

OUT-OF-SCHOOL ADOLESCENTS



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1. Rationale

As the drive towards universal primary education (UPE) continues, successful progress to date has resulted in greater pressure on secondary education systems. As such, the need to better monitor exclusion from lower secondary education, or out-of-school adolescents, becomes increasingly important (World Bank, 2005; Lewin, 2006; Verspoor et al., 2008). While countries are seeking to meet their international commitments and reach the goal of UPE by 2015, monitoring exclusion in post-primary education has become increasingly relevant at the national and international levels. Hence, there is an increased demand for indicators that go beyond the enrolment of primary school-age children.

Presently, no internationally accepted indicators for post-primary education exist. EFA Goal No. 3 states that the learning needs of all young people and adults should be met through equitable access to appropriate learning and life skills programmes (UNESCO, 2000). While there is little doubt that schools (i.e. secondary-level education and higher) are one place to begin to meet this goal, other learning environments might also present an opportunity. In any event, monitoring exclusion at the secondary level is important in relation to this goal in order to quantify those out of school and in need of alternative forms of education.

Most countries have committed themselves far beyond international goals and have made varying degrees of post-primary education compulsory (UIS, 2009a). For example, regional Education for All (EFA) goals for Latin America have explicitly mentioned the objective to expand compulsory education (UNESCO, 2000, p. 36), while the Arab States have pledged to ensure that basic education is made compulsory (UNESCO, 2000, p. 51). International monitoring will face increasing pressures to hold countries accountable to these goals.

This paper presents new global, regional and country-level estimates for the number of out-of-school adolescents at lower secondary education. It examines the progress made in reducing levels of exclusion since 1999, especially with regard to gender disparities. It also analyses lower secondary participation as increasingly being recognised as being part of compulsory education.

Further consideration and inputs from national and international statistical agencies and other stakeholders will be required in order to develop a better consensus on the indicators for out-of-school secondary school-age adolescents. This paper presents a first step towards achieving this outcome.

Box 1. Estimating the number of out-of-school adolescents

In comparison to the UIS figures presented in this report, substantially higher estimates of out-of-school adolescents of lower secondary school age have been recently published by the World Bank (Mertaugh, Jimenez and Patrinos, 2009) and the G8 (G8 Education Experts, 2009).

The World Bank authors estimated that there were 118.7 million out-of-school adolescents of lower secondary school age in 2005. While the paper does not describe the details of its calculation methods, the figure appears to be based on the assumption that the proportion of over-age students in lower secondary education was the same as in primary education. In other words, it appears that the number of out-of-school adolescents of lower secondary school age was calculated using the primary-level net enrolment ratio (NER) of a country. This may lead to overestimates as NERs typically decline at higher education levels. In addition, it counts adolescents who are in primary education (or other levels other than lower secondary) as being out of school.

A widely quoted figure of 266 million adolescents being out of school is published in the G8 Education Experts Report 2009 (G8 Education Experts, 2009). According to the authors, the figure is based on both lower and upper secondary education. In addition to differences in defining 'adolescents', the G8 calculation is based on a global secondary school-age population reported as 782 million and a global gross enrolment rate (GER) of 66% in 2006. As noted in this paper, there are strong conceptual and technical limitations in terms of elaborating a policy-relevant and reliable measure of out-of-school youth in the upper secondary ages which still need to be addressed.

In both of these approaches, the estimates count secondary school-age children who are enrolled in primary or tertiary education as being out of school. The number of adolescents of lower secondary school age enrolled in primary education represents 67 million young people, while a smaller number of adolescents of lower secondary school age are enrolled in upper secondary education (or at post-secondary levels). Including them in the total number of out-of-school adolescents results in overestimation, especially in countries with high participation rates. Over-age children in primary education undoubtedly pose a significant educational challenge. However, by mixing data on this group with those who are truly excluded from education may invite erroneous conclusions about the number of out-of-school children and adolescents, and potentially misguide education policy.

2. Methodology

In the development of indicators on out-of-school adolescents, a number of factors need to be considered. First, the indicators need to be defined using existing data and building on a comparable definition of out-of-school adolescents, since comparability across countries is one of the most important requirements for the production of international statistics. Second, the indicators should complement data on out-of-school children at the primary level and not result in the same children or adolescents being counted twice at different levels of education.

This paper focuses on a specific part of the youth population, namely those of lower secondary school age. In order to monitor out-of-school adolescents, reliable and complete data by age are needed for all levels of education at which the target group should be enrolled. This includes both lower levels and higher levels of education. Currently, however, many countries cannot provide consistent enrolment data for upper secondary technical and vocational programmes or post-secondary education. Moreover, many adolescents of upper secondary school age are already enrolled in post-secondary non-tertiary education. As such, a complete picture of out-of-school adolescents of upper secondary education age is currently unattainable.

