

The 12th EEA Meeting - Empowering the Marginalized: Strategies for Inclusive Education and Collaborations

1. Background

According to the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS), about 118.6 million upper secondary school-aged youth are out of school. Despite major global efforts to reduce this number and promote inclusion and equity for all learners, including ethnic minorities, girls, migrants and refugees as well as minors who are stateless, have disabilities or live in remote areas, the situation has hardly changed over the past two or three decades.

Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG4) aims to “**ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.**” Equity is the core of SDG 4, which provides the most hope and support for change. However, its practical implementation has been inadequate in many countries with large populations of disadvantaged children and youth, including the ‘not in employment, education or training’ or NEETs and out-of-school children and youth (OOSCY).

Globally, the issue of OOSCY and youth NEET remains a pressing concern, stagnating education progress towards the 2030 Agenda. Despite the reduced out-of-school population by 9 million between 2015-2021,¹ the figure has increased in the past several years largely due to the mass exclusion of girls and young women from education in Afghanistan and the impact of armed conflicts. In 2023, 122 million girls and young women worldwide were not attending school² and an estimated 78 million crisis-affected children and adolescents were out of school.³ Moreover, widespread school closures during the COVID-19 crisis affected 1.6 billion learners,⁴ indirectly lowering their educational attainment in school. The pandemic also hit the labour market hard, aggravating the challenges faced by young people. The youth NEET rate reached its highest level in 2020 and the global youth unemployment rate in 2021 was 15.6 per cent, with 75 million young people unemployed and 732 million out of labour force.⁵

In Asia and the Pacific, the prevalence of OOSCY and youth NEET mirrors the global situation and poses a critical developmental challenge. Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, there were 35 million out-of-school children and adolescents in East/Southeast Asia and the Pacific and the

¹ UNESCO. 2023. *SDG 4 mid-term progress review: progress since 2015 has been far too slow*. P.1.

<https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000386852?posInSet=2&queryId=81a5f81c-4a2a-4896-ae3a-3ecb1a828e6b>

² UNESCO. “250 million children out-of-school: What you need to know about UNESCO’s latest education data.” 19 September 2023.

<https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/250-million-children-out-school-what-you-need-know-about-unescos-latest-education-data>

³ GPE Transforming Education. “Education in crisis situations.” <https://www.globalpartnership.org/what-we-do/education-crisis>

⁴ ILO. 2022. *Global Employment Trends for Youth 2022*. P.16.

https://www.ilo.org/sites/default/files/wcmsp5/groups/public/@dgreports/@dcomm/@publ/documents/publication/wcms_853321.pdf

⁵ Ibid., PP.26-28.

pandemic led to 12 million children and adolescents dropping out in South and West Asia.⁶ According to the ILO report, Southern Asia had the highest NEET rate among all the subregions in 2019. 30 per cent of young people, equivalent to 160 million, were classified as NEETs, and 49 per cent of them were young women.⁷ The ramifications of these issues are profound, negatively impacting individual life outcomes and national and regional productivity, as uneducated and unemployed youth face limited career prospects, which will lead to increased societal and economic costs. Addressing OOSCY and youth NEET in the region requires comprehensive policy interventions focused on enhancing educational access, improving flexible learning pathways, and creating inclusive labour market opportunities.

In order to contribute to the body of global knowledge on equitable education, in 2020, UNESCO Regional Office in Bangkok and the Equitable Education Fund (EEF) Thailand, established “**Equitable Education Alliance**” (EEA), a community of government, civil societies, and the private sector advocating a more inclusive and equitable educational system in the Asia Pacific region, while simultaneously enhancing the performance of existing equitable education organizations at all levels to collaboratively provide substantive and technical support to countries which are interested in narrowing gaps in education equity.

The EEA convenes four meetings annually to discuss and improve equity in education through collaborative efforts. A total of 19 countries⁸ and 23 local and international organizations⁹ have participated in these meetings, to date, mutually sharing the expertise they are applying to the promotion and fostering of equity in education systems locally and regionally.

2. Objectives - 12th EEA Closed-Door Meeting

EEA aims to serve as a community of practitioners and similarly minded organizations for improving equity in education within and beyond the region and an integral part of the SDG4: Education 2030 framework. The Alliance works as a technical body in an informal setting.

