



BACKGROUND PAPER:

United Nations Development Programme
Ensuring Access to Education

Introduction:

Access to education remains a serious challenge that affects millions of children worldwide, limiting their opportunities for personal growth and future livelihoods. Barriers to education can be economic, social, or structural, which can range from poverty and lack of infrastructure, to discrimination based on gender, or disability. These obstacles often force children to drop out of school, attend irregularly, or never enroll at all, robbing them of the chance to develop essential skills.

In its most severe forms, lack of access to education can perpetuate cycles of poverty and inequality, leaving children especially vulnerable to exploitation or instability. In some regions, conflict and displacement prevent entire generations from attending school, while in others, inadequate resources mean classrooms are overcrowded, and teachers are under-trained. The consequences of these educational gaps are long-lasting, undermining not only a child's academic development, but their social, and mental development too.

Background & History:

Access to education has been long influenced by broader economic and social conditions. During the Industrial Revolution, many children were unable to attend school because of economic necessities that forced families to prioritize working, rather than learning. Over time, international efforts have increasingly recognized education as a fundamental human right. Today, the global community views access to free, safe, quality education as an essential to protecting children's rights, and enabling their full potential.

Some significant milestones aimed to solve the problem include the passage of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) in 1989, Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG4) in 2015, and the passage of the Global Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications in Higher Education (UNESCO) in 2019. These achievements have created a pathway for attempts to ensure the youth are educated. However, limited progress has been made, especially in lower income countries in sub-Saharan Africa.

Current Status & The Problem:

Despite steady progress in recent decades, gains in education have been slower than required to meet international targets. Even prior to the COVID-19 Pandemic, improvements in learning rates and proficiency were limited, however, the pandemic only further stunted progress, and reversed hard-won advances. As of 2023, an estimated 272 Million children and youth remain out of school, over a 3% increase from 2015, with the majority concentrated in low income countries.

In 2019, only 58% of children achieved minimum reading proficiency, and just 44% achieved minimum mathematics scores by the end of primary school. These children face heightened risks of falling further behind as they progress through higher levels of education, with cumulative learning gaps often resulting in early dropouts. The consequences extend beyond individual futures—limited educational attainment curbs economic growth, undermines social stability, and perpetuates cycles of poverty. Without urgent interventions, current trends suggest that millions of children will be unable to acquire the foundational skills necessary to thrive in the 21st-century workforce, leaving the global community far from meeting the Sustainable Development Goal of inclusive and equitable quality education for all.

Committee Mission:

The mission of The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) is to produce comprehensive plans and strategies aimed at providing more access to education, and aimed at achieving universal access to quality higher education. Key areas of focus for the committee include but are not limited to:

- Recognizing education as a universal human right and a global public good.
- Collaborating with international organizations, governments, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and civil society to implement coordinated, effective solutions.
- Raising awareness of the gender divide when it comes to education, and providing gender equality in education.
- Recognizing the impact the lack of available education has on the economy, culture, and society itself.
- Responding to modern global challenges such as conflict, global warming, and the digital revolution.

Questions to Consider:

1. How can the international community better send and show support for developing nations focused on providing quality education?
2. How can expanding access to quality education help eliminate gender and wealth disparities?
3. What changes to education systems already in place are needed in order to support long term success?
4. How can nations be better held accountable for developing vocational training and higher education opportunities?
5. What barriers prevent students of color, with disabilities, and students from low-income backgrounds from accessing education?

Additional Research:

Delegates are encouraged and recommended to look into the Sustainable Development Goals in order to formulate comprehensive plans for delivering on Goal 4. It may be useful to understand the current policies nations have in place for the expansion of education, as well as future plans for expansion. Extra information can be found by looking into separate subcommittees the UN has that deal with education, such as the UIL and the IBE. Additional research on the relationship between gender rights and education can be found in the 2030 education targets. Reliable sources for further research include the UN, The Institute for International Education, CIA World Factbook, and the NYT, as well as reputable news outlets for current developments or updates.

Sources:

<https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/education/>

<https://www.undp.org/sustainable-development-goals>

<https://www.unesco.org/en/education>

<https://www.carnegie.org/our-work/article/what-changes-us-education-system-are-needed-support-long-term-success-all-americans/>

<https://www.iie.org/>