A clearly defined term does not currently exist for this age group. Children enrolled at the lower secondary level typically cover an age range from approximately 10 to 15 years. While the United Nations defines 'youth' as ranging between 15 and 24 years of age (UN, 2009a), 'adolescence' is frequently defined by several UN agencies as ranging from 10 to 19 years of age, which more accurately encapsulates the lower and upper secondary levels of education (UN, 2009b; UNICEF, 2002; WHO, 2009).

For these reasons, the following analysis primarily utilises the term 'out-of-school adolescents' rather than 'out-of-school youths'. Moreover, the concept of out-of-school adolescents is defined in this report using the following four, partially overlapping, definitions:

- i. exclusion of adolescents of the official lower secondary school age (absolute number and as a proportion);
- ii. exclusion from compulsory education (in a number of countries, compulsory education includes only the primary age group);
- iii. exclusion from the last two years of compulsory education by country; and
- iv. exclusion by age group.

To be clear, the term 'out-of-school adolescents' does not refer only to adolescents who are outside of the age-appropriate level of education (i.e. lower secondary or upper secondary level). Rather, the term denotes adolescents who are definitively out of school, meaning that they are not enrolled in lower secondary or any other level of education – most typically at the primary level.

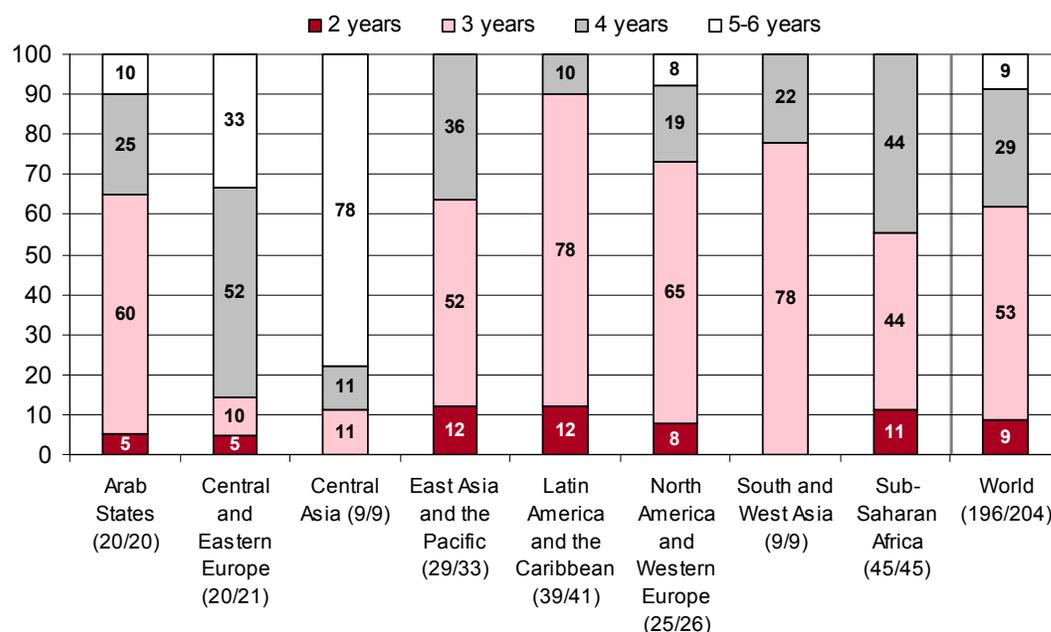
Calculating the absolute number of out-of-school adolescents for countries poses comparability issues due to differences in programme duration and, therefore, the number of cohorts (or grades) included. For example, it is possible that two countries with similar school-age populations and similar age-specific enrolment rates (e.g. NER) may show widely different absolute numbers of out-of-school adolescents. As explained,

the difference lies in the variation in duration. For example, given that population and participation rates are equal, a country with four years of lower secondary education could expect an estimate for out-of-school adolescents that is twice as large as another country with a programme intended to last two years.

In addition to the variability in duration, comparability between countries is further confounded by the reporting of age-specific data as related to level of education. For example, while out-of-school 10-year-olds are being counted in lower secondary statistics in some countries that have short primary-level programmes (four years or less), they are being counted at the primary level in most other countries. This variable needs to be carefully considered when comparing countries or regions of Central Asia and Central and Eastern Europe where many countries have short primary programmes and, as a consequence, longer lower secondary programmes. Here, the majority of countries (over 85%) offer programmes of four years or more. In contrast, 90% of countries in Latin America and the Caribbean have programmes of three years or less.

