**Education and Equity**

**Message Framing**

**An equitable education system is the foundation for a peaceful, productive and fair society.** Prioritising investment in education for those most often excluded — those who are poor, disabled, female, rural, nomadic, from minority ethnic groups, and living in conflict — provides the greatest social and economic returns.

**Key challenges**

* **The benefits of education for all will not be fully realised without quality education for all.** Great inequities exist in learning and the quality of education provided — even for children with a primary education — with learning outcomes often the lowest for children from disadvantaged backgrounds ([UNICEF](https://www.unicef.org/sites/default/files/2019-03/Investment_Case_for_Education_and_Equity-ENG.pdf), 2015). In low and middle-income countries, only 18 of the poorest youth complete secondary school for every 100 of the richest youth. In at least 20 countries, mostly in sub-Saharan Africa, hardly any poor rural young women complete secondary school ([GEM](https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark%3A/48223/pf0000373718), 2020).
* **Providing equitable education opportunities starts with more equitable education financing.** Governments often spend the least on the children most often excluded from education. In Malawi, the most educated 10% consume 130 times the amount of public education funds than the bottom 10% ([UNICEF](https://www.unicef.org/publications/index_78727.html), 2015).
* **Progressive education policies are needed to proactively address systemic learning inequality.** Across 30 countries, children from the poorest quintile of households were four times more likely to be out of school compared with those from the wealthiest households (40% versus 10%) ([UIS](http://uis.unesco.org/sites/default/files/documents/fs18-reaching-out-of-school-children-is-crucial-for-development-en.pdf), 2012).

**Making the case**

* **Prioritising education for the most marginalised provides the highest returns.** Financing primary and early childhood education, and the education of the poorest, the disabled, and those with social disadvantages, is the quickest route to achieving equity, with the greatest potential social dividends ([Education Commission](https://report.educationcommission.org/downloads/), 2016).
* **Investments in early childhood education promote equity.** Creating a level playing field from the beginning improves the chances for a fair start in life, reaping benefits to nutrition and health, cognitive development, and school achievement ([GBC-Education](https://gbc-education.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/opportunities_for_impact-_the_business_case_for_early_childhood_development_final3-1.pdf), 2018; [Black & Dewey](https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/24571211/), 2014; [Nonoyama-Tarumi et al.](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/03057920701712833), 2009)
* **Investing in the most disadvantaged generates the greatest impact.** In Ghana, building nurseries for the poorest children in the poorest districts had an impact on primary completion four times that of providing nurseries to the general population ([UNICEF](https://www.unicef.org/education), 2016).
* **Providing equitable education is an important driver of national economic growth**. More equal access to education reduces income inequality and poverty, offering all segments of society more equal economic opportunities. If education inequality in sub-Saharan Africa had been halved, the annual per capita growth rate would have increased nearly 50% over a five-year period ([EFA GMR](https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark%3A/48223/pf0000223115), 2013).
* **A marginal increase in education has transformative effects on inequality.** One additional year of education is associated with a 1.4% decrease in income inequality. Societies with high income equality are able to reduce poverty 75% faster ([Patrinos & Psacharopoulos](https://books.google.com/books?hl=en&lr=&id=JdyaAAAAQBAJ&oi=fnd&pg=PA170&dq=Patrinos+%26+Psacharopoulos,+2013+equality&ots=5PRXnG2geA&sig=Lh5WbqDS0A76V5AyyMt90SBRTQk" \l "v=onepage&q&f=false), 2013).

**Key Talking Points**

* Education can create more equitable societies, if investments provide opportunities to the poorest and most marginalised.
* Education has a tremendous power to equalise the playing field early in life and helps reduce inequalities between income groups and for minority populations.
* The Education Commission recommended that when balancing spending across levels of education and population groups, decision-makers should prioritise spending for equity and public returns. This includes prioritising the poor or disadvantaged, areas with lower levels of education where social returns are highest, and supporting the complementary role for private financing and cost recovery for higher levels of education where appropriate.