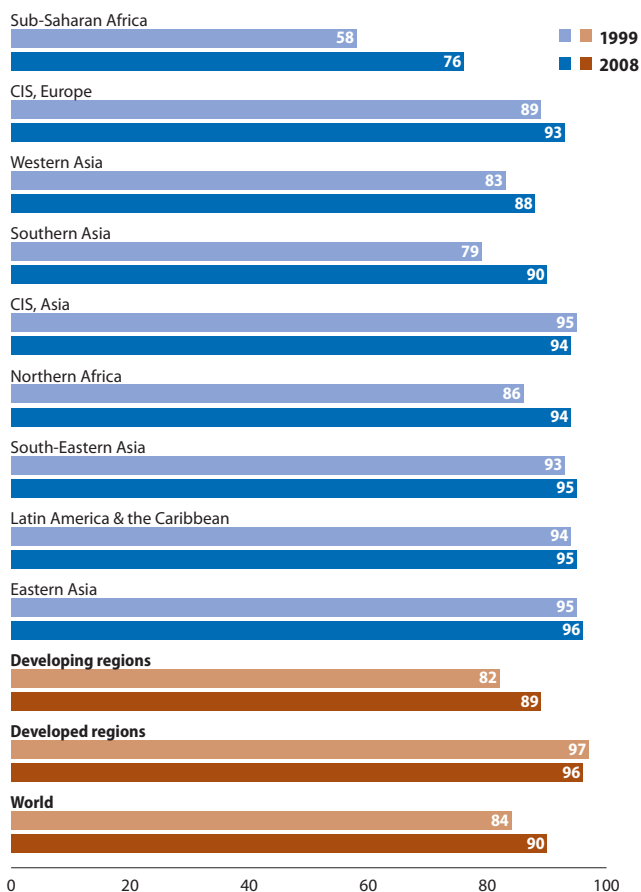


TARGET

Ensure that, by 2015, children everywhere, boys and girls alike, will be able to complete a full course of primary schooling

Hope dims for universal education by 2015, even as many poor countries make tremendous strides

Adjusted net enrolment ratio in primary education,* 1998/1999 and 2007/2008 (Percentage)



* Defined as the number of pupils of the theoretical school age for primary education enrolled in either primary or secondary school, expressed as a percentage of the total population in that age group.

Note: Data for Oceania are not available.

Enrolment in primary education has continued to rise, reaching 89 per cent in the developing world. But the pace of progress is insufficient to ensure that, by 2015, all girls and boys complete a full course of primary schooling.

To achieve the goal by the target date, all children at the official entry age for primary school would have had to be attending classes by 2009 or so, depending on the duration of the primary level and how well schools retain pupils to the end of the cycle. But in half of the sub-Saharan African countries with available data, at least one in four children of primary-school age were out of school in 2008.

To meet the goal, countries will also need to ensure that there are enough teachers and classrooms to meet the demand. Between now and 2015, the number of new teachers needed in sub-Saharan Africa alone equals the current teaching force in the region.

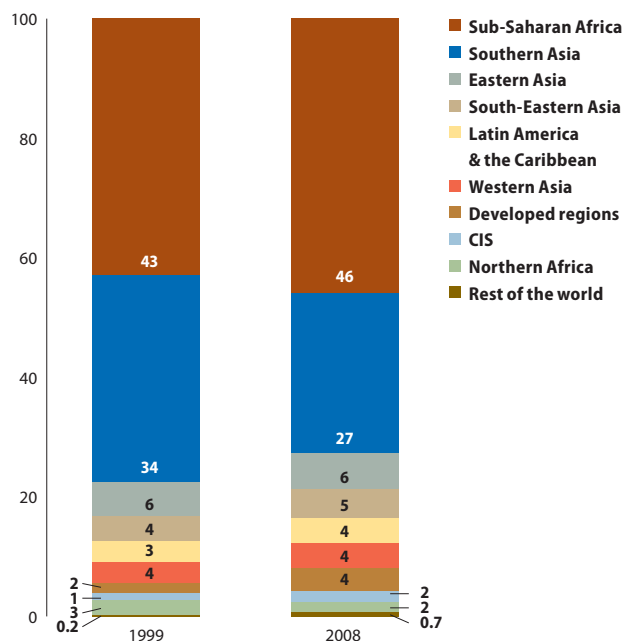
Despite these challenges, a good deal has been accomplished in many regions. Though enrolment in sub-Saharan Africa remains the lowest of all regions, it still increased by 18 percentage points—from 58 per cent to 76 per cent—between 1999 and 2008. Progress was also made in Southern Asia and Northern Africa, where enrolment increased by 11 and 8 percentage points, respectively, over the last decade.