As seen in **Figure 1**, the duration of lower secondary education varies between two and six years – or, in other words, is comprised of two to six single-year population cohorts. The majority of countries (108 of 204 or 53%) have lower secondary education with a duration of three years. Combined with countries with a programme duration of four years, they account for 82% (168 of 204) of countries worldwide. This is important to consider when making cross-national comparisons, since indicator values change from cohort to cohort or grade to grade. For example, it is typical for participation rates, such as the GER or NER, to decrease at higher grade levels.

Figure 1. Distribution of lower secondary education programmes by duration and region, based on ISCED97, 2007



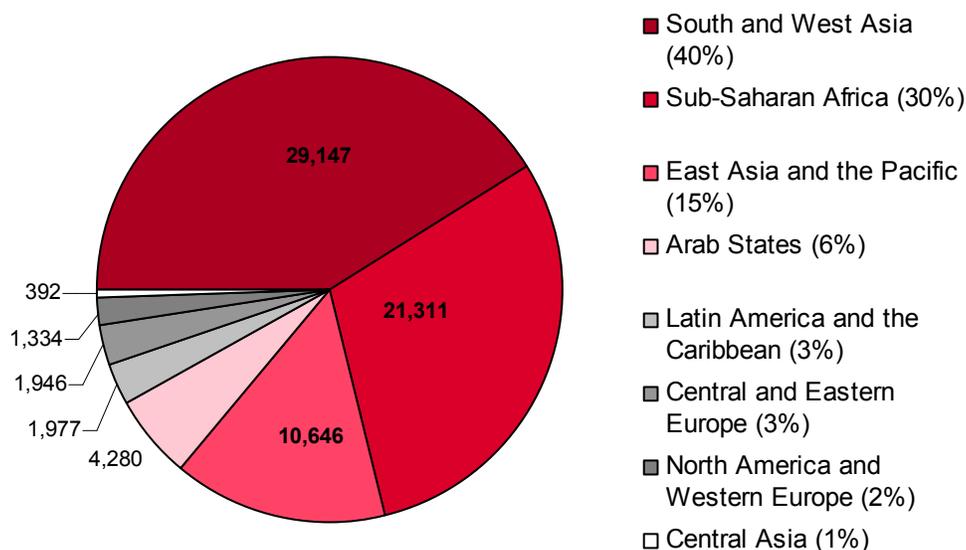
Note: Numbers below the region labels represent the number of countries reporting data over the total number of countries in the region.

Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics database, 2009.

3. The number of out-of-school adolescents of lower secondary school age

There are approximately 71 million out-of-school adolescents of lower secondary school age¹ excluded from any level of education². According to **Figure 2**, the majority are found in South and West Asia (40%) and sub-Saharan Africa (30%). These two regions account for a combined total of 70% of all out-of-school adolescents in this age group. Significant numbers also exist in East Asia and the Pacific (15%) and, to a lesser extent, the Arab States (6%). This is in sharp contrast to Latin America and the Caribbean, Central and Eastern Europe, Central Asia, as well as North America and Western Europe, where the number of out-of-school adolescents for each region contributes 3% or less to the global total.

Figure 2. Total out-of-school adolescents of lower secondary school age (in thousands) by region, 2007



Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics database, 2009.

The absolute number of out-of-school adolescents by region demonstrates where the greatest overall needs are found. In contrast, the proportion of out-of-school adolescents of lower secondary school age expressed as a percentage of the population of that age provides information on the relative challenges faced by regions. For example, while South and West Asia claims the largest number of out-of-school adolescents at the lower secondary level, sub-Saharan Africa claims a higher proportion of adolescents out of school at 37%, compared to 27% for South and West Asia (see **Table 1**).

¹ Lower secondary school age is defined for each country as the ages which correspond to lower secondary education as defined by the *International Standard Classification of Education 1997* (ISCED97).

² The number of out-of-school adolescents is calculated using the latest population figures from the United Nations Population Division (2007) and the UIS-calculated adjusted net enrolment rate (ANER).

Likewise, while out-of-school lower secondary school-age adolescents in East Asia and the Pacific make up the third largest group of all regions in absolute numbers, the regional proportion of adolescents excluded from education is 10%. In contrast, the proportion is doubled (20%) for the Arab States.

