CONFERECE REPORT

Regional Ministerial Education Conference

Including all children in quality learning

10-13 December 2013
Istanbul, Turkey

http://education-equity.org/
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Introduction

The ‘Including all children in quality learning’ Regional Ministerial Education Conference, co-organised by the Government of Turkey and the UNICEF Regional Office for Central and Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States (CEECIS) was held in Istanbul from the 10 to 13 December 2013.

The objectives of this high-level event were to: (i) launch the Call for Action “Education Equity Now! Including all children in quality learning”, (ii) provide a renewed impetus and foster greater political commitment for education equity, (iii) share good practices across the region to advance primary and secondary education participation and learning, and (iv) accelerate reforms at country level and to contribute to on-going regional discussions on the Post-2015 Development Agenda. The Conference also provided a forum for adolescents and youth to have their voice heard regarding the quality and relevance of the education they are offered. The Ministerial Conference consisted of a 2-day political segment and a 1.5 day technical segment presenting strategies for how the Call for Action can be best implemented.

A Preparatory Meeting and a Youth Forum were organised in advance of the Conference. The Preparatory Meeting, in which experts from all countries in the region participated, was held in Eskisehir, Turkey (23-24 October 2013). It aimed to discuss and validate the Call for Action. The Youth Forum took place in Istanbul (2-6 September 2013). It aimed to empower young people to effectively participate in the Ministerial Conference and resulted in the development of a Youth Statement.

The Regional Ministerial Education Conference, in line with the on-going discussions on the post-2015 agenda in education, focused on the unfinished business of MDG2. Indeed, it contributed to the shift from a purely quantitative focus on access and participation in formal education to include a greater concern for the quality and relevance of education for all children to improve learning outcomes and their social distribution. It emphasised the need for truly inclusive education systems that respond to the needs of each and every child and thus reduce exclusion. It also highlighted the necessity of broad partnerships, inter-sectoral collaboration and multi-level interventions to ensure that all children, including marginalized children and adolescents, can access education on time and complete at least a full cycle of basic education. Lastly, the Conference made the case for a renewed political commitment to inclusive and quality education and for investing smartly in an environment of limited financial resources.

This report summarises the highlights of the Conference sessions.

Conference Programme and Invited Speakers: [Web link]

Conference Agenda:  🇭🇷 English  🇹🇷 Turkish  🇷🇺 Russian

Call for Action “Education Equity Now! Including all children in quality learning”:  🇭🇷 English  🇹🇷 Turkish  🇷🇺 Russian

Presentations: [Web link]

Youth Statement on Education:  🇭🇷 English  🇹🇷 Turkish  🇷🇺 Russian

Video: “Education Equity Now!”  🎥
Day 1 and Day 2

The Call for Action:
Seeking political commitment for equity in education
Day 1

The aim of the first two days of the Conference was to set an agenda for quality basic and secondary education in the region. It focused on strengthening political commitments toward effective reforms for improving equity in education access and in learning.

Session 1: Welcoming Session – Official Opening of the Conference

Thank you and Welcome
H.E. Mr. Recep Tayyip Erdogan, Prime Minister, Turkey

Key note addresses
Ms. Yoka Brandt, Deputy Executive Director, UNICEF
Ms. Anna Susarenco, Youth Representative, Moldova
Mr. Qian Tang, Assistant Director-General for Education, UNESCO
H.E. Mr. Nabi Avci, Minister of National Education, Turkey

Key issues

- Investing in education is investing in the future: by including all children in higher quality and more relevant education from preschool to secondary, we invest smartly and are building stronger societies made up of resilient individuals equipped to sustain their families and livelihoods and to participate in stronger and more cohesive societies.
- Poor education quality has contributed to a cycle of disadvantage. Education must tackle social norms and behaviour change and provide learners with the necessary cognitive and non-cognitive skills that will enable them to be flexible and to adapt to an evolving 21st century.
- Education in the 21st century must harvest the potential of technology and must address the needs of young people: global citizenship and communication, reproductive health, inclusive education and employment.
- Discrimination, segregation and violence must end in schools. Rather, schools must focus on nurturing learning through flexible learning spaces and engaging and responsive teaching practices.
- The Post-2015 education agenda must learn the lessons from the past 15 years, be ambitious and focus on reducing education inequities and improving education outcomes for children, including learning outcomes.
- The Call for Action provides a useful framework to tackle these issues now.

Session 1: Summaries of addresses and presentations

H.E. Mr. Recep Tayyip Erdogan, Prime Minister, Turkey (read statement)

A warm welcome to Conference participants. Including all children in quality learning is of critical importance, particularly as the crisis has been negatively impacting on nations’ expenditures. Turkey has committed to investing in education and has undertaken a range of reforms and projects, from Girls’ Education Campaigns to free textbooks, from remedial classrooms to piloting the provision of tablets.
with educational content to all students (FATIH project). A closing wish for all participants to have a fruitful Conference.

**Ms. Yoka Brandt, Deputy Executive Director, UNICEF**

With 57 million children out of school globally and 250 million who cannot read or write after 4 years in primary school, the post-2015 agenda education goal must go beyond access to encompass equity and learning from preschool to secondary education. UNICEF aspires to work harder, invest smarter and evaluate better to live up to the promises of the millennium development goals and will focus on 3 priority areas: equity, learning and innovation. Education is positively correlated with better health and nutrition, lower fertility, higher income access, better individual well being and stronger nations. There is a cost of not reaching the most vulnerable today as later costs will far exceed what we would pay now. Addressing learning achievement is long due as poor education quality has contributed to a cycle of disadvantage. To meet the challenges of the evolving 21st century, education has to be innovative, to contribute to social norms and behaviours’ change and to harvest the potential of technology to nurture the learning process. Ambition is needed to change education and to secure results for children.

**Ms. Anna Susarenco, Youth Representative, Moldova**

Most of us had a childhood connected to school, usually associated with positive memories. But schools can also be a place of discrimination, intimidation and violence and some young people do not have school memories because they have never been to school, have dropped out or have stayed at home due to a disability. Young people might not see education as a priority as they have often no hope to enter the job market. Young people today want to learn about technologies, foreign languages, and sexual and reproductive health. They want education systems to be inclusive, job-related and to prepare them for global citizenship. Young people are ready to partner with decision-makers and organisations and they will make also sure that promises and commitments become a reality.

**Mr. Qian Tang, Assistant Director-General for Education, UNESCO**

The Call for Action is in line with UNESCO’s vision of education. Since Dakar in 2000, unprecedented progress in education has occurred but disparities in access, participation and learning outcomes remain, particularly for the most marginalized and remote communities, for populations in conflict zones, for girls and women, for children with disabilities and for ethnic and linguistic minorities. Education equity and quality should be the core constructs of the new Post-2015 agenda. Non-cognitive skills should also be included in the future agenda as they support lifelong learning and enable people to adapt to professional changes throughout their lives. Today’s challenge is to create a holistic system that provides equitable access to ensure that people learn better and continue to learn throughout their career in a changing world.

**H.E. Mr. Nabi Avci, Minister of National Education, Turkey**

Important steps have been taken in the region to merge forces and to exchange experiences on education improvement. The region is now committing to collective action to implement the Call for Action. Free and equal access to preschool, primary and secondary education is critical for our children and for better employment, welfare, increased social justice and solidarity. By committing to the Call for Action, governments are taking responsibilities to provide equal opportunities for all children in access and learning and are contributing to the bright future of society. There are high collective expectations for this Conference, which has the potential to shape the future of our children for the best and yield fruitful results.
**Session 2: Call for Action – Including All Children in Quality Learning**

**Chairperson:** Mr. Qian Tang, Assistant Director-General for Education, UNESCO

**Addresses:**

- **Situation of education equity in the region: Setting the stage for the Call for Action:** Ms. Marie-Pierre Poirier, UNICEF Regional Director for Central and Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States
- **Presentation of Call for Action:** H.E. Mr. Nabi Avci, Minister of National Education, Turkey
- **Presentation of the Youth Statement on Education:** Ms. Ana Maria Duminica, Youth Representative, Romania

**Key issues**

- Although the region has many good practices to share in inclusive education, drop-out prevention and identification of children out-of-school, millions of children remain out of school, do not attend preschool or pre-primary or are silently excluded from learning in the classroom. Beyond policies, there is a need for an unprecedented political commitment and support to close the education equity gap in the region.
- The Call for Action is articulated around four axes: every child in school, every child learning, every child learning early and enrolling on time, every child supported by efficient and effective governance.
- Education is critical in the post-2015 agenda. The Call for Action looks towards 2030 and aspires to secondary education and lifelong learning for all children.
- Young people have much to offer to implement the Call for Action and to improve education systems and the education experience of children and adolescents in schools and classrooms: energy, enthusiasm, experience and focus on issues that are at the heart of their preoccupations: making education systems inclusive, improving quality education, delivering health education and linking education with the world of work.
- UNICEF will support partnership building, cross-sector collaboration, technical and policy advice, data improvement and solution sharing across countries. UNICEF will keep engaging with young people and marginalized groups, including through online consultation, to give them a voice and ensure their active contribution to shaping the post-2015 education agenda and the implementation of the Call for Action.

**Session 2: Summaries of addresses and presentations**

**Ms Marie-Pierre Poirier, UNICEF Regional Director for Central and Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States**

While technical solutions are important, they only worked if backed by strong political will and commitment. In addition to children officially out-of-school, many are invisible in official data and millions who are attending education are silently excluded from learning. Children out-of-school include children who have never attended education, children who are enrolling late, children who have dropped out and children who are at risk of dropping out. As showed in the PISA 2009 results, about half of children in the region do not master basic skills in reading, maths and science and achievement gaps between the poorest and richest quintiles and between rural and urban areas are significant. The region has many good practices to share: back to school campaigns for girls, inclusion of children with
disabilities in neighbouring schools, development of national policies to prevent drop-out, monitoring systems to track out-of-school children, investment in early education, and secondary compulsory education policies. Immediate action and general commitment to a full basic education cycle from pre-primary to lower secondary education are imperative. For 2030, the aspiration should be secondary education and access to lifelong learning opportunities for all.

**H.E. Mr. Nabi Avci, Minister of National Education, Turkey**

The Call for Action: Education Equity Now! calls for all children to complete a full cycle of basic education starting from preschool, for the identification of children out-of-school or at risk of dropping out and a comprehensive answer to their needs, for all children achieving the required levels of literacy and numeracy and other necessary competencies and skills, for all children to benefit from early learning and to enrol at the age of 6 in primary education, for efficient and transparent education governance and more targeted investments. All governments and participants are encouraged to turn towards 2030 and to exceed their expectations for education.

**Ms. Ana Maria Duminica, Youth Representative, Romania**

Young people are bringing experience, ideas, energy and human resources to the education improvement debate in the region. Young people can implement small-scale, youth-led local level interventions that can bring about big changes. The Youth Statement has four priorities: inclusive education for all children, quality education, health education, and links between education and the labour market. Unfulfilled dreams have a cost. There is a need to work together and decision-makers and organisations must demonstrate that they care for young people and that they take their views and readiness to help into consideration.
**Education challenges**

**Millions of children and adolescents out of school**
- 2.5m children of primary and lower secondary school age
- 1.6m children of pre-primary school age
- 3.6m children with disabilities

**Millions of children and adolescents not learning**
- Half of 15-year-olds do not master basic skills in maths, reading and science

**Millions of children and adolescents left behind**
- 2 year learning gap
- 1 year learning gap

- Rural
- Poorest Quintile
- Richest Quintile
- Urban
Session 3: Every Child in School – Promoting Equity in Education Access and Completion

Session 3.1:  
Global concern for out of school children – Toward inclusive education and equity for the most marginalized children

Chairperson: Ms. Yoka Brandt, Deputy Executive Director, UNICEF

Key note speakers:

Human rights-based approach to achieving equity in education: Ms. Rita Izsák, Independent Expert on Minority Issues (video statement), OHCHR

The Global Out of School Children Initiative: Mr. Albert Motivans, Head of Education Statistics, UNESCO Institute of Statistics

Including every child in school: Ms. Diane Richler, Joseph P Kennedy, Jr. International Fellow

Discussants:

Ms. Mukkades Nalbant, Deputy Minister of Education, Bulgaria
Ms. Lia Gigauri, Deputy Minister of Education and Science, Georgia
Ms. Vesna Vučurović, Deputy Minister of Education, Montenegro
H.E. Mr. Remus Pricopie, Minister of Education, Romania
Ms. Tojiniso Fayzalieva Mahmadova, Deputy Minister of Education, Tajikistan

Key issues:

- Quality data and nuanced analyses are critical to understand the complex barriers to education faced by some children. Data collection instruments and integration of data sources remain a challenge and existing data sets continue to be underused by Governments in policy making and monitoring.