With the EEA’s mission to collaboratively provide substantive and technical support to countries and organizations which are interested in narrowing gaps in equity in education, the 12th EEA Meeting aims to kick off the policy dialogue on education and training for NEET youth and OOSCY in the Asia-Pacific region. The number of out of school youth in East and Southeast Asia was 16.6 million in 2023 which is an increase of more than 2 million since 2020. The

⁶ UNESCO. 2022. *Adolescent and Youth Education, Learning and Skills Development*. PP.2-3.

<https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000381969>

⁷ ILO. 2020. *Tackling the COVID-19 youth employment crisis in Asia and the Pacific*. P.4.

<https://www.ilo.org/publications/tackling-covid-19-youth-employment-crisis-asia-and-pacific>

⁸ Australia, Cambodia, Canada, China, Finland, France, India, Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, Nepal, New Zealand, Pakistan, Republic of Korea, Republic of Panama, Thailand, United Kingdom, United States, and Viet Nam.

⁹ Australian Education Research Organization (AERO), Educate A Child (EAC), Educational Endowment Foundation, Equitable Education Fund (EEF) Thailand, Global Partnership for Education (GPE), Institute for Educational Leadership (IEL), Kartu Prakerja, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), National Institute for Lifelong Education (NILE), Pratham Education Foundation, Pakistan Coalition for Education (PCE), Promise Neighborhoods, Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organization (SEAMEO), Save the Children Nepal, SIL International, UNESCO Regional Office in Bangkok, UNICEF East Asia and Pacific Regional Office (EAPRO), UNHCR Pakistan, UNICEF Latin America and Caribbean Regional Office (LACRO), UNICEF Nepal, UNICEF Thailand, VVOB – Education for Development, and World Bank.

increasing number of youth with low skills has not only led to lower GNP per capita, but there are consequences such as early pregnancies, crime, and corruption (see Figure 1).

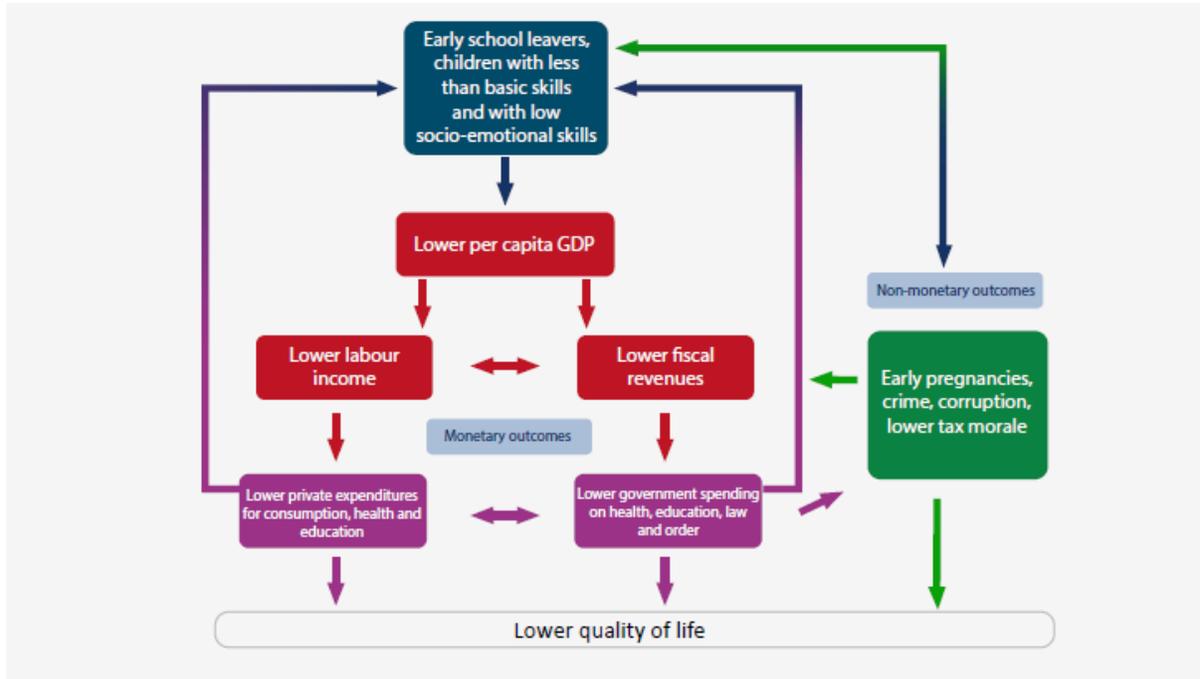


Figure 1: The interaction between the share of children leaving school early, failing to attain basic skills or with low socio-emotional skills and private, fiscal, social and non-monetary costs¹⁰.