Table 1. Out-of-school children and adolescents in absolute numbers and in proportion of school-age population for primary, lower secondary and combined levels by region, 1999 and 2007

1999	Primary education		Lower secondary education		Primary and lower secondary education	
	Number (000)	Proportion (%)	Number (000)	Proportion (%)	Number (000)	Proportion (%)
Arab States	7,980	20.3	5,120	26.4	13,100	22.3
Central and Eastern Europe	2,036	8.0	4,310	16.1	6,346	12.1
Central Asia	464	6.6	1,056	12.9	1,520	10.0
East Asia and the Pacific	5,992	3.1	20,149	18.0	26,141	8.6
Latin America and the Caribbean	3,538	6.1	4,124	11.5	7,662	8.2
North America and Western Europe	1,420	2.8	m	m	m	m
South and West Asia	38,594	22.1	36,443	37.1	75,037	27.5
Sub-Saharan Africa	45,012	42.9	22,942	48.7	67,954	44.7
World	105,035	16.0	98,364	26.0	203,399	19.7

2007	Primary education		Lower secondary education		Primary and lower secondary education	
	Number (000)	Proportion (%)	Number (000)	Proportion (%)	Number (000)	Proportion (%)
Arab States	5,752	13.9	4,280	19.5	10,032	15.8
Central and Eastern Europe	1,551	7.0	1,945	9.6	3,497	8.3
Central Asia	270	4.8	392	4.9	663	4.8
East Asia and the Pacific	9,039	5.2	10,646	10.0	19,685	7.0
Latin America and the Caribbean	2,988	5.1	1,976	5.5	4,965	5.3
North America and Western Europe	1,931	3.8	1,333	4.3	3,264	4.0
South and West Asia	18,031	10.2	29,147	27.3	47,178	16.6
Sub-Saharan Africa	32,225	25.8	21,311	36.8	53,536	29.3
World	71,791	11.0	71,033	18.3	142,824	13.7

Note: The number of out-of-school primary-age children and out-of-school adolescents were calculated based on the adjusted net enrolment rate (ANER).

Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics database, 2009.

In addition to 71 million out-of-school adolescents of lower secondary school age, there are approximately 72 million out-of-school children of primary school age. However, it should be noted that these rates are not comparable since the duration of primary education is typically longer and consequently includes more age cohorts.

These numbers provide the first source of evidence that exclusion from lower secondary education is more typical globally than from primary education. In fact, Table 1 shows that, while 11% of primary school-age children are out of school worldwide, 18% of lower secondary school-age adolescents are also excluded from education. This finding is mirrored in all regions to various degrees; however, the greatest differences are observed in sub-Saharan Africa and in South and West Asia where the difference is more than 10 and 15 percentage points, respectively.

Since the commitment by governments to the EFA goals, the global percentage of out-of-school adolescents who are not enrolled in any education level declined between 1999 and 2007 from 25% to 18%, which is a relative decrease of 28% (see **Figure 3**). A decrease in the percentage occurred in every region, with Central Asia reporting the sharpest decline of over 50%. It should be noted, however, that their proportion of adolescents out of school in 1999 was substantially less (13%) than in many other regions.

Regions where the initial proportion was much higher in 1999 – including sub-Saharan Africa, South and West Asia, and the Arab States – also reported decreases of 11%, 10% and 7%, respectively, during the same period. While these three regions have greatly reduced their absolute numbers of out-of-school adolescents, they face the greatest challenges in ensuring that all adolescents be enrolled in lower secondary education. It is noteworthy that these same regions experienced rapid natural population growth during this period (1999-2007), making it more difficult to decrease the number of adolescents who are excluded from school.

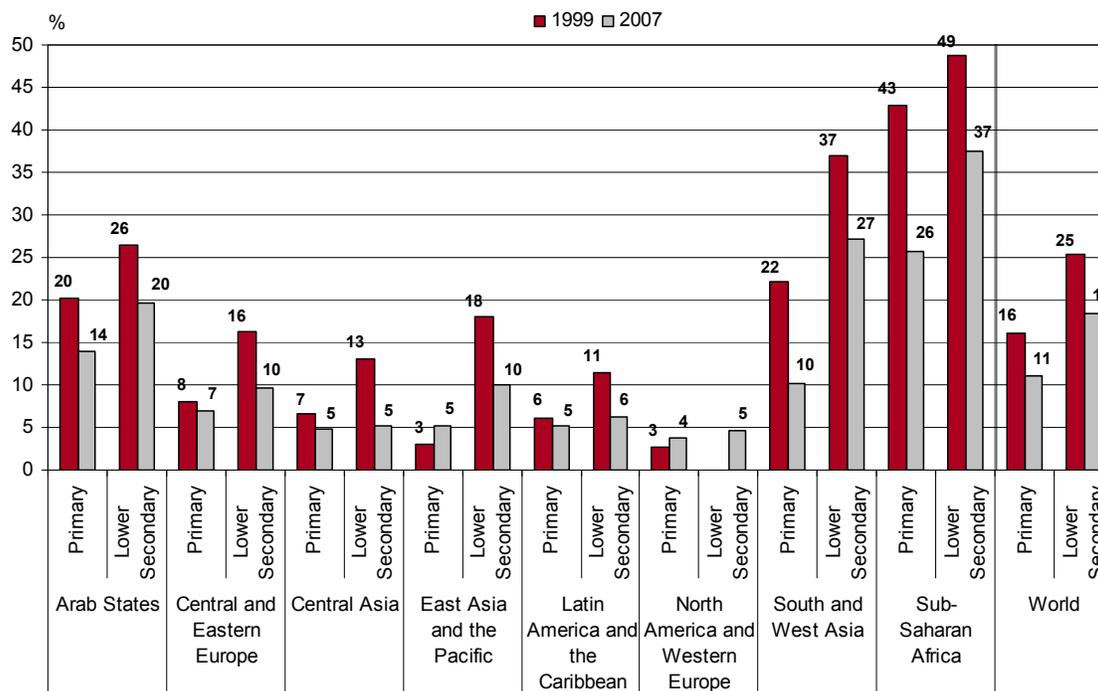
In contrast, other regions – namely Central and Eastern Europe, East Asia and the Pacific, and Central Asia – experienced declines in population between 1999 and 2007 while their proportion of out-of-school adolescents decreased. In other words, these regions were not under pressure to create more space in schools; rather, they were presented with a unique opportunity to ensure that vacated school places are filled by out-of-school adolescents.