- The post-2015 education goal should be inclusive and address specifically the needs of children with special educational needs and children from ethnic and linguistic minorities. Truly inclusive education systems will not only better the lives of marginalized children, they will also improve the education experience of all children.

- Only intersectoral and comprehensive approaches, backed up by strong political will can
adequately address the needs of the most marginalized children and their families. Drop-out prevention strategies must be holistic and provide support to children and their families in and out of school walls.

- Good examples from the region show the importance of addressing both supply and demand sides of education. Improved equipment and material, identification and referral mechanisms for children with disabilities can only be successful in societies that are addressing the tradition of segregation and challenging social norms and attitudes towards disabilities.
- Policies that are based on robust and participatory situation analysis will yield greater results as well as policies that are including learning outcomes in their monitoring system.
- Inter-government dialogue is critical to address the many education barriers faced by migrant and refugee children in host, transition and target countries.
- Gender trends in access, participation and achievement are to be monitored and better addressed as there is an increased trend of early school leaving and underperformance among boys in some countries while girls still face barriers to access in other countries.

Session 3.1: Summaries of addresses and presentations

**Ms. Rita Izsák, Independent Expert on Minority Issues**

*Human rights-based approach to achieving equity in education* [English]

Quality data is a critical factor in ensuring access to education but there is an overreliance on UN and NGO data to the detriment of national and municipal level data. Roma are one of the most marginalized groups of the region, facing a vicious cycle of exclusion and too often attending low standard schools. It is necessary to adopt an inter-sectoral approach to simultaneously address poverty, employment, housing, health and education by merging budgets from different sectors and by strengthening coordination. There are challenges ahead, but with political will, implementation obstacles can be overcome. We need to engage with minorities to ensure their voices are heard and that they will not be left out of post-2015 development agenda.

**Mr. Albert Motivans, Head of Education Statistics, UNESCO Institute of Statistics**

*The Global Out of School Children Initiative* [English][Turkish][Russian]

As the region is trying to reach the last 5% of children, more nuanced analysis, better understanding of overlapping factors and better targeting of instruments are necessary. We need to better understand the composition of out-of-school children in the region, their characteristics and situations, including outside the school. Existing data is too often underused by governments in policy making, but we also lack instruments that would enable collection of data over time. Existing data sources are also weak when it comes to capturing information about specific groups such as linguistic minorities, specific education provision such as non-formal education and community-based education (e.g. preschool) and learning. The biggest challenge of tomorrow is how to integrate data from different systems and sources – a challenge that the Scandinavians have risen to, resulting in less data collection in these countries.

**Ms. Diane Richler, Joseph P Kennedy, Jr. International Fellow**

*Including every child in school*

Despite human rights international instruments, people and children with disabilities continue to face exclusion and discrimination and are not accounted for in national statistics. Stigma is still attached to disability and many other barriers to schooling and learning remain for children with disabilities. The level of inclusion of children with disabilities is an indicator of the quality of education systems. This can be
seen through flexible curricula, formative assessment, parental involvement, differentiated instruction and teacher training on inclusive practices. As long as children with disabilities cannot access their local school, MDG 2 will not be realised and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with disabilities not fulfilled. A transformative shift and a commitment to leave no-one behind are long due. The Call for Action calls for transformative education systems with universal learning design and resources allocated to inclusive mainstream schools that would benefit all children. Ministers should make sure that the education goal for post-2015 will be inclusive.

H.E. Mr. Remus Pricopie, Minister of Education, Romania

**Question:** What initiatives in the area of inclusive education and equity have proven to be effective in recent years in the Romanian education system?

**Answer:** Despite the small percentage of children out of school in Romania (0.2-0.4%), the situation faced by these children is complex and the drop-out rate is high (16%-18%). Most children drop out from school between Grade 8 and Grade 9, possibly because of the lack of appropriate vocational education. Several solutions are currently being implemented to address the issue, such as improving infrastructure and school transport, developing teacher deployment policies and adequate incentives, making one year of pre-primary compulsory (in 2015) to reach the last 2% of children not benefitting from preschool, targeting financial support for families, improving school and home communication, and measuring performance before the end of Grade 8 in order to address learning issues before it is too late. Policy development and implementation must build on sound situation analysis, public participation and political support.

Ms. Mukkades Nalbant, Deputy Minister of Education, Bulgaria

**Question:** How has your country approached closing equity gaps in education for the most marginalized children?

**Answer:** Implementing multiple policies is important, as well as ensuring that they include protection mechanisms for minorities, such as Roma. The Education Policy Reform adopted by Bulgaria in 2008 makes provision for Education Coordination Centres that identify children at risk and implement education and support activities. Current education strategies are also focusing on interaction with youngsters, after school activities and drop-out prevention. Under the National Education Strategy, a specific budget is allocated to drop-out prevention and back to school interventions, including free textbooks, school meals, and school transport.

Ms. Vesna Vučurović, Deputy Minister of Education, Montenegro

**Question:** What policies have proven successful in your experience in making education more inclusive of children with disabilities and changing social norms and attitudes towards disability?

**Answer:** Under the framework of the Strategy for Inclusive Education (2008-2013), children grow up in their families and attend mainstream education to the extent possible. To support this, local commissions have been set up for assessment and referral, teachers have been trained on inclusive education and mobile support teams have been set up. Former special schools are being transformed into resource centres, providing professional support to teachers and parents. Textbooks are available in Braille and are now being audio recorded while national exams are being adjusted for children with special educational needs. Individual Education Plans are used throughout the education system, including in vocational education. The Campaign "It’s About Ability", which gathered together a wide variety of actors from education to the private sector, increased the general public awareness about the rights of children with disabilities and resulted after three years in significant attitudinal change.
**Ms. Lia Gigauri, Deputy Minister of Education and Science, Georgia**

**Question:** What role does data play in promoting education equity? How does your country approach collecting education data concerning the most marginalized children?

**Answer:** Georgia has been moving the education quality agenda forward since the 1990s but the legacy of Soviet times, for example the tradition of segregation is a key challenge. Producing accurate data on out-of-school children is also a challenge due to the need to include both drop-out data and data on children who never attended school. The EMIS system is currently being strengthened through the inclusion of indicators pertaining to out-of-school children, including those children who are invisible or semi-invisible in national statistics or who are at risk of dropping out. Vertical and horizontal collaboration and information sharing to improve data collection on marginalized children are key in the process.

**Ms. Tojiniso Fayzaliyevna Mahmadova, Deputy Minister of Education, Tajikistan**

**Question:** What barriers hinder access to inclusive education for all children in Tajikistan? What measures is the Government of Tajikistan taking to ensure an equitable approach in providing basic education?

**Answer:** Tajikistan has been ensuring that all children have equal access to education through amending the regulatory framework, expanding the school network, rehabilitating boarding schools and multiplying inclusive education seminars. In addition, targeted projects to support girls’ education and other disadvantaged groups and on-going efforts to improve teaching and learning in school contribute to quality education. There is a need however to better track out-of-school children within the education system.
Session 3.2
Adolescents, equity and upper secondary education

Chairperson: Ms. Josephine Bourne, Associate Director, Education, UNICEF

Key note speakers:

Ending Early School Leaving:

- Mr. João Delgado, Head of Unit for School Education Policy, Comenius Programme, European Commission, DG Education and Culture
- Mr. Fred Voncken, Director Early School Leaving, Ministry of Education, The Netherlands

Discussants:

Mr. Jeyhun Bayramov, Deputy Minister of Education, Azerbaijan

Mr. Salih Çelik, Deputy Under-Secretary, Ministry of National Education, Turkey

Key issues:

- Drop-out and early school leaving have individual, economic and social costs. There is an economic saving argument in taking early school leaving seriously.
- In addition to individual and family factors, drop-out is also affected by school practices, so-called “push factors”, including the attitudes and behaviour of education staff towards certain groups of children. Due to the complex nature of drop-out, policies must be comprehensive, evidence based and multi-sector. Strong monitoring mechanisms based on robust data will show when policies are successful.
- Prevention is critical: intervening early in the life of the child is cheaper and more effective. This does not mean that later interventions (such as child and family support when drop-out occurs) and compensation measures (such as non-formal education provision) do not have a role to play, but they are more complex to implement and more expensive.
- Diversifying education pathways particularly in upper-secondary is of critical importance in encouraging retention. Quality vocational education provision with bridges between education pathways is also important.
- Ambition and leadership are necessary to embark on drop-out prevention and response as demonstrated in the number of countries extending the length of their compulsory education or in the outcome-based financing strategy adopted in the Netherlands.

Session 3.2: Summaries of addresses and presentations

Mr. João Delgado, Head of Unit for School Education Policy, Comenius Programme, European Commission, DG Education and Culture

Reducing early school leaving to under 10% is a 2020 priority for the EU. Early school leavers (usually boys, disadvantaged background and minority students) are more likely to be unemployed, poor, socially excluded and dependent on social support systems. Policy recommendations were published in 2011 to support the work of Member States. They are articulated around prevention, intervention and compensation measures for early school leaving. A thematic Working Group on early school leaving is also supporting the exchange of best practices across Europe. A complex phenomenon, early school leaving requires a long term response, political commitment across government changes, and strong multi-level and cross-sector collaboration, bringing around the table representatives from Ministries and agencies of economy, employment, youth, welfare, social policies, teacher unions and students and
parents’ organisations. Integrated approaches are needed at school level where social workers, psychologists, nurses and teachers are working together. Current challenges include: (i) the lack of cross-sector evidence based comprehensive policies, (ii) the focus on intervention and compensation measures to the detriment of prevention measures such as preschool and pre-primary, early tracking, support in transition between levels of education and high quality vocational education, (iii) the weak cooperation between schools, local communities and local employers to address early school leaving, and (iv) how to better promote understanding of early school leaving among teachers so that they can support students adequately. Reducing early school leaving will remain a priority in the EU and become a core element to future national education strategies and reforms.

Mr. Fred Voncken, Director Early School Leaving, Ministry of Education, The Netherlands

Early school leaving has a cost: many early school leavers are unemployed and have five times more chance of being involved in crime. The early school leaving strategy of the Government costs 600 million Euros for a 900 million Euro benefit. Instead of focusing on strategies and tools, the approach taken by the Netherlands is to pay on results and to give each local government 2,500 Euros per child not dropping out. At the core of the approach is an online portal which captures real time data on absenteeism, truancy and early school leaving. Data can be disaggregated by regions, towns and even areas. With transparent data, local governments have no choice but to address the issue. Based on this data, a number of interventions are implemented, such as the “going back to school bus” and the “Plus schools”. Other strategies used in the Netherlands include: compulsory education until the age of 18, unique ID number for all children, comprehensive psycho-social response provided in schools. Key recommendations to other countries are: (i) be ambitious and aim for high targets; (ii) monitor implementation – if results are not following implementation there is a need to change the approach, (iii) integrate programmes in the primary running process of the school, and (iv) ensure political will in the long term to reduce early school leaving.