Major advances have been made even in some of the poorest countries, most of them in sub-Saharan Africa. The abolition of primary school fees in Burundi resulted in a threefold increase in primary-school enrolment since 1999, reaching 99 per cent in 2008. Similarly, the United Republic of Tanzania doubled its enrolment ratio over the same period. Guatemala, Nicaragua and Zambia also broke through the 90 per cent threshold towards greater access to primary education.

Getting children into school is a vital first step. But to receive the full benefits of education, they must continue to attend classes. In half the countries in sub-Saharan Africa with available data, more than 30 per cent of primary-school students drop out before reaching the final grade.

Sub-Saharan Africa and Southern Asia are home to the vast majority of children out of school

Distribution of out-of-school children by region, 1999 and 2008 (Percentage)

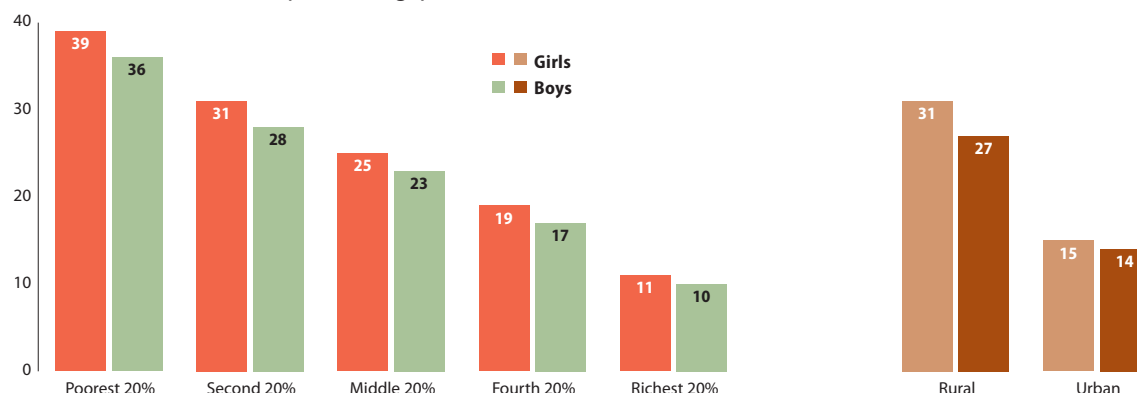


Even as the number of school-age children continues to rise, the total number of children out of school is decreasing—from 106 million in 1999 to 69 million in 2008. Almost half of these children (31 million) are in sub-Saharan Africa, and more than a quarter (18 million) are in Southern Asia.

The gender gap in the out-of-school population has also narrowed: the share of girls in this group decreased from 57 per cent to 53 per cent globally between 1999 and 2008. In some regions, however, the share is much larger; in Northern Africa, 66 per cent of out-of-school children are girls.

Inequality thwarts progress towards universal education

Out-of-school children by wealth quintile and area of residence, girls and boys, 42 countries, 2000/2008 (Percentage)



Household data from 42 countries show that rural children are twice as likely to be out of school as children living in urban areas. The data also show that the rural-urban gap is slightly wider for girls than for boys. But the biggest obstacle to education is poverty. Girls in the poorest 20 per cent of households have the least chance of getting an education: they are 3.5 times more likely to be out of school than girls in the richest households and four times more likely to be out of school as boys in the richest households. Boys from the richest households are the least likely to be out of school (10 per cent), compared to all other groups.

Children remain out of school for a variety of reasons, including cost. Social and cultural

barriers to education are also common. In many countries, educating girls is widely perceived as being of less value than educating boys. And children with disabilities across the world face far more limited opportunities than their non-disabled peers.

The link between disability and marginalization in education is evident in countries at all levels of development. In Malawi and the United Republic of Tanzania, being disabled doubles the probability that a child will never attend school, and in Burkina Faso the risk rises to two and a half times. Even in some countries that are closer to achieving the goal of universal primary education, children with disabilities represent the majority of those who are excluded. In Bulgaria and Romania, net enrolment ratios for children aged 7 to 15 were over 90 per cent in 2002, but only 58 per cent for children with disabilities.

