



Education and Minority Groups



Education can be an equaliser for marginalised minority groups — the poor, refugees, migrants, ethnic or linguistic minorities, and those that live in rural or fragile areas.

Education promotes tolerance, reduces conflict, and builds healthy relationships across divides. When education is tailored for these minority groups, learning outcomes are increased, money is saved, and our society is healthier.

Key challenges



- **Teaching children in their native language can result in lower drop-out rates, higher retention, and increased academic achievement.** Half of all children in low- and middle-income countries are not taught in their native language, many of them belonging to a minority group. A number of studies show a near zero level of understanding by children not being taught in their mother tongue. Children in Mali taught in their native language were five times less likely to repeat the year and more than three times less likely to drop out of school

(International Commission on Financing Global Education Opportunity, 2016; Smits et al., 2008; Alidou et al., 2006)

Make the case



- **Education promotes religious tolerance.** In Arab States, people with secondary education were 14% less likely to express intolerant attitudes towards people of a different religion ([GMR/Chzhen, 2014/2013](#)).
- **Education advances tolerance for immigrant children.** Higher educational attainment is correlated with more positive attitudes towards immigrants. People with secondary education were 16% less likely to express intolerance towards immigrants in Central and Eastern Europe in comparison to those without a secondary education ([Borgonovi & Pokropek, 2019](#); [GMR/Chzhen, 2014/2013](#)).
- **Education bolsters racial tolerance.** In Latin America, people with a secondary education were half as likely to express intolerance for people of different race than those with only a primary education ([EFA GMR, 2014](#)).
- **Increased education increases tolerance of sexual orientation.** In Argentina, people with a secondary education were nearly one-quarter less likely to express homophobic attitudes than those with only a primary education ([EFA GMR, 2014](#)).
- **When education is more equal for minority groups, the probability of conflict attributed to xenophobia or stereotypes of minority groups is reduced.** In sub-Saharan Africa, the risk of conflict in the areas with the highest education inequality is almost double that of the areas with the lowest education inequality ([Smith, 2009](#); [EFA GMR, 2013](#)).
- **Integrated schools can play an important role in building productive, sustainable relationships across political, religious, and ethnic divides in post-conflict communities.** Integrated schools can positively influence minority group identity, attitudes towards inclusion, and a sense of compassion. Arab-Jewish schools in Israel have been successful in reconciling conflicting narratives by guiding conversation that recognises ethnic, religious and other differences ([McGlynn, 2004](#); [Bekerman, 2012](#); [Alexander and Christia, 2011](#)).
- **Open classroom environments can advance the rights of minority groups.** Students who perceived their classroom environment as open were more likely to endorse equal rights for all ethnic groups and believe that this was a benefit for democracy. An open classroom climate can foster political participation by students from disadvantaged backgrounds ([Treviño et al., 2018](#); [GEM, 2019](#); [Campbell, 2008](#)).

- **Learning incomes improve for minority groups when they are provided with equal instructional materials, particularly when relevant and appropriate to their culture.** More than half of the achievement gap between indigenous and non-indigenous speakers in Guatemala can be attributed to indigenous children attending schools with fewer instructional materials, a non-mother-tongue curriculum, and fewer qualified teachers. When books with stories that were culturally applicable for ethnic minority students were used in the Philippines, reading and language test scores rose by 40%
(McEwan and Trowbridge, 2007; Dekker, 2003).
- **Adapting education for minority groups saves money.** Switching to mother-tongue instruction is cost effective. In Guatemala, native-language-based bilingual schooling saved US\$5.6 million a year through reduced drop out and grade repetition, even with higher start up costs for teacher training and materials. In Mali, the cost of educating a student in non-native French is estimated to cost nearly one-third more due to repetition and drop out
(Partinos and Velez, 2009)
- **Early childhood education is particularly important for minority groups.** Community and family-based early childhood programmes allow caregivers to come together to discuss and resolve the challenges they face. In doing so, they also help forge and sustain relationships across social, ethnic, religious, and political divides
(UNICEF, 2015).

Key talking points



- **Education promotes tolerance - of religion, race, sexual orientation and immigrants.**
- **Equal education for minority groups reduces the chances of conflict.**
- **Integrated schools can play a key role in building relationships across political, religious and ethnic divides.**
- **Children taught in their native language, and with culturally relevant materials, are more likely to stay in school and achieve better results.**