Proportions of out-of-school children and adolescents have both been decreasing between 1999 and 2007. However, the rates of decline differ across regions. Over this period, the proportion of out-of-school primary school-age children declined almost twice as rapidly as the proportion of lower secondary school-age adolescents in South and West Asia and sub-Saharan Africa. These regions had the highest overall proportion of out-of-school children at the primary school-age level, but significant efforts have been made to achieve UPE.

Meanwhile, the proportion of out-of-school adolescents of lower secondary school age has been decreasing more rapidly than that of out-of-school children in almost all other regions – namely, Central and Eastern Europe, Central Asia, East Asia and the Pacific, and Latin America and the Caribbean. In these regions, the proportion of out-of-school primary school-age children was and remains under 10%, while substantial challenges existed in terms of managing the number of out-of-school lower secondary-age adolescents.

In the Arab States, the rate of decline for primary and lower secondary school-age pupils is similar to the global rates of 31% and 27%, respectively.

Figure 3. Proportion of out-of-school primary school-age children and lower secondary school-age adolescents by region, 1999 and 2007



Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics database, 2009.

Globally, more females are excluded from school than males. According to **Table 2**, 54% of the world's out-of-school adolescents of lower secondary school-age are girls. However, substantial variations are found across regions and countries within a region. In the Arab States, girls account for approximately 59% of all out-of-school adolescents of lower secondary school age. Within this region, Egypt, Yemen and Iraq report very high percentages of adolescent girls being out of school, totalling 82%, 64% and 61%, respectively.

Table 2. Absolute number and proportion of out-of-school girls of lower secondary school age by region, 2007

2007 Region	Primary education		Lower secondary education		Primary and lower secondary education	
	Number (000)	Proportion (%)	Number (000)	Proportion (%)	Number (000)	Proportion (%)
Arab States	3,520	61.2	2,345	58.5	5,866	60.1
Central and Eastern Europe	802	51.7	823	56.7	1,625	54.1
Central Asia	156	57.6	181	59.8	337	58.8
East Asia and the Pacific	4,357	48.2	4,946	47.9	9,302	48.1
Latin America and the Caribbean	1,483	49.6	904	48.0	2,387	49.0
North America and Western Europe	850	44.0	594	45.0	1,444	44.4
South and West Asia	10,388	57.6	16,513	55.2	26,901	56.1
Sub-Saharan Africa	17,599	54.5	12,152	55.9	29,711	55.1
World	39,144	54.5	38,458	54.2	77,572	54.4

Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics database, 2009.

Females also make up the majority of out-of-school adolescents in Central and Eastern Europe and Central Asia (57% and 60%, respectively). Again, significant differences exist across countries in these regions. For example, females account for 80% of out-of-school lower secondary school-age adolescents in Turkey but only 44% and 41% in the Russian Federation and Armenia.

While regional proportions of males and females out of school are roughly equal in East Asia and the Pacific and Latin America and the Caribbean, country variations exist. For instance, 58% of out-of-school adolescents are female in Cambodia and Lao PDR, while they only make up 33% in the Philippines, where boys are less likely to be enrolled in school.

In North America and Western Europe, the total out-of-school population is generally very low for all countries. Nonetheless, males make up the majority of out-of-school adolescents in most countries of the region.

In South and West Asia, females account for the majority of out-of-school adolescents of lower secondary school age in India (56%)³ and Pakistan (60%), while they comprise a minority in Bangladesh (44%) and the Islamic Republic of Iran (45%).

Finally, in the vast majority of countries in sub-Saharan Africa, adolescent girls are more often out of school than boys (50%-65%). Exceptions are found in South Africa, Mauritius and Lesotho, where girls account for 41%, 40% and 25% of out-of-school adolescents of lower secondary age, respectively.