Mr. Jeyhun Bayramov, Deputy Minister of Education, Azerbaijan

Question: What role does the quality of education play in reducing early school leaving? What strategies have proven successful in your country for improving the quality of education?

Answer: Azerbaijan developed programmes focusing on refugees and internally displaced children. Recently, Azerbaijan started implementing a 5-pillar education quality strategy covering curricula, teachers, management, infrastructure and financing. The gradual shift towards 12 years of compulsory education has been instrumental to reducing drop-out and increasing quality. EMIS is also a critical component of transparency and results-based management. The development of parent-teacher associations and school boards has been key to enhancing meaningful community participation in school management. Capacity development of all actors from national to local level, including the private sector, is critical.

Mr. Salih Celik, Deputy Under-Secretary, Ministry of National Education, Turkey

Question: What challenges exist in upper secondary education related to early school leaving? How has your country approached these challenges?

Answer: There is a need to tackle drop-out from different angles in order to address its array of root causes. There are some common reasons for drop-out across the region such as seasonal work, the negative impact of the crisis on families’ income or gender norms that require girls to stay at home to care for family members and look after the household. Turkey embarked on a journey to increase compulsory education from 8 to 12 years and has targeted a 100% enrolment. The biggest proportion of
Turkey’s state budget has been allocated to the education sector in the last 10 years. Investing in education and increasing the education budget are necessary. It is crucial to ensure the social participation of out-of-school children and to support them economically for preventing children from dropping-out due to their socio-economic situations. Education is necessary for them to develop the skills and competences that they need for a successful transition to the labour market.
Session 4: Every Child Supported by Effective and Efficient Governance Systems
– The Multi-Dimensional Nature of Education

Panel Discussion:
Promoting collaborative governance systems and child-friendly learning environments to enhance equity in education and improve labour market outcomes

Chairperson: Ms. Monika Linn, Chief, Development Policies and Cross-Sectoral Coordination Unit, UN Economic Commission for Europe

Key note speaker:
Education financing and governance for equity: Mr. Alberto Rodriguez, Director of Education, Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia, World Bank

Discussants:
Mr. Robert Stepanyan, Head of Department of Monitoring and Development Programmes, Ministry of Education, Armenia

Mr. Vassily Budkevich, Deputy Minister of Education, Belarus

Ms. Rie Vejs-Kjeldgaard, Regional Director a.i., International Labour Organization

Ms. Sabina Glasovac, Assistant Minister and Head, Directorate for Preschool, Elementary and Secondary Education, Croatia

Mr. Yessengazy Imangaliyev, Deputy Minister of Education and Science, Kazakhstan

Key issues:
- Schools need more autonomy in the region, which goes hand in hand with increased accountability for expenditures and learning results.
- Reducing education system inefficiencies would enable redirecting savings to support quality and inclusion.
- Per capita financing is also central to performance-based financing for education. Per capita
financing formulae might have many variables to respond to country context and to adequately translate government policy focus. Formulae need piloting and adjusting. As a result the impact of per capita financing can only be seen over time. In Bulgaria, the first stage of implementation of per capita financing led to drop-out among Roma communities. The formula was consequently adjusted to mitigate this.

- While pressure and demand from the labour market emphasize the need for soft skills, education systems should keep on serving several purposes, including supporting children in mastering core skills such as literacy and numeracy but also in exploring other curriculum areas. Only a flexible curriculum that will enable people to have the skills to be trained and retrained can adequately prepare young people to undertake the jobs of tomorrow.
- School violence can negatively impact regular attendance and can contribute to drop-out. Whole-school approaches with a focus on violence prevention can result in violence-free schools. Teachers, parents, NGOs, school management and others have a key role to play in defining and applying referral protocols and building young people’s capacities to identify and deal with violence.

Session 4: Summaries of addresses and presentations

**Mr. Alberto Rodriguez, Director of Education, Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia, World Bank**

*Education financing and governance for equity*  
Companies are not getting the skills they need from their employees in the region, particularly non-cognitive social and emotional skills such as communication and presentation skills, conflict management and group working. There are three key impediments in the region. The impediment of data is partially due to the regional focus on diploma rather than learning outcomes but also due to the lack of existing tools to measure skills. The impediment of legacy refers to the Soviet legacy of central planning and bureaucratic processes, which constrain schools. The impediment of financing refers to the lack of school network rationalisation following the falling number of students. The most effective way to allocate resources to education quality was to make savings on current education expenditures and redistribute them for quality. Among the policy imperatives we find: (i) Generating data on education quality through setting up national assessment systems to monitor students’ learning from an early age; (ii) Establishing performance management by expanding school autonomy while making them accountable for the resources spent; and (iii) Creating performance-based financing by reducing system inefficiencies and ensuring that the money follows the student (per capita financing).

**Mr. Robert Stepanyan, Head of Department of Monitoring and Development Programmes, Ministry of Education, Armenia**

*Question:* Why is intersectoral collaboration important in pursing education equity? And how will ongoing reforms in your country improve inter-sectoral collaboration to that end?

*Answer:* The ongoing education reforms have maximised the cooperation between education and social services when coming to residential institutions for children with disabilities. Alongside public consultations, this has increased the quality of residential institutions. NGOs are also extremely active at local level and work hand in hand with local governments. Effective partnerships are critical in education equity.
Mr. Vassily Budkevich, Deputy Minister of Education, Belarus

**Question:** What policies, coordination mechanisms and strategies have proved effective in your country for achieving comprehensive inter-sectoral early childhood development education services?

**Answer:** Belarus has established kindergartens in rural areas to increase early learning. Belarus also has an extensive network of special schools which are free of charge. Special centres also provide support to families. Early identification mechanisms are in place and children are sent to special schools or included in special programmes when necessary. Children with special needs are also provided education in mainstream schools where possible. Cross-sector collaboration has been key to quality education improvement. The Ministries of Education, Labour and Social Protection, Internal Affairs and Emergency Situations cooperate regularly on education issues. Belarus has also implemented communication campaigns to increase awareness about social diversity.

Ms. Rie Vejs-Kjeldgaard, Regional Director a.i., International Labour Organization

**Question:** What policies promote broad access to the labour market for all those in need of decent employment, in particular youth? How can Ministries of Labour and Education in countries in the region work more closely together to improve school to work transition rates, to improve labour market outcomes and to ensure that youth leaving education have skills that match the needs of the labour market?

**Answer:** First we need to understand how education relates to the labour market. We see in the region a huge mismatch between the skills and competencies education systems equip young people with and the demand of the labour market. There are 4 million jobs not filled in the region despite a high unemployment rate. This means that our preparedness needs to be more entrepreneurial and that we must stand ready to create our own jobs and to prepare for jobs which do not yet exist. Second we need to understand where jobs are coming from. They are not the result of Ministry decisions but are linked to industrial and development policies. The two sectors that will potentially create new jobs are the green economy and the care sector. Third, we must adopt a coherent approach and look at linkages between education and the labour market from a rights-based approach perspective. To have a right to a job, the principle of inclusion must be maintained after school, to ensure that persons with disabilities, minorities and women access employment more easily. Fourth, while the cooperation between Ministries of Education and Labour is important, they do not have the responsibility to decide on the fiscal space for implementation. Ministries of Finance are therefore a strong partner in ensuring that labour market policies are inclusive and feasible. Lastly, the participation of beneficiaries, particularly the most vulnerable, and of major economic players is critical in discussing and designing labour market policies.

Ms. Sabina Glasovac, Assistant Minister and Head, Directorate for Preschool, Elementary and Secondary Education, Croatia

**Question:** What successful experiences does Croatia have in reducing school violence? What policies and strategies were used to achieve those successes?

**Answer:** Croatia developed violence referral protocols for all stakeholders, created online forms for schools to report cases of violence, implemented a violence-free school award and conducted research on school-based violence. A zero tolerance approach is necessary, as well as a focus on prevention rather than response. Adopting a whole school approach is also critical to raise the awareness of all actors in school communities. Teachers need support in identifying cases of violence, in providing children with the skills to prevent and deal with violence and in dealing with both perpetrators and victims. Croatia has also established regulations/charters in every school and included violence prevention as a transversal theme in the primary school curriculum.
**Mr. Yessengazy Imangaliyev, Deputy Minister of Education and Science, Kazakhstan**

**Question:** How does Kazakhstan strategically address violence in education? What have been the steps and lessons learned?

**Answer:** Kazakhstan has improved its regulatory framework with regard to children’s rights and the criminal code outlines clear sanctions and penalties for child rights violations. We are protecting children from drugs and alcohol abuse and have increased the number of school psychologists to 8,000 to provide psycho-social support to children in need. Kazakhstan collaborates with NGOs and UNICEF to conduct studies on violence in schools and residential institutions. A violence prevention programme has been implemented in Eastern Kazakhstan on violence referral mechanisms and response interventions and more activities are to be implemented on sexual harassment in and out of school. Partnerships with NGOs are critical as well as well-resourced centres for child victims of violence.
Session 5: Every Child Learning – Achieving Equity in Learning Outcomes

Panel Discussion:
The Learning Imperative

Chairperson: Mr. Alberto Rodriguez, Director of Education, Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia, World Bank

Key note speaker:
Linking Education Participation and Learning: Ms. Carol Bellamy, Former Chairperson of the Global Partnership for Education
The Learning Imperative: Ms. Josephine Bourne, Associate Director, Education, UNICEF
Monitoring teacher quality: Ms. Kristen Weatherby, OECD, Senior Analyst, Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS) Programme

Discussants:
Ms. Nora Malaj, Deputy Minister of Education, Albania
H.E. Mr. Spiro Ristovski, Minister of Education, The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia
Mr. Geldymammed Geldymammedov, Deputy Minister of Education, Turkmenistan
Mr. Bakhtiyor Daniyarov, Deputy Minister of Public Education, Uzbekistan

Key issues:
- The renewed focus on learning outcomes is a good entry point to look at what is happening in the classroom and what are the best strategies in a given context to maximise learning for all children.
- There is a need for robust data on learning, beyond the usual proxy indicators used to measure quality education. Data on early learning is necessary to assess whether education systems are doing the right thing.
- Quality education standards enable schools to celebrate progress and identify areas for improvement. They are also a good tool to engage parents, students and communities in the debate about quality education and learning improvement.
- Early learning is critical for future learning achievement – starting school early is instrumental to cognitive, social and emotional development.
Improved learning outcomes require a focus on students and on teachers. Learners must be at the heart of the education process and teachers must be adequately recruited, motivated, paid and supported.

Teacher feedback and appraisal play a significant role in improving teaching practices, regardless of whether observers are fellow school staff or inspectors.

High teacher status is a pre-requisite to attract the best individuals into the profession.

Session 5: Summaries of addresses and presentations

Ms. Carol Bellamy, Former Chairperson of the Global Partnership for Education

Linking Education Participation and Learning

Many countries have achieved MDG2 in the region but there is plenty of unfinished business as students leave schools without the necessary knowledge and skills. Quality education requires teachers to be skilled, classrooms to be child friendly, teaching and learning to be responsive to children’s and employers’ needs. There are many examples of good strategies in the world: parental engagement, curriculum reforms, vocational education, innovative public-private partnerships. To ensure that all children are in school and learning, we need to improve learning assessment to know that what we are doing is actually working, to reform curricula and develop standards for quality education, to focus on students themselves and to motivate and train teachers. Education should be relevant to children and equip them for life and work. Investing in education is a cost-effective strategy to eradicate poverty and reduce inequality.