Information: Thailand's new zero drop out initiative

“Thailand Zero Dropout” initiative: reducing dropouts down to zero was launched in May 2024. The projects under the Initiative are designed to target the most vulnerable groups within their respective areas while continually adapting to their ever-evolving challenges. Driven by the imperative of addressing future societal issues, the initiative’s interventions are tailored to the unique challenges of four priority groups — adolescent parents, border community members, youths requiring safe environments and learning ecosystems, and urban community members — with a strong emphasis on monitoring progress to make tangible impacts in the lives of these out-of-school youths. The overarching goal is to end abrupt youth dropouts and facilitate their seamless reintegration back into the educational system, focusing on personalized educational models that account for individual lifestyles and circumstances, while establishing mechanisms for ongoing improvement. Therefore, on 28 May 2024, the Thai Cabinet endorsed comprehensive measures under the Thailand Zero Dropout Initiative, intending to reintegrate 1,000,000 out-of-school children and youth by 2027. Strategies include 1. Identifying Out-of-School Children and Youth through Inter-Ministerial Data Integration; 2. Providing Tailored Support; 3. Offering Flexible and Quality Education Tailored to Each Child and Youth’s Potential; and 4. Encouraging Private Sector Involvement.

¹⁰ UNESCO, et al. 2024. *The Price of Inaction: The Global Private, Fiscal and Social Costs of Children and Youth Not Learning*. P.19. <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000389852>.

3. Dates and Venue

Thursday, 17 October 2024, 14.00–16.00 (UTC+7)

At Sapphire 107, IMPACT Forum Building, Nonthaburi, Thailand

Location: <https://maps.app.goo.gl/VLSEjqoAPvh5yfwKA>

Zoom Link:

<https://zoom.us/j/92687013518?pwd=YNKB7vSnb498rv1OQ9UJYAGkRE7yyI.1>

Meeting ID: 926 8701 3518

Passcode: 998614

4. Expected Outcomes

- Improved regional and international cooperation in raising the issue of educational inequity for young people at risk, including youth NEETs and OOSCY.
- Enhanced institutional capacity of member organizations to promote equity-based education for applying good EEA practices and knowledge into the local contexts.
- Strengthened partnerships for promoting equity-based education and innovative learning systems established at national, regional, and international levels among governments, international agencies and the private sector.
- Increased knowledge and expertise on equitable education and its implementation widely disseminated with supported evidence data.

Provisional Agenda - 17 October 2024 from 14:00 to 16:00 (UTC+7 Bangkok time)

Facilitator: Dr Rangsun Wiboonuppatum, Education Specialist, UNICEF Thailand		
Notetakers: Ms Yuner Lin		
Time	Agenda Item	Content
5 mins	<i>Opening</i>	Introduction by Dr Kraiyos Patrawart, Managing Director, Equitable Education Fund (EEF) Thailand
10 mins	<i>Introduction</i>	Round the table: Self-Introduction
15 mins	<i>Background</i>	EEF provides disaggregated data on NEETs and OOSCY in Thailand and in the region by Dr Kraiyos Patrawart, Managing Director, Equitable Education Fund (EEF) Thailand.
5 mins		Q&A
30 mins	<i>Presentation by New Members</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - ASPBAE - MoEYS Cambodia - Prakerja
5 mins		Q&A
30 mins	<i>Discussion with EEA Members</i>	<p>Open forum for EEA members to share good policies and strategies for replication and learning via Padlet</p> <p><u>Guiding Topics:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Lifelong learning initiatives <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Flexible education pathways - Learning Loss & Recovery - Equitable Education Approaches targeting youth at risk (i.e. NEETs) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Country Report/Cases - Sub-groups: adolescent mothers, persons with disabilities, ethnic minorities, internal/internationally displaced - Adequate, equitable and sustainable financing for youth and adult education. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - whole-of-society approaches - innovative financing (fiscal measures, social impact bonds)
30 mins		<p>Discussion on joint action and development.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 2 Publications; 2-page case studies and a paper on NEETs
5 mins	<i>Closing</i>	Closing Remarks by Dr Rika Yorozu, Education Programme Specialist, UNESCO Bangkok