Lower secondary school-age pupils enrolled in primary education

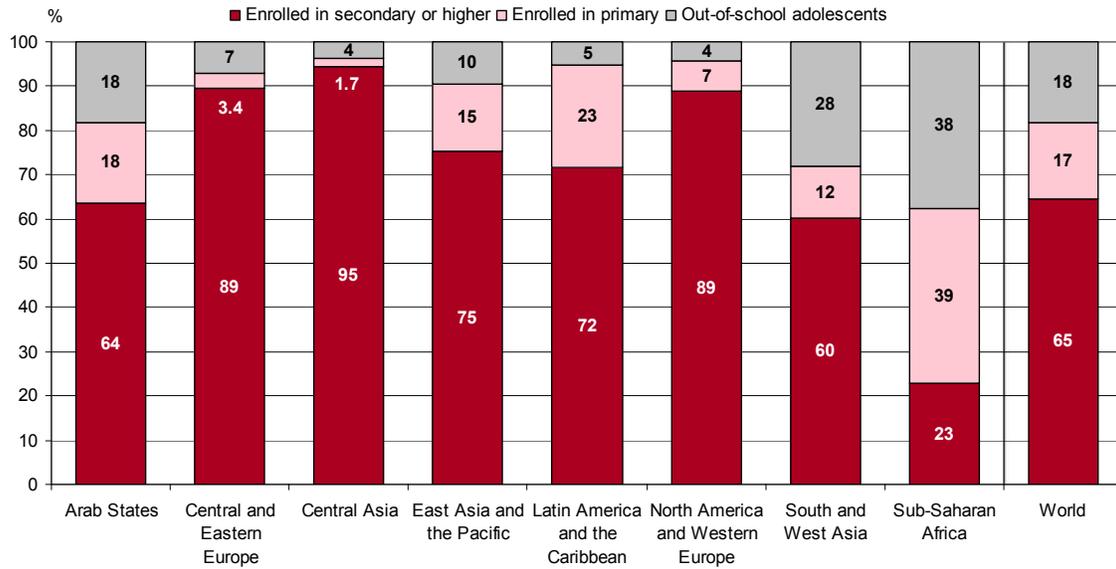
The measure used in this report counts adolescents who are not enrolled at any level of education and, as such, does not take into account those enrolled at other levels (e.g. pupils of lower secondary age enrolled in primary-level (or even upper secondary) programmes). This is an important distinction since enrolment in a lower level of education measures another form of non-participation.

As shown in **Figure 4**, 18% of lower secondary school-age adolescents are out of school globally. However, this does not mean that the remaining 82% benefit from lower secondary education. Figure 4 shows that 17% of these adolescents are still enrolled in primary education. For the region of sub-Saharan Africa, this proportion increases to 40% and only the minority (23%) of all lower secondary school-age adolescents are actually enrolled at that level. Central Asia reports the lowest percentage of lower secondary school-age adolescents enrolled in primary education, at 2%.

In contrast to sub-Saharan Africa, non-participation in lower secondary education in South and West Asia is mainly due to adolescents being out of school (28%) rather than being enrolled at the primary level (12%).

³ In India, 48% of the total population aged 10 to 15 years is female.

Figure 4. Distribution of lower secondary school-age adolescents by level of education, 2007



Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics database, 2009.

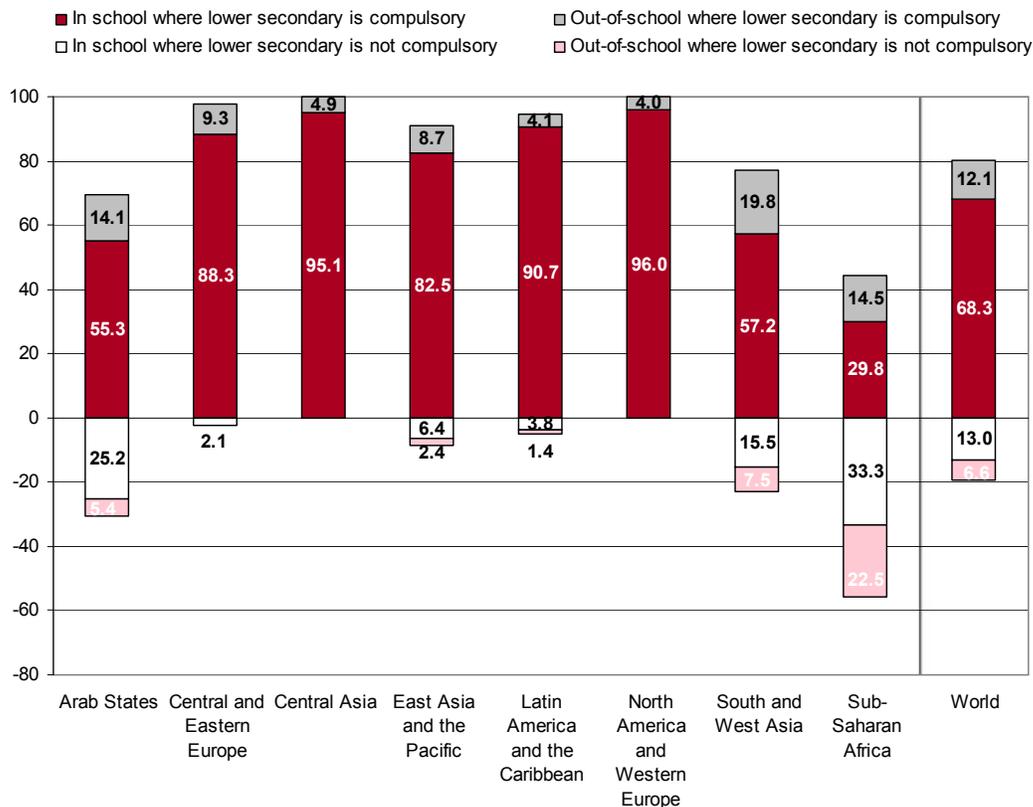
4. Enrolment in compulsory lower secondary education