Ms. Josephine Bourne, Associate Director, Education, UNICEF

The Learning Imperative

Globally an estimated 200 million adolescents do not have the skills they need for life and employment. Knowing how well children are learning through national or international assessment is critical for teachers and policy makers to make evidence-based decisions. Education is a smart investment. We can learn from richer countries that improving the performance of poorer children also results in increased learning outcomes for all children. Starting early is critical and positively impacts on development and reading. Learning to read and do basic numeracy at the right age matters and impacts on cognitive development and future learning achievement. Education systems must be responsive to students’ and teachers’ needs, transparent, and engaged with communities. Data, particularly data on learning, is important. Solutions to ensure that all children are in school and learning will vary depending on countries, but commitment to learning is non-negotiable.

Ms. Kristen Weatherby, OECD, Senior Analyst, Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS) Programme

Monitoring teacher quality

Teachers and teaching related factors are the most important parameters on students’ achievement. PISA results show that students’ achievements vary more within schools than across schools. However teachers suffer from low status and it is difficult to convince good students to embrace the teaching profession. It is important to raise the status of the profession, not only salaries, by giving teachers career opportunities and responsibilities, beyond curriculum delivery. Motivation and performance can be increased through appraisal and feedback mechanisms, particularly when those recognise the importance of innovation and creativity and when they are at the core of the development of teaching practices. Professional development can help weaker teachers become more effective. This is why appraisal and feedback should be linked to professional development opportunities. There is no easy
answer for how to make teaching attractive. There are good examples of teacher recruitment policies in Singapore, of promotion policies in China and elsewhere. Supporting teachers to be reflective to improve their practice remains key.

**Ms. Nora Malaj, Deputy Minister of Education, Albania**

**Question:** Your country has shown improvement in its PISA reading scores. What policies and strategies have been successful in improving equity in learning?

**Answer:** We call “hidden drop-out” those children attending class but not really learning, among other things because of teachers’ selective attention. The hidden drop-out rate is 20% higher than the physical drop-out rate. We tackled silent learning discrimination in the classroom to ensure all children would learn. Over a 10-year period there has been a notable reduction in students suffering from hidden drop-out. Our efforts were recognised as one of the world three best practices by the Overseas Development Institute in 2010. Whilst improving the learning conditions and classroom environments, we also improved teacher training to better focus on students’ achievement and measuring learning objectives, we sanctioned hidden drop-out in normative documents which resulted in marginalisation being better prevented, we raised teachers’ salaries and regulated better the profession and four ministries signed a cooperation agreement for the identification and recording of out-of-school children. We have also enriched our EMIS system with socio-economic indicators and disability indicators to identify those invisible students. Only a holistic approach implemented through broad partnerships can close the equity gap.

**H.E. Mr. Spiro Ristovski, Minister of Education, The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia**

**Question:** You are working to improve the inclusion of Roma children and children of other ethnic and linguistic groups in education. What is your policy in reconciling your inclusive education agenda with the one related to quality education?

**Answer:** The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia has been active on education inclusion. Education is one of the 4 national priorities and is instrumental in achieving the other priorities, including improving relations between ethnic groups. We introduced conditional cash transfers for education and scholarships-cum-mentorship for Roma students which resulted in increased enrolment. Although we do not score highly, we take part in international assessments and we are now focusing on improving literacy and numeracy skills in the first 3 grades, which will be carefully monitored. Another focus area is life skills education and how to measure achievement for this. We recognise the differences in results among students, especially between Macedonian and Albanian language of instruction, and Roma students. We are piloting specific literacy and numeracy strategies to support the most marginalized children. Teacher training is core to our endeavour to improve quality education and ensure education inclusion.

**Mr. Geldymammed Geldymammedov, Deputy Minister of Education, Turkmenistan**

**Question:** What policies and strategies has your country used to improve the quality of education?

**Answer:** Preschool education is being expanded and Turkmenistan is moving towards 12 years of compulsory schooling in line with international standards. This is done in parallel to improving teaching methods, increasing the number of child-friendly schools, developing inclusive approaches, printing quality textbooks and piloting the use of new technologies. Child friendly school standards are being developed and schools will be supported to assess how well they are doing on these standards.

**Mr. Bakhtiyor Daniyarov, Deputy Minister of Public Education, Uzbekistan**

**Question:** How has your country’s reform of teacher policies improved the quality of education and reduced equity gaps in learning?
**Answer:** Teacher education is critical. Special teacher courses were developed. This was done in parallel with the implementation of 12 years of free compulsory education and the expansion of vocational education.
Session 6: Every Child Learning Early and Enrolling on Time – Improving Equity and Quality in Early Learning Services

Panel Discussion:
Early education and school readiness – Expanding access and improving quality

Chairperson: Ms. Diane Richler, Joseph P Kennedy, Jr. International Fellow

Key note speakers

Quality early education services: A key strategy for equity in education:
Ms. Caroline Arnold, Director of Education, Aga Khan Foundation
Ms. Sarah Klaus, Director, Early Childhood Programme, Open Society Foundations

The Starting Age Imperative:
Mr. Keith Lewin, Professor of International Education and Development and Director of the Consortium for Research on Educational Access, Transitions and Equity (CREATE), University of Sussex

Discussants:
H.E. Mr. Sredoje Novic, Minister of Civil Affairs, Bosnia and Herzegovina
H.E. Mr. Kanat Sadykov, Minister of Education, Kyrgyzstan
H.E. Ms. Maia Sandu, Minister of Education, Moldova

Key issues:

- Early childhood education is a sound investment which brings huge returns, including in terms of future learning outcomes and skills.
- Alternative provisions are necessary to expand preschool and pre-primary networks and universalise early learning and school readiness. There are innovative approaches in the region which are respectful of the needs and capacities of communities.
- The status, pay, training and professional development of preschool teachers and facilitators is instrumental in the success of early learning strategies and in convincing parents of the importance of early learning.
- Early learning standards contribute to the professionalisation and the quality of preschool and pre-primary services.
- Classroom practices and interactions between preschools, teachers and families are at the core
of early childhood education improved quality, particularly for disadvantaged children.

- The overall cost of universal preschool is affordable for most countries.
- Lowering the age of admission in primary education should be a priority in countries where children enter primary school at 7.
- It is important to link preschool, pre-primary and primary institutions and to smooth the transition between the two levels for both children and parents.
- Expansion of preschool and pre-primary access goes hand in hand with parental awareness raising on the importance of early years education.

Session 6: Summaries of addresses and presentations

Ms. Caroline Arnold, Director of Education, Aga Khan Foundation

Quality early education services: A key strategy for equity in education  

Early childhood development is one of the best investments a country can make due to the huge returns on investment and its potential in addressing deeply rooted patterns of exclusion. In the region we observe significant national disparities between urban and rural areas and the poorest and richest quintiles. To address these disparities a range of flexible approaches are needed to universalize pre-primary, from community-based provision (e.g. yurt summer preschool classes in Kyrgyzstan) to private sector supported provision. Increased resources, improved recognition of pre-primary teachers and their professional development needs, family engagement and quality standards are also key in ensuring that preschool centres will be ready for all children.

Ms. Sarah Klaus, Director, Early Childhood Programme, Open Society Foundations

Quality early education services: A key strategy for equity in education  

Early interventions yield higher economic returns compared with remedial services later. For the benefits of preschool to persist throughout schooling, high quality preschools are necessary. Young children develop and learn holistically through relationships and interactions. Non-cognitive skills such as self-regulation are as important as cognitive skills. Quality programmes offer appropriate curricula, emphasis on language development, sustained communication with parents and families, and small class sizes. Definitions of quality must reflect local context, cultures and values and cover both structural and process aspects of quality, from regulations and standards to approaches to learning and family engagement. While countries in the region tend to score high on structural quality, more work needs to be done on process aspects of quality, particularly in terms of inclusion training, family engagement and strategies for smooth transitions to primary education. Recommendations for improving the quality of early years education in the region include investing in the professionalization and development of early years staff (increased salaries, improved conditions of services, teacher standards, training) and improving quality and access for disadvantaged children through additional training for practitioners on how to work with children with special needs, minority children and other vulnerable groups and their families.
Mr. Keith Lewin, Professor of International Education and Development and Director of the Consortium for Research on Educational Access, Transitions and Equity (CREATE), University of Sussex

The Starting Age Imperative

In this region children start school late. But starting early is important: it leads to more time to learn before leaving school and it is correlated with higher performance and reduced learning equity gaps. Lowering the age of admission is therefore important and admission should not be delayed by administrative hurdles or rigid starting dates. There are good examples of staggered entry dates in preschool and of child seeking schools. Only 0.2% of GDP could universalize preschool. Governments should have a social contract to deliver such services.

H.E. Mr. Sredoje Novic, Minister of Civil Affairs, Bosnia and Herzegovina

Question: How has your country addressed the challenges in improving the access and quality of early childhood education?

Answer: Improving access to early childhood education has become a priority and although enrolment rates remain low, they have drastically increased in recent years. First, the legislative and institutional frameworks were reviewed to give an appropriate status to preschools and secure one year of compulsory pre-primary education. Second, a curriculum was adopted. Third, strong cooperation was established between health, social protection and education stakeholders. Last, parental awareness of the importance of preschool is critical. We should stop treating investment in preschool as expenditure, but as investment for social and economical development.

H.E. Mr. Kanat Sadykov, Minister of Education, Kyrgyzstan

Question: What policies and strategies in Kyrgyzstan have proved successful in improving access to early childhood education services?

Answer: The 2009 Law on Preschool Education, National Standard of the Kyrgyz Republic on “Preschool education and child care” (updated in 2012) and the Early Learning and Development Standards for 3-7 year old children endorsed in 2013 set forth minimum rules and requirements for expansion and development of early childhood education services in the country. PISA results were taken into consideration. Children with pre-primary education succeeded better than others. Improving access to early childhood education services requires not only the expansion of public kindergartens but also the establishment and expansion of alternative forms of preschool programmes including community-based kindergarten and school preparedness programmes, implemented with a range of international and national partners. Raising parental awareness about the importance of preschool is important and NGOs have a great role to play in this.

H.E. Ms. Maia Sandu, Minister of Education, Moldova

Question: What successful experiences does Moldova have in reforming early childhood education? And what was the role of communities in this process of change? What was the difference in approach that made the difference?

Answer: Progress was made although the coverage is not yet 100% and discrepancies remain particularly between urban and rural areas. We started with a clear strategy that covered early learning standards, teacher professional development and curriculum development. Local governments have a big role to play both in terms of financing but also for the identification of vulnerable families who need extra-support to enrol their children. Alternative models of early education community centres were piloted and it was revealed that parents needed more than a daily 4-hour provision. Strong partnerships, including with the media and civil society organisations, have been instrumental in securing community contributions for the renovation of infrastructure and in raising awareness of the importance of early
childhood education. Lastly the focus has been on capacity building. The provision of teaching and learning materials and guidance is insufficient and innovative training methods were piloted, such as an in-service training mentoring scheme.

**Additional interventions**

**H.E. Mr. Goran Mutabdzija, Minister, Ministry of Education and Culture of the Republic of Srpska Bosnia and Herzegovina**

Increased enrolment in preschool was promoted through family support and the strengthening of education institutions based on the adoption of a new curriculum. However the coverage remains unsatisfactory and this is partially due to the weak physical capacity of the preschool network.

**H.E. Mr. Damir Masic, Minister, Ministry of Education and Science of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina**

Increased enrolment in preschool was promoted through awareness raising activities and specific measures, including the adoption of innovative teaching and learning methods based on some of the Waldorf and Montessori principles and increased involvement of Municipalities in the provision of quality services.

**Roza Isakovna Otunbayeva, former President of the Kyrgyz Republic**

Kyrgyzstan has taken significant steps to introduce pre-primary education and to socialise children and prepare them for school. In post-Soviet countries, explaining the importance of pre-primary education is challenging as the general perception is that children should not start school before 7. The International Public Foundation “Roza Otunbayeva Initiative” led by the ex-President of the Kyrgyz Republic works among other things on preschool models in summer pastures. Changing mindsets is a big task, changing pedagogical approaches is another big task. We have learned a lot over the past 20 years and are hoping that much more attention will be dedicated to education in the future.
Session 7: The Way Forward and the Post-2015 Agenda

Chairperson: Ms. Carol Bellamy, Former Chairperson of the Global Partnership for Education (GPE)

Linking to discussions on the Post-2015 Agenda

Addresses

Mr. Qian Tang, Assistant Director-General for Education, UNESCO [written statement]

Ms. Monika Linn, Chief, Development Policies and Cross-Sectoral Coordination Unit UN Economic Commission for Europe

Ms. Yoka Brandt, Deputy Executive Director, UNICEF

H.E. Mr. Nabi Avcı, Minister of National Education, Turkey

Key issues:

- The Call for Action is an important document for the post-2015 consultation process and for shaping the education agenda for 2030. It is ambitious with learning, equity and inclusion at the heart of its principles. It ensures that no child is left behind in pre-primary, primary and secondary education and that all children are adequately supported to develop, grow and learn.

- The post-2015 education agenda must be holistic, address the education continuum, learning outcomes, equity and inclusion.

- It is more than ever recognised that education, beyond being a goal in itself, is also a pre-requisite for the achievement of all other development goals, that is for social and human development, for economic growth and for peace and security.

- By sharing best practices, documenting initiatives, monitoring and evaluating policies and working together, countries can learn from each other and jointly contribute to the improvement of education and learning for all children in the region.

Session 7: Summaries of addresses and presentations

Mr. Qian Tang, Assistant Director-General for Education, UNESCO [written statement]

UNESCO and UNICEF have co-led regional and global thematic consultations on education in the post-2015 development agenda. UNESCO developed a concept paper on the future education agenda, articulated around the following key points: (i) an overarching education goal (currently the proposed goal reads: “to ensure provision of equitable quality and lifelong learning for all by 2030”); (ii) the education agenda should stand-alone whilst also being integrated in other development goals; (iii) the agenda should ensure the provision of increased equitable access for all children, youth and adults from early childhood to higher education; (iv) learning outcomes should be at the core of the agenda; (v) particular attention should be given to marginalized groups and gender equality, (vi) the development of skills and competencies for youth for personal and professional development, (vii) lifelong learning is a central principle of the agenda. The Call for Action and the Regional Ministerial Conference greatly contribute to the post-2015 discussions.

Ms. Monika Linn, Chief, Development Policies and Cross-Sectoral Coordination Unit UN Economic Commission for Europe

There is a clear link between the Call for Action and the broader post-2015 agenda as education is not only a goal in itself but also a critical component of the realisation of the other goals and the bedrock of sustainable development. Implementing the new agenda will require a strong focus on governance,
participation, human rights and effective approaches in terms of young people's involvement and reduction of gender inequalities. The regional consultation on the post-2015 agenda highlighted the significant mismatch between skills and qualifications and the job market and the weakness of entrepreneurial skills teaching. It reiterated the importance of investing in early childhood education, addressing child labour and education disparities between ethnic minorities and investing in teachers' education and professional development. It also recommended that countries capacities in measurement and statistics be strengthened and that broad coalitions be engaged in implementing the new agenda. Better education outcomes will positively affect health and social protection, governance and accountability.

Ms. Yoka Brandt, Deputy Executive Director, UNICEF

In spite of much progress over the past decade in reducing the number of out-of-school children in the region, significant inequalities remain. Many inspirational good practices and successful models have been highlighted in the region and there is no easy one-size fits all solution to education equity. Better horizontal and vertical collaboration between and across Ministries and agencies at local levels are needed as well as broad partnerships and the participation of a wide range of stakeholders at the school and community level. Comprehensive and integrated evidence-based policies are necessary. Monitoring systems enabling the identification and tracking of children not in school or at risk of dropping out are necessary. Inclusive education is a priority at policy level and in the classroom. Children need to be equipped with the skills and competencies which will enable them to become lifelong learners, and to adapt to the changing labour market. Youth Representatives stressed the need for creative approaches that would involve children and youth themselves. The Call for Action is an opportunity for us all to come together and include all children in quality learning.

H.E. Mr. Nabi Avci, Minister of National Education, Turkey

There are many steps to take to improve the education system in the region but the Call for Action is a critical step in the orientation of the post-2015 agenda. Education intersects with and has implications for all other sectors. It is central to social and human development and growth. Children and young people must be guided through education pathways and supported adequately so that they master the competencies they need for the world of tomorrow. The Government of Turkey will attend to its responsibility with regard to the improvement of the education system and will increase its collaboration so as to improve education throughout the region.
Day 3 and Day 4

Strategies for equity:

Working together to implement the Call for Action
Day 3

Session 8: Strategies for Including Every Child in School – Reducing Discrimination, Improving Data and Closing System Gaps

Session 8.1: Reducing Discrimination against Marginalized Children

Chairperson: Ms. Sarah Klaus, Director, Early Childhood Programme, Open Society Foundations

Key Note Address

Strategies for ending inequities in education participation and learning

Mr. Keith Lewin, Professor of International Education and Development and Director of the Consortium for Research on Educational Access, Transitions and Equity (CREATE), University of Sussex

Presentations

The Right to Inclusive Education: UNICEF’s Position - Mr. Gopal Mitra, Programme Specialist, Disability Section, UNICEF NYHQ

‘It’s About Ability’: Changing perspectives on disability in Montenegro - Ms. Vesna Vučurović, Deputy Minister of Education, Montenegro

Tackling discrimination against Roma children – Good practices from the region - Ms. Anasztazia Nagy, Country Officer for Roma Education Fund in Serbia, Montenegro and Croatia

Sharing experience from Romania – Reducing the exclusion of Roma communities - Ms. Liliana Preoteasa, General Director, General Directorate for Education and Lifelong Learning, Ministry of Education, Romania

Key issues:

- Inequalities remain in the region in terms of access to an education of quality, which points to the weak efficiency and weak effectiveness of education systems.
- A range of good practices is emerging from countries to address the situation of specific groups of children. Prevention measures, intervention measures and compensation measures are used in combination to support children’s enrolment and retention in education. Comprehensive approaches are more successful.
- Good practices to support the education of Roma children include school readiness classes, school meals, mother tongue teaching, learning support after school, the recruitment of Roma mediators, working with parents and the combination of scholarships and mentoring for secondary school students.
- Good practices to reduce the stigma attached to disability include nation-wide campaigns based on a broad coalition of actors and aiming to change social norms and attitudes and to raise awareness about the rights of people with disabilities.
Session 8.1: Summaries of addresses and presentations

**Mr. Keith Lewin, Professor of International Education and Development and Director of the Consortium for Research on Educational Access, Transitions and Equity (CREATE), University of Sussex**

*Strategies for ending inequities in education participation and learning*

Inequalities are multi-dimensional. In the region inequalities in access and attainment are far from being resolved, revealing the weak efficiency and weak effectiveness of education systems. To address this situation, we need: (i) Political will and sustained commitment to reduce differences in educational access, participation and outcomes between groups who suffer disadvantage, (ii) Consensus on the key dimensions of inequality including household poverty, location, gender, disability, social group and civil status; understanding that equity requires investing more in those children who are most disadvantaged; (iii) Enhanced data collection and analysis through an annual school census, household surveys, assessment data; developing child registration and tracking systems to manage children's learning; initiating longitudinal studies of access, participation and learning; (iv) Commission national reviews to widen access and identify inequalities and link these to programmes of action and short and medium term planning and resource allocation.

**Presentations**

**Mr. Gopal Mitra, Programme Specialist, Disability Section, UNICEF NYHQ**

*The Right to Inclusive Education: UNICEF’s Position*

No international or national development goal will be achieved unless persons with disabilities are included. Persons with disabilities have been made invisible. Children do not enter a “special world” after attending a special school. To promote inclusive education existing barriers need to be dismantled and policies and programmes need to be inclusive. Inclusive education requires a transformation of systems. First we need to address specific barriers, such as the education of children with disabilities not being the responsibility of the Ministry of Education, or people having to be physically fit to become teachers. Second we need to adopt universal design, a design made for everybody, from school infrastructure to curriculum. Third we need to accommodate various needs and develop and use assisted technologies and practices. Fourth we need affirmative action. Fifth we need to raise awareness to overcome the stigma attached to disability. The pockets of good practices in inclusive education need to be supported to spread across the system. UNICEF focuses on three axes: accessibility, data and teacher training.

**Ms. Vesna Vučurović, Deputy Minister of Education, Montenegro**

*‘It’s About Ability’: Changing perspectives on disability in Montenegro*

The Campaign “It’s About Ability” was launched in 2010 to address key barriers faced by children with disabilities: outdated education systems, lack of inclusive classrooms and services and stigma attached to disability. The aim of the Campaign was to change social norms and attitudes and to raise awareness about the right of people with disabilities. The Campaign strategy was to create a wide coalition/movement for social change through a broad coalition of stakeholders from the Prime Minister to celebrities, from the private sector to parents and children. Campaign activities complemented the implementation of a new education and social policy. Results showed improved attitudes towards disability and increased number of children with disabilities enrolled in mainstream schools.
Ms. Anasztazia Nagy, Country Officer for Roma Education Fund in Serbia, Montenegro and Croatia

Tackling discrimination against Roma children – Good practices from the region

Roma children often face school or class segregation. Sometimes they face special school segregation and are placed in residential institutions for children with disabilities. Low quality education is also an issue, particularly in segregated settings. A 2012 study in Hungary showed that the main reason for school segregation was parental free school choice which resulted in Roma being enrolled in low ranking schools. The rate of early school leavers is also very high. The Roma Education Fund supports the development of inclusive education policies across the region and works on early school leaving, supports after school programmes and mentoring, provides scholarships and academic support in secondary and higher education. To prevent segregation, the Roma Education Fund promotes early childhood development and supports the gradual closing of segregated schools. Working with communities and parents is key as only parents can sustain the attendance of their children and the aspiration for desegregation.

Ms. Liliana Preoteasa, General Director, General Directorate for Education and Lifelong Learning, Ministry of Education, Romania

Sharing experience from Romania – Reducing the exclusion of Roma communities

Roma children have the highest rate of preschool and school non-attendance and the highest rate of drop-out. To address this we developed prevention, intervention and compensation measures. The prevention component includes access school readiness classes, education in the mother tongue and development of a Romanian as a second language curriculum, reserved quotas for Roma students in high school to support their enrolment and recognition of Roma mediators as auxiliary school staff. The intervention component gathers after school programmes including learning support, quality extra-curricular activities and social programmes for all children in need, from nutrition support to scholarships. The compensation component covers second chance programmes within mainstream schools, with flexible timetables so that children can learn at their own pace, and validation of prior learning achieved in non-formal and informal settings. Increasing the self-esteem of Roma children to support their ambition and to foster their aspirations for the future is key.
Session 8.2:
Closing data gaps on out of school children

Chairperson: Ms. Sarah Klaus, Director, Early Childhood Programme, Open Society Foundations

Presentations

Improving data on out of school children in Central and Eastern Europe and Central Asia
Mr. Albert Motivans, Head of Education Statistics, UNESCO Institute of Statistics
Ms. Erin Tanner, Education Specialist, UNICEF Regional Office for Central and Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States

Improving data on children from Roma communities – MICS in Bosnia and Herzegovina - Ms. Sanja Kabil, Education Officer, UNICEF, Bosnia and Herzegovina

Improving data on children with disabilities - Mr. Daniel Mont, Principal Research Associate, Department of Epidemiology and Public Health, University College London

Key issues:

- A range of approaches can be used to close the data gap for out-of-school children.
- Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys include in some countries a Roma component which enables provision for accurate data on school readiness, participation in primary school and transition from primary to secondary.
- UNICEF is piloting a monitoring framework for children out-of-school, which enables, through triangulation of various children’s records, identification of children out-of-school.
- Most EMIS systems inadequately record information about children with disabilities. By asking simple questions on the degree of difficulty experienced by children in a few areas and by collecting information on the school environment, we would be able to gather more useful data on children with disabilities. Thus, education planners and school managers could more appropriately respond to their needs in the school environment.