Another perspective on out-of-school adolescence is gained when looking at countries with compulsory lower secondary education. Compulsory education defines the number of years that children and adolescents are legally obliged to attend school (UIS, 2009b). It is estimated that at least 90% of the world's countries have legally-binding regulations requiring children to attend school (UIS, 2009a). While enacting legislation on compulsory education does not necessarily ensure higher enrolment, it does provide an important enabling condition and an intention by countries to provide access to education for all children (Benavot and Resnik, 2006).

Figure 5 shows that 80% of all adolescents of lower secondary school age live in countries where this level of education is compulsory. However, 68% are in school and 12% are out of school, despite compulsory lower secondary education.

The region of South and West Asia has the highest proportion (20%) of lower secondary school-aged children out of school in countries where it is mandatory. Sub-Saharan Africa and the Arab States also have high proportions – approximately 15% and 14%, respectively. In contrast, less than 5% of adolescents in North America and Western Europe, Central Asia, as well as Latin America and the Caribbean are out of school when living in a country with compulsory lower secondary education.

Figure 5. Proportion of school-age adolescents in and out of school by compulsory school attendance, 2007



Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics database, 2009.

Figure 5 also demonstrates that enrolment in many countries is a step ahead of current policy on compulsory education. In other words, while many countries have not yet introduced legislation on compulsory lower secondary education, they may have nevertheless achieved high enrolment at that level. For example, in the Arab States and sub-Saharan Africa, respectively 25% and 33% of lower secondary school-age adolescents are enrolled at that level in countries where it is not compulsory. Therefore, some countries might consider increasing the duration of compulsory education to include lower secondary education, for example Saudi Arabia, where the percentage of out-of-school adolescents of lower secondary school age is less than 10%. On the other hand, a high percentage of lower secondary-age students are enrolled at the primary level in these regions, therefore some countries may want to reconsider whether achieving full enrolment at this level is a realistic goal in the short to medium term.

An alternative way to measure the exclusion of adolescents from education is through comparison of NER for a standardised period of the last two years of compulsory education. Since the duration of compulsory education is defined by each country, this measurement provides a way to monitor how countries are meeting their own targets for enrolment and reducing exclusion of adolescents.