Session 8.2: Summaries of addresses and presentations

Mr. Albert Motivans, Head of Education Statistics, UNESCO Institute of Statistics;

Global Initiative on Out-of-School Children

The Initiative was launched in 2010 by UIS and UNICEF. 25 countries participated, of which 4 in the region. Studies identified profile of out-of-school children and analysed the barriers keeping them outside of education. The framework, organised around five dimensions of exclusion, included children out of pre-primary (i.e. the year before primary entrance age), children who never enrol in education, children who enrol late, children who enrol but drop out from school and children in school but at risk of dropping out.

Ms. Erin Tanner, Education Specialist, UNICEF Regional Office for Central and Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States

From evidence to action: Regional framework for monitoring out of school children

Turkish Russian
The purpose of this framework is to make invisible out-of-school children visible to education ministries. It builds on existing systems to improve identification mechanisms and better analyse the causes of exclusion. It aims to monitor “invisible” out-of-school children who do not appear on any records, “semi-invisible” children not visible to education ministries but visible in other records, and “visible” out-of-school children and children at risk of dropping out who appear on education ministries’ databases. The monitoring framework comprises eight steps: (i) Establish indicators, definitions and benchmarks, (ii) Prevent, detect and resolve data inaccuracies, (iii) Update EMIS to incorporate new indicators and methodologies, (iv) Close gaps in vertical information flows between local and national level, (v) Close gaps in horizontal information flows through cross-sector collaboration, (vi) Develop early warning systems, (vii) Develop reporting and analyse routines to inform policies and strategies, (viii) Develop improved policies and strategies.

Ms. Sanja Kabil, Education Officer, UNICEF, Bosnia and Herzegovina

Improving data on children from Roma communities – MICS in Bosnia and Herzegovina

The Multiple Indicators Cluster Survey round four included a Roma component. Results showed drastic inequalities between children from the majority population and Roma children on pre-primary experience, school readiness, primary school completion and transition to secondary school. Larger gender gaps to the disadvantage of girls were also noticeable in primary and secondary education indicators. Critical success factors for the implementation of the survey included involving interviewers from marginalized groups to overcome possible trust issues, involving relevant institutions to own the process and ensuring institutional memory and continuity through the repeated involvement of the same institutions across surveys.

Mr. Daniel Mont, Principal Research Associate, Department of Epidemiology and Public Health, University College London

Improving data on children with disabilities

Disability comes from the interaction of children’s functioning and the environment. Collecting data on disability means not only collecting data on children with disabilities, but also on the environment. In an inclusive environment, children’s impairments will constrain their functioning less than in a non-inclusive setting. Asking if a child has a disability will only identify children with the most severe impairments, asking if a child is receiving special support lacks precision as the definition of special needs will depend on countries and policies, asking about diagnoses leaves aside children who are not diagnosed and does not recognise that children with the same diagnosis can have very different abilities and needs. Recommended questions for EMIS forms for children with disabilities are: (i) “Compared with children of the same age, how many children enrolled in school have difficulties in the following areas (a child can be counted in more than one area)” – information on vision, hearing, gross motor, fine motor, intellectual, communication, behaviour/socialisation can be collected for two categories “some difficulty” and “a lot of difficulty or unable”, and (ii) “How many children enrolled in school have difficulties in the following number of areas”, the answers being organised by number of areas (1 area, 2 areas, 3, etc). Data on environment can include data on premises accessibility, materials, human resources and services.
Session 8.3:
Upper secondary education – Preventing dropouts and promoting relevant skills and employability

Chairperson: Mr. Albert Motivans, Head of Education Statistics, UNESCO Institute of Statistics

Presentations

School to Work Transition: Promoting skills for the 21st Century - Ms. Margarete Sachs-Israel, Programme Specialist, EFA Global Partnerships Team, UNESCO

Monitoring Early School Leavers in the Netherlands - Mr. Fred Voncken, Director Early School Leaving, Ministry of Education, Netherlands

Collecting data on OOSC of Upper Secondary School Age -Mr. Salih Çelik, Deputy Under-Secretary, Ministry of National Education, Turkey

Key issues:

- Permeability of education systems and pathways is critical to enable students to transfer from academic to vocational streams and vice-versa.
- Curriculum reforms are needed to ensure students will be equipped with relevant knowledge and skills, including transferable and vocational skills which will support transition from school to work and strengthen resilience.
- When tackling drop-out, data is crucial in order to identify problems, set-up targets and monitor progress. It is also a good tool for improved governance, accountability and transparency.
- Unique education ID numbers are instrumental in reducing early school leaving but safeguards are needed to prevent excessive surveillance of individuals.
- Drop-out prevention and response interventions require broad vertical and horizontal partnerships and schools need to be supported by state and non-state actors in identifying children at risk and responding to their needs.
- Awareness-raising and drop-out prevention and response trainings for teachers and school managers are important in ensuring that drop-out prevention is mainstreamed throughout the school culture and practice.

Session 8.3: Summaries of presentations

Ms. Margarete Sachs-Israel, Programme Specialist, EFA Global Partnerships Team, UNESCO

School to Work Transition: Promoting skills for the 21st Century

How can education systems provide relevant content for young people? There is an economic demand for skills, but skills are also necessary for young people to adapt to climate change, to become global citizens and to be more resilient and recover from crisis. Young people must be equipped with foundation skills, transferable skills and technical and vocational skills. Innovation, creativity, communication and presentation skills are transferable skills that are in high demand. Key recommendations for policy improvement include: supporting school to work transition, development of ‘permeable’ systems which allow different pathways to skills development and moving from academic to vocational training and vice versa, providing learners with learning to learn skills, providing relevant job and career guidance and providing opportunities for all students to combine workplace experience with education.
Mr. Fred Voncken, Director Early School Leaving, Ministry of Education, Netherlands

Monitoring Early School Leavers in the Netherlands  English  Turkish  Russian

The Netherlands has aimed to reduce the early school leaving rate from 15.3% in 2002 to 8% in 2014. Every child has an education number in the Netherlands, which is used among other things for monitoring truancy and early school leaving. Every child absent for more than 16 hours per month is registered in a portal, even if studying in a private school. With a one stop shop system, real time information can be given to all stakeholders, from ministries to municipalities, social services to attendance officers, etc. The classification of information about children is a complex problem and there is the question of how far we should go because of surveillance/privacy issues. Data has been instrumental to governance and accountability for early school leaving, from setting up targets to monitoring progress to financial rewards for high performing municipalities. Beyond the focus on data, other successful factors include the implementation of comprehensive approaches based on strong and long-term cooperation between national, regional, municipal and school levels, and the reliance on long-term political and financial commitment to reducing early school leaving.

Mr. Salih Çelik, Deputy Under-Secretary, Ministry of National Education, Turkey

Collecting data on OOSC of Upper Secondary School Age

To reduce drop-out, one of our priorities has been technical and vocational education. It is challenging and expensive to re-integrate children into the education system at secondary level once they dropped out. Data on school repetition and drop-out must be collected. Teachers must be trained to support children at risk of dropping-out. Curricula must be reformed to be more relevant and enable transfers between academic and vocational pathways. Counselling, coaching and mentoring are also critical for children and families and we need regulations for social workers to implement this. Turkey is aiming for 100% enrolment and is introducing a unique education ID number.
Session 9: Strategies to Foster Good Governance – Enhancing Education Financing and Coordination across Sectors

Panel Discussion
Enhancing education financing and improving cross-sectoral collaboration to promote equity

Chairperson: Mr. Jan van Ravens, Yale University, Child Study Center

Key Note Address

Education financing for equity - Mr. Jan Herczynski, Senior Research and Advisor to the Polish Ministry of National Education, Institute of Education Research, Warsaw.

Presentations

Trends in education financing reform – impact on equity - Mr. Philippe Testot-Ferry, Regional Education Advisor, UNICEF Regional Office for Central and Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States

Education financing in Moldova - Ms. Svetlana Bortoi, Head of education, culture and science financial division, Ministry of Finance, Moldova

Multidimensional monitoring of child well-being: lessons and suggestions - Mr. István György Tóth, Director, Tárki Social Research Institute, Budapest, Hungary

Linking social protection to education inclusion - Mr. Robert Stepanyan, Head of Department of Monitoring & Development Programmes, Ministry of Education, Armenia

Key issues:

- To ensure improvement in education quality, efficiency gains from education finance reforms must be reinvested in education, particularly in the quality dimensions of education.
- Education financing is key to education equity. Per capita financing can reinforce education equity when education policies strive for equity and when the right coefficients are applied. But it can also have a negative impact on certain groups or on small schools. This is why the implementation of per capita financing should be carefully monitored and the formula regularly revised and amended.
- Per capita financing often fails to address adequately inclusive education and children with disabilities or other vulnerable groups.
- The rationale for increased cross-sector collaboration is also about more effective use of human resources. There are good examples in the region of protocols of cooperation between both state and non-state stakeholders and service providers in order to improve the case management of children in difficult life circumstances, including children out-of-school and those at risk of dropping out.

Session 9: Summaries of addresses and presentations

Mr. Jan Herczynski, Senior Research and Advisor to the Polish Ministry of National Education, Institute of Education Research, Warsaw.

Education financing for equity  🇺🇸 English  🇹🇷 Turkish  🇷🇺 Russian
Education financing is key to education equity. Education reforms operate in constrained environments due to demographic shifts, migration and the economic crisis. Per capita financing is often seen as an incentive to keep students in school, increase equity and ensure transparency. Data limitation or data mismanagement are common hindering factors in the implementation of per capita systems. To be successful per capita financing should be applied to a specific financial flow within decentralised systems and its effects should be monitored so as to adjust the formula if necessary. Formulae are an expression of policy focus and ministries have a key role to play in identifying coefficients. Per capita funding does not address all education challenges which sometimes require additional specific approaches, such as the integration of Roma students or inclusive education and fighting against corruption. Lessons learned show that: (i) education finance is always subordinated to management and steering of education and per capita financing requires strong political will from the ministry, (ii) equity and inclusion are not automatic effects of the formula, and (iii) formula should be simple enough so that policy makers can understand their implications.

Presentations

**Mr. Philippe Testot-Ferry, Regional Education Advisor, UNICEF Regional Office for Central and Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States**

*Trends in education financing reform – impact on equity*  
[English] [Turkish] [Russian]

These are the preliminary findings of a study assessing whether and how the demand for efficiency gains in education financing, through per capita funding and school network rationalization, may reinforce inequalities in access to and outcomes of basic education. Reforms impacted on school autonomy but efficiency savings have not been fully reinvested in the education system and we observe a gradual decrease in the growth rate of education spending. Per capita funding has increased inequity between schools: small schools are financially disadvantaged. It also often does not include additional funding for disadvantaged groups, particularly children with disabilities. Large schools tend to experience the greatest benefits from reforms. Although the study does not confirm an increase in drop-out rates following school network rationalization, school attendance has been negatively impacted due to transport issues and school directors might be reluctant to accurately report drop-out and absenteeism. To ensure improvement in education quality, efficiency gains from education finance reforms must be reinvested in education and formulas must be gradually adjusted. Supporting local governments and schools throughout the reform is also a condition of success.

**Ms. Svetlana Bortoi, Head of education, culture and science financial division, Ministry of Finance, Moldova**

*Education financing in Moldova*  
[English] [Turkish] [Russian]

After a pilot the formula for per capita financing in Moldova was used nation-wide. Some small schools have been maintained when they provide education for minority children in different languages; in others students have been sent to larger circumscription schools. The formula is simple and we still need coefficients to address equity issues. In addition to the formula, targeted interventions have remained in place such as school feeding. Next steps include developing a preschool education funding formula, reviewing the general funding formula and introducing coefficients to ensure inclusive and equitable education and creating mechanisms to prevent local governments from diverting education funds to other areas.
Mr. István György Tóth, Director, Tárki Social Research Institute, Budapest, Hungary

Multidimensional monitoring of child well-being: lessons and suggestions

Drop-out intersects with many other family and socio-economic variables and is related to national policies. We developed policy marker report cards to compare countries’ approaches to child wellbeing in the European Union. Key determinants to reduce material child poverty in the European Union include: a sufficient level of child-related benefits, support for parents (mothers in particular) to find employment, minimum wages and increased affordable childcare available all year round. A number of dimensions also have to be put at the centre of policies to improve child wellbeing, including equal opportunities to education, early childhood development interventions and family support and strengthening.

Mr. Robert Stepanyan, Head of Department of Monitoring & Development Programmes, Ministry of Education, Armenia

Linking social protection to education inclusion

Children’s access to education is constrained by factors that are often outside the direct control of education authorities – disability, child labour, extreme socio-economic conditions, etc. We need effective cooperation between the health, education, and social protection services to ensure equity not only in access but also in learning outcomes. The institutionalised practice of cooperation between services will embrace a holistic view of the child and allow for a more streamlined, effective and efficient provision of children’s rights. We are now developing a conceptual model for protocols of cooperation between services that will include all state and non-state actors around issues such as out-of-school children or transformation of residential institutions and inclusion of children in mainstream schools.

Session 10: Strategies for Expanding Quality Early Learning for Every Child

Session 10.1

Expanding access to early education services

Chairperson: Ms. Liana Ghent, Executive Director, International Step by Step Association

Presentations

Investing in early education for equity - Mr. Jan van Ravens, Yale University, Child Study Center

Sharing experience from Tajikistan – Expanding access to early education with the half-day model - Mr. Abdujabor Aliev, Head, Department of Preschool & General Secondary Education, Ministry of Education, Tajikistan

Sharing experience from Turkey – Improving access to early education - Ms. Funda Kocabıyık, Director General of Basic Education, Ministry of National Education, Turkey

Key issues:

- Preschool has the highest rate of return compared to any other education level, particularly for children from low socio-economic status.
- In the region countries, including low-income countries, have developed innovative and cost-effective models to expand access to early learning which could be adapted elsewhere.
- Community-based models also play a big role in increasing the demand for early education services.
Session 10.1: Summaries of addresses and presentations

Mr. Jan van Ravens, Yale University, Child Study Center

Investing in early education for equity  🇪🇸 English  🇹🇷 Turkish  🇷🇺 Russian

Early childhood education has the highest rate of return compared to any other education level, particularly for children from disadvantaged backgrounds (up to 17). Universal enrolment from age 3 is feasible. Affordability is the same in high and low income countries. Unit costs of alternative programmes compared to full day kindergarten are lower. The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia has a very cost effective three-shift model. In Kyrgyzstan, the Aga Khan Foundation has been working with central kindergartens to support home and school-based programs that would otherwise have a sub-critical scale. Richer countries often show the highest returns - country specific benefit-to-cost analysis studies could be done in the region to support advocacy.

Mr. Abdujabor Aliev, Head, Department of Preschool & General Secondary Education, Ministry of Education, Tajikistan

Sharing experience from Tajikistan – Expanding access to early education with the half-day model -

Sharing experience from Turkey  🇪🇸 English  🇹🇷 Turkish  🇷🇺 Russian

The 509 state kindergartens serve only 10% of preschool age children mostly in urban areas. A school readiness assessment in 2009 indicated poor reading, writing, and numerical skills amongst 6 year old children. Tajikistan developed alternative school based early childhood education models with partners. The model has a teacher pupil ratio of 1:25. Children attend three-hour sessions five days a week for a full calendar year. The model targets children from 4 to 6 years old. In addition National Early Learning Development Standards were adopted to promote inclusive child-centred approaches. To date 888 alternative early childhood groups serve 18,000 children. To further expand the model we need to address a few challenges including a constraining regulatory framework, the lack of qualified personnel and the absence of an EMIS system for preschool education.

Ms. Funda Kocabıyık, Director General of Basic Education, Ministry of National Education, Turkey

Improving access to early education  🇪🇸 English  🇹🇷 Turkish  🇷🇺 Russian

Early childhood education in Turkey has been changed drastically over time. The 2014-2018 Development Plan aims to improve equity and the quality of preschool programmes. Priorities include: (i) expanding community-based early childhood services through the development of alternative models (such as recreation rooms, toy libraries, mobile classes) and through local level partnerships, (ii) improving quality through restructuring teacher training and qualification, developing a teacher career and performance assessment system, establishing quality standards and improving family participation and leadership and management.
Session 10.2
Improving and monitoring the quality of early education services

Chairperson: Ms. Liana Ghent, Executive Director, International Step by Step Association

Presentations

Young child well-being and quality early education - Ms. Deepa Grover, Regional ECD Advisor, UNICEF Regional Office for Central and Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States

Improving quality of early childhood education programmes - H.E. Mr. Dime Spasov, Minister of Labour and Social Policy, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia

Q&A – The link between quality early learning, on-time enrolment and learning in primary school

Ms. Caroline Arnold, Director of Education, Aga Khan Foundation; and Mr. Keith Lewin, Professor of International Education and Development and Director of the Consortium for Research on Educational Access, Transitions and Equity (CREATE), University of Sussex

Key issues:

- Quality early education services adopt intersectoral and comprehensive approaches to young children's wellbeing in which partnerships between actors and relationships with the family are at the core.
- Quality early learning standards, professionalization of staff and robust assessment instruments to measure learning and child wellbeing are the three pillars of the improvement of the quality of early learning services.
- Alternative forms of early childhood education provision have demonstrated positive results on children's development and learning for a minimal investment. The diversification of early learning provision is instrumental to its universalisation.
- Positive discrimination is necessary to close the equity gap in early learning. Both supply and demand factors need to be addressed simultaneously for all children to receive early education services and to enter school before the age of 7.

Session 10.2: Summaries of addresses and presentations

Ms. Deepa Grover, Regional ECD Advisor, UNICEF Regional Office for Central and Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States

Young child well-being and quality early education

Early childhood education is at the core of the Call for Action. UNICEF is mindful of the links between quality and equity and looks carefully at system changes in terms of service delivery, workforce, information systems, curricula and pedagogy, financing and legislative and policy framework. UNICEF is compiling materials, and monitoring tools and is documenting best practices across the region. UNICEF is working alongside governments and NGOs to address young children's needs holistically. Comprehensive wellbeing includes health and nutrition, relationships, family support and inclusion and protection. In the absence of early interventions, equity gaps can widen throughout life. While all families need support, some need more support than others. UNICEF works with governments to redesign the roles and responsibilities of providers, including home visitors who are trained to advise and counsel, to conduct early detection and to identify cases of abuse or neglect. The vision of UNICEF is one of a holistic intersectoral and comprehensive approach to young children's wellbeing.
**H.E. Mr. Dime Spasov, Minister of Labour and Social Policy, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia**

*Improving quality of early childhood education programmes*

The government is committed to quality early childhood education. The Ministry of Labour and Social Policy has embarked on a major reform in the field of preschool education. Our network of institutions is limited and it has often been seen in the past as a care option rather than a key element to child development. The 2013 law on child protection provides a normative framework for preschool and early learning opportunities and recognises alternative forms of provision. Early learning development standards were adopted in 2009 and a licensing scheme for early childhood development professionals was established. Instruments to monitor children’s learning outcomes were developed and piloted and unsurprisingly children benefitting from early childhood education performed better than their peers on a range of items.

**Ms. Caroline Arnold, Director of Education, Aga Khan Foundation;**

Q&A – *The link between quality early learning, on-time enrolment and learning in primary school*

Quality has been for too long looked at through proxy indicators such as classroom size and number of teachers. The emphasis is now back on learning and wellbeing and there are encouraging results from studies showing that low cost early childhood models yield results as good as those of standard models, with much lower investment.

**Mr. Keith Lewin, Professor of International Education and Development and Director of the Consortium for Research on Educational Access, Transitions and Equity (CREATE), University of Sussex**

Q&A – *The link between quality early learning, on-time enrolment and learning in primary school*

The lower the age of school entry, the better. When the entry age is 7, children may only enter school at 7 years old and 11 months and thus be significantly disadvantaged compared to their peers. The equity and quality discussions invite clarity about what needs to be achieved and the acceptance that those with the greatest needs will need the most resources. Positive discrimination is necessary to close the equity gap. Both supply and demand factors need to be addressed.
Session 11: Strategies to support every child to learn

Session 11.1:
Reducing Discrimination against Marginalized Children

Chairperson: Ms. Kate Lapham, Senior Program Manager, Education Support Program, Open Society Foundations

Key Note Address
Monitoring learning outcomes through PISA - Mr. Andreas Schleicher, Deputy Director for Education and Skills, OECD [video presentation]

Presentations
Analysis of learning outcomes according to PISA 2009 - Mr. Philippe Testot-Ferry, Regional Education Advisor, UNICEF Regional Office for Central and Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States

The role of national assessments - Mr. Aaron Benavot, Professor, School of Education, State University of New York

Improving learning outcomes: the experience of Croatia - Ms. Michelle Bras Roth, Head of the PISA Centre, National Centre for External Evaluation of Education, Croatia

Key issues:

- High performing systems demonstrate the importance of clear, ambitious goals, high quality instructional systems, good teacher recruitment and retention practices and effective leadership.

- Socio-economic background of children and schools' average socio-economic intake strongly affect students' results. School autonomy, school climate and teacher pay also affect students' performance.

- Although international assessments such as PISA provide a wealth of information, they also have limitations. Developing strong national assessments has the potential to examine better the contextual factors of national education systems and to improve learning environments, teaching practices and students' learning.

- PISA can nonetheless play a significant role in accelerating reforms in some participating countries. But results must be well communicated and mediated with education professionals, parents and students and the general public.
Session 11.1: Summaries of addresses and presentations

Mr. Andreas Schleicher, Deputy Director for Education and Skills, OECD

Monitoring learning outcomes through PISA (video presentation)

PISA not only tests the ability of students to reproduce what they have learned but also their capacity to apply actively their knowledge. It also collects a range of data on the personal backgrounds of students, their schools and their parents. PISA looks at the relationship between high performance and equitable distribution of learning outcomes across socio-economic backgrounds. PISA analyses the relationship between variations in spending per student and learning outcomes. Above a certain threshold, the variation in spending per student does not really impact on learning outcomes, but there is a large difference for countries not spending much overall. There is a positive relationship between equity, investment and overall learning outcomes as well as between students who received preschooling and learning outcomes. We need to invest in things that work and to commit to universal achievement. PISA results also show the critical role of parental expectations, which impact on truancy, motivation to learn and enjoyment of education. High performing systems demonstrate the importance of clear, ambitious goals, high quality instructional systems, good teacher recruitment and retention practices and effective leadership. The teacher agenda should focus on ability to innovate in the classroom and professional development opportunities. PISA shows that success is possible in education and that education systems can achieve both high performance and equitable learning opportunities and outcomes.