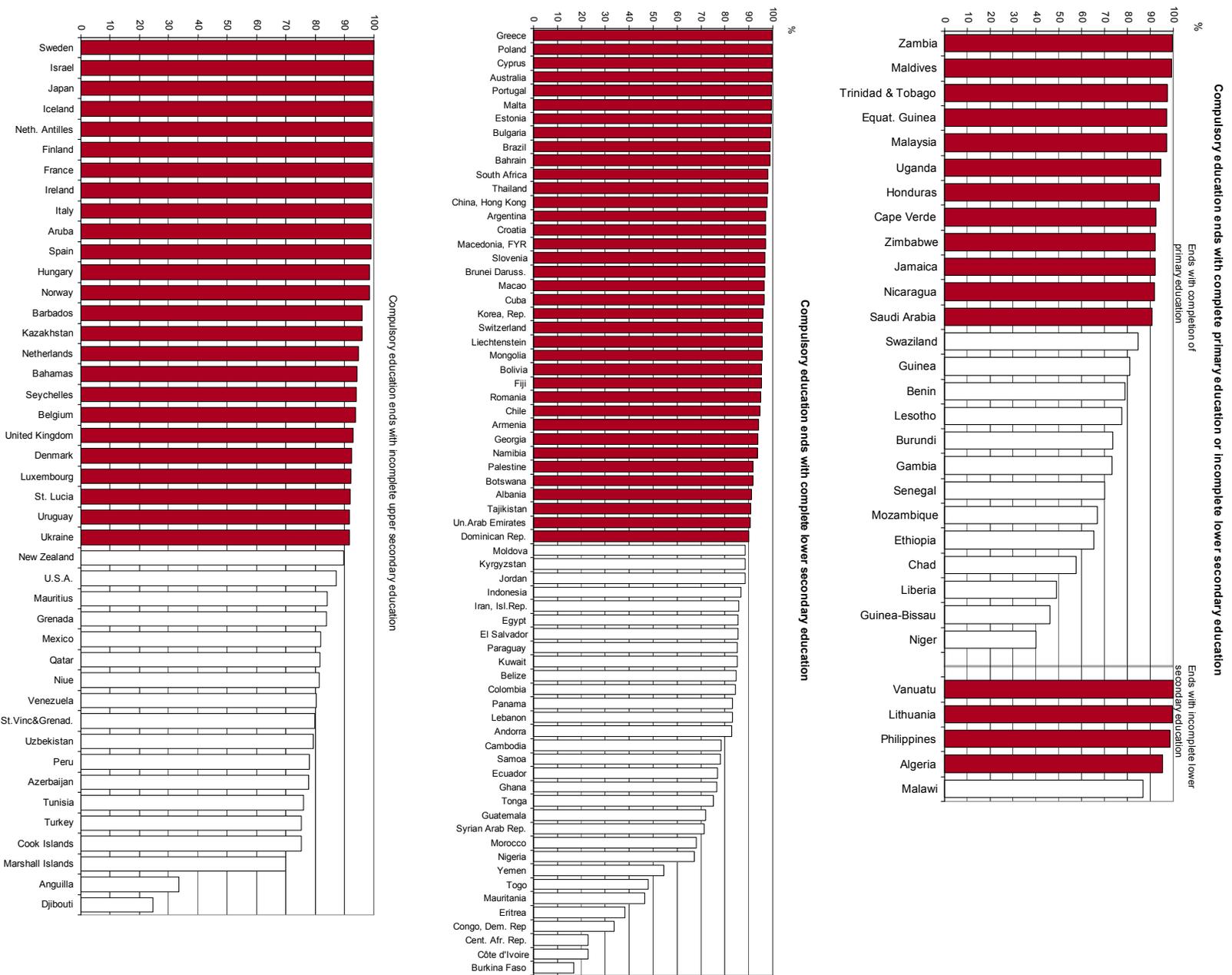
Figure 6 groups countries by highest level of compulsory schooling and ranks them by their average NER for the last two years of compulsory education. Countries shown by the shaded bars correspond to those which have met their own targets for compulsory education by scoring a NER greater than 90%.

The first group of countries (i.e. top figure) represents those that set the standard for compulsory education relatively low. In other words, compulsory education includes only the primary or incomplete lower secondary level. These countries are dispersed throughout the world, though to a lesser extent in North America and Western Europe, Central and Eastern Europe, and Central Asia. While the standard set is relatively low, this group includes countries which are still far from meeting the goal of UPE, including Guinea-Bissau, Liberia and Niger, where not even one-half of appropriately-aged children are enrolled in the last two grades of compulsory primary education.

In contrast, this group also includes countries that have met their own standard and could raise the level of compulsory education to include some or all of the lower secondary level. These countries include Equatorial Guinea and Zambia in sub-Saharan Africa; Trinidad and Tobago in Latin America and the Caribbean; Malaysia in East Asia and the Pacific; and the Maldives in South and West Asia.

The second group of countries (i.e. middle figure) sets a higher standard which is the mandatory completion of a full programme of lower secondary education. Many countries in East Asia and the Pacific, Central and Eastern Europe, Central Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean and sub-Saharan Africa. are able to meet this standard and may consider increasing the standard to include the upper secondary level as part of compulsory education. Countries which face greater challenges in meeting the standard are mostly in western or central sub-Saharan Africa: Burkina Faso, Central African Republic, Côte d'Ivoire, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Mauritania and Togo.

Figure 6. Net rate of enrolment in the last two years of compulsory education, 2007



Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics database, 2009.

The last group of countries (i.e. bottom figure) has a system that includes at least some upper secondary education as mandatory. Most developed countries belong to this group, though some of them – including the United States – fall short of meeting their own standard. At the lower end of the scale, Anguilla and Djibouti have NERs below 40% for the last two years of compulsory education.

Among these three groups, almost one-half of countries (44%) do not reach their national targets in terms of participation. This is reflected by enrolment rates at the end of compulsory education that fall below 90%.

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