Mr. Philippe Testot-Ferry, Regional Education Advisor, UNICEF Regional Office for Central and Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States

Analysis of learning outcomes according to PISA 2009

A regional analysis of learning outcomes according to PISA 2009 showed that about half of 15-year-old students in the region did not master the baseline level in reading, mathematics and science and that they struggled to apply the knowledge they gained. There are large disparities between the highest and lowest achievers in all countries, equivalent to up to 7 years of schooling. Girls tend to have higher average scores in reading than boys but in maths and science, gender gaps are much smaller. Socio-economic background has, among all variables, the strongest impact on performance but schools’ average socio-economic intake tends to have a greater impact on a student’s performance than his or her own individual background. Where students are not separated in different schools according to socio-economic background there are small between-school differences in performance and high overall performance. There is a close association of GDP per capita with student performance in the region, unlike among richer OECD countries, and systems prioritising teachers’ pay over smaller classes tend to perform better. Countries with greater school autonomy and better disciplinary climates tend to have higher scores in reading. Public policies in education matter and should be based on rigorous evidence and focus on learning achievement monitoring overtime.

Mr. Aaron Benavot, Professor, School of Education, State University of New York

The role of national assessments

Rather than measuring the quality of inputs, we have moved into measuring the quality of outcomes. As a result we have seen the proliferation of international assessment activities, although international assessments have substantive limitations. They almost exclusively look at cognitive outcomes in language, mathematics and sometimes science to the detriment of other competencies. They tend not to be longitudinal and do not collect sufficient information on classroom processes, teachers and curricula. Lastly they only collect information on schooled children. National assessments have also proliferated, mostly curriculum-based and subject specific rather than competency-based. Secondary analyses of national learning assessments have the potential to examine better the contextual factors of national
education systems and to improve learning environments, teaching practices and students’ learning. They are also better for benchmarking and for examining specific reforms and the results they yielded. Drawbacks of national assessments include teachers teaching towards specific tests and variations in scientific rigour depending on countries. Overall, however, the advantages of national assessments overall outweigh their disadvantages.

**Ms. Michelle Bras Roth, Head of the PISA Centre, National Centre for External Evaluation of Education, Croatia**

*Improving learning outcomes: the experience of Croatia*  
Croatia participated in three rounds of PISA. Good communication of PISA results is critical at both national and local levels. Croatia disseminates results through national reports, teacher and school workshops, school reports and students’ personalised reports. The latter is important to build understanding and consensus around PISA among the population. Croatia’s participation in PISA has contributed to national level changes such as the introduction of quality standards, the revision of the curriculum framework and the establishment of a state graduation exam. Teachers are critical and Croatia is conscious of the need to improve teachers’ techniques and methods. Achieving a small change requires a very long journey.
Session 11.2: Reforming teacher recruitment and qualifications systems

Chairperson: Ms. Kate Lapham, Senior Program Manager, Education Support Program, Open Society Foundations

Presentations

Teacher quality in Central and Eastern Europe and Central Asia - Ms. Gita Steiner-Khamsi, Professor, Teachers College, Columbia University

Active learning and standards of quality basic education - Mr. Emin Amrullayev, Head of Education Quality Section, Ministry of Education of Azerbaijan

Improving teacher quality in Uzbekistan - Mr. Fayzulla Akhmedov, Head of Main Department for Organization of the Activities of Educational Institutions, Ministry of Public Education, Uzbekistan

Education standards for the 21st Century - Ms. Liana Ghent, Executive Director, International Step by Step Association

Key issues:

- Teacher reforms should first and foremost address the low status and the low salaries of the profession. All inclusive workload systems would contribute to the professionalization and motivation of the teaching force while enabling most teachers to earn higher salaries.

- Another key area of focus should be teacher recruitment and retention, to ensure that the best teachers will be those entering and remaining in the system.

Session 11.2: Summaries of addresses and presentations

Ms. Gita Steiner-Khamsi, Professor, Teachers College, Columbia University

Teacher quality in Central and Eastern Europe and Central Asia

A key pattern in the region is the wasteful recruitment into teaching with very few graduates entering and remaining in the teaching profession. Teachers are mostly qualified in the region, but motivation and incentive are an issue. The distribution of teaching hours at school level, with non-subject specialists taking on extra classes, particularly in sciences, also negatively impacts on education quality. Teachers’ salaries are low, sometimes less than the average GDP per capita. The stavka system focuses on teachers as deliverers of knowledge and creates inequalities in the profession and between schools. Recommendations include lifting the base salary, increasing the statutory teaching load, introducing sizeable bonuses for high performing teachers and adopting an all-inclusive workload system.

Mr. Emin Amrullayev, Head of Education Quality Section, Ministry of Education of Azerbaijan

Active learning and standards of quality basic education

Azerbaijan started in 2008/9 on a new curriculum, aiming for a 10 year compulsory education system, and 2 years of upper-secondary. The focus has been on content and method, with active learning at the heart of the process. Moving away from the stavka system, we are aiming for a workload system where teachers will become full time employees. The education system has been traditionally centralised and we are working on higher autonomy for secondary schools. A secondary school ranking was produced.
this year for the first time. Efforts are also made to professionalise education manager posts by recruiting real managers rather than taking the best teachers out of the classroom to become school directors. In addition, efforts will be made in the area of social policies as we know there is a correlation between poverty and low education achievement.

Mr. Fayzulla Akhmedov, Head of Main Department for Organization of the Activities of Educational Institutions, Ministry of Public Education, Uzbekistan

Improving teacher quality in Uzbekistan  🇺🇸English 🇹🇷Turkish 🇷🇺Russian

We have focused on the quality of teachers through the introduction of a new curriculum for in-service training, the development of a range of methods for professional development, from mentoring to cascade training in schools, the use of financial bonuses for the best teachers and publications on child friendly teaching methodologies. A key focus area for future years is to monitor and assess the effectiveness of teacher training and to strengthen the quality of the assessment system.

Ms. Liana Ghent, Executive Director, International Step by Step Association

Education standards for the 21st Century  🇺🇸English 🇹🇷Turkish 🇷🇺Russian

The International Step by Step Association developed principles of quality pedagogy to improve learning and social outcomes for children. The principles are articulated around seven framework areas: interactions, family and community, assessment and planning, teaching strategies, learning environment, professional development and inclusion, diversity, and democratic values. The resource pack includes guidelines, practical tools and instruments for assessing quality practices. An online course is also being piloted. This approach has inspired the development of professional standards in the region.

Session 11.3:

Making education staff and services more inclusive for learners

Chairperson: Ms. Gita Steiner-Khamsi, Professor, Teachers College, Columbia University

Key note address:

Closing policy gaps: policy strategies to support inclusive education for children with disabilities - Ms. Kate Lapham, Senior Program Manager, Education Support Program, Open Society Foundations

Video:

It’s About Ability Campaign, Montenegro

Presentations

Inclusive schools for inclusive education and care for children with disabilities – the Bulgarian experience -Ms. Mukkades Nalbant, Deputy Minister of Education, Bulgaria

Ending school segregation -Ms. Galina Bulat, Inclusive Education Project Manager, Lumos

Inclusive schools for inclusive learning - Ms. Natasha Graham, International Disability Expert, Partnership for Child Development

Inclusive learning for children with disabilities - Ms. Denise Roza, Executive Director, Perspektiva

Key issues:

- There are pockets of good practices in inclusive education which demonstrate that inclusive education is possible even in resources constrained environments, as long as it is supported by strong political will.
Cross-sector collaboration is instrumental to inclusive education. While inclusive education should fall under education ministries, referral and support mechanisms should be available at school level to make the link with the health and social protection sectors.

Deinstitutionalisation is cost-effective and positively impacts on children’s development, fulfilment and achievement. It is achievable with strong political will and inclusive education in mainstream schools.

Working with parents and supporting them to claim their children’s right to education and to become agents of change for inclusive education is a key strategy for increasing the demand for inclusive education.

Session 11.3: Summaries of addresses and presentations

Ms. Kate Lapham, Senior Program Manager, Education Support Program, Open Society Foundations

Closing policy gaps: policy strategies to support inclusive education for children with disabilities

Inclusive education refers to both access and quality and it is possible with limited resources. The main policy challenges are: transition from existing segregated systems to inclusive systems that would be under the responsibility of education ministries; support for teachers and their deployment based on needs, and: communication and collaboration between the education, social protection and health sectors. Governments face challenges that they feel are insurmountable - we should help them find ways to make inclusive education possible.

Ms. Mukkades Nalbant, Deputy Minister of Education, Bulgaria

Inclusive schools for inclusive education and care for children with disabilities – the Bulgarian experience

There has been progress in recent years thanks to efforts from a broad coalition of actors. Areas of focus have included accessibility of vocational centres, adaptation of national examinations to the needs of children with disabilities, increased access to preschool with transport provision, additional benefits for the poorest families and improvement of differentiated instruction. Parental awareness raising is critical in building inclusive education systems as well as school autonomy. By giving schools more autonomy we can try out different approaches and build on the most successful ones.

Ms. Galina Bulat, Inclusive Education Project Manager, Lumos

Ending school segregation

The institutionalisation rate of children with disabilities has been traditionally high in the region due to a combination of disability and poverty. Institutionalisation occurs despite the recognition that growing up outside an institution positively impacts on cognitive, motor and emotional development. Deinstitutionalisation is also cost-effective and shares a common agenda with inclusive education in terms of children’s right to family life, education and inclusion in the community. Cross-sector partnerships are necessary, particularly for assessing children and their families, identifying their needs, planning support delivery and evaluating results. Ending segregation and realising inclusion can be done with political will and professional approaches on the ground.

Ms. Natasha Graham, International Disability Expert, Partnership for Child Development

Inclusive schools for inclusive learning
Disability itself is not the reason for exclusion of persons with disabilities from schools – it is lack of accessibility, poor attitudes, low expectations and a lack of capacity for inclusive education. What makes schools inclusive is disability awareness raising, training of education staff, inclusive curricula and assessment, the establishment of in-school support mechanisms and the provision of referrals and assistive devices. Children spend quite a lot of time in school – teachers must be able to refer them for screening so that they receive the help they need.

Ms. Denise Roza, Executive Director, Perspektiva

Inclusive learning for children with disabilities  🇪🇸 English  🇹🇷 Turkish  🇷🇺 Russian

There are a range of barriers to inclusive education in the region. Parents can be over protective, professionals think that “specialists” know better and the focus is on impairments rather than abilities. To make inclusive education a reality we can: (i) support and empower NGOs of parents and persons with disabilities to be leaders in the inclusive education movement, (ii) implement pilot programs and multidisciplinary teams that include persons with disabilities, parents, teachers, administrators, officials, and (iii) support and lead public education campaigns and activities, including disability awareness training at mainstream schools.
Session 12: Closing Remarks

Closing remarks

Ms. Marie-Pierre Poirier, UNICEF Regional Director for Central and Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States

Mr. Yusuf Ziya Yediyildiz, Director General of European Union and Foreign Relations, Ministry of National Education, Turkey

Session 12: Summaries of addresses and presentations

Ms. Marie-Pierre Poirier, UNICEF Regional Director for Central and Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States

We have acknowledged common challenges faced by countries in Central and Eastern Europe and Central Asia in realising education equity for every child. We have also discussed the many good practices and successful models developed in the region. Our youth representatives have reminded us of their willingness and readiness to be involved in the identification of creative approaches to improve equity in education. We acknowledged the importance of looking beyond enrolment averages and to invest smartly, from an early age, to reduce equity gaps and include all children in quality learning. We, in UNICEF, pledge to provide technical expertise and policy advice, to facilitate sharing across countries, and to generate and disseminate innovative approaches that work.

Mr. Yusuf Ziya Yediyildiz, Director General of European Union and Foreign Relations, Ministry of National Education, Turkey

Discussions have focused on topics such as equal opportunities, data, quality of education, minority groups, shaping the post-2015 agenda, monitoring and evaluation systems and financing. Countries have exchanged their experiences. This conference will help governments to build strong political momentum to carry out reforms in their countries which will be beneficial for all children and ensure equitable access to quality education and learning.
Annex: List of participants

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