

Educational Inequalities: Experiences in Ensuring Education System Resilience in Eastern Europe, the Caucasus, and Central Asia

Analytical report



Cedos



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● Introduction

Educational inequalities are shaped by a combination of sociocultural, historical, and economic factors that determine not only access to education and the conditions for obtaining it, but also ultimate learning outcomes. They manifest as disparities among population groups in the opportunity to obtain a quality education, utilize educational resources, and achieve expected academic outcomes. In most cases, unequal access to education affects vulnerable groups of children who face additional barriers to entering the school system.

Vulnerability is not one-dimensional and often arises from a combination of several factors. Different risk factors can overlap, exacerbating the effect of educational exclusion. For instance, a child with a disability who lives in a rural area and comes from a low-income family faces a complex combination of barriers—infrastructural, financial, and social.

In this report, we highlight the state of educational access for various vulnerable student groups across the countries of Eastern Europe, the Caucasus, and Central Asia¹ as part of a broader study on the education system resilience in the region. This report constitutes the second part of our desk research analyzing resilience policies in the target region.

For the analysis in this report, we utilized scholarly articles, reports from international development organizations, and official documents, such as national strategies and action plans. A detailed methodology of the study is available in the [*Education System Resilience in Eastern Europe, the Caucasus, and Central Asia: Policies and Practices Report*](#).

¹ As part of the Observatory on Education System Resilience Initiative of the Knowledge and Innovation Exchange (KIX), implemented with the support of the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) and the Global Partnership for Education (GPE), the Cedos Think Tank hosts one of six observatories working to define the understanding and practices of education system resilience and potential future challenges to education systems in the countries of its region. Each observatory represents a specific region whose countries are GPE members. The Cedos team works with a region that brings together countries of Eastern Europe, the Caucasus, and Central Asia, namely Albania, Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Mongolia.

● Theoretical Framework for Studying Equality of Access to Education

Education is a fundamental human right that, in accordance with international conventions and documents,² must be accessible to everyone. Educational equality is rooted in the principle of equity, which recognizes that due to differences in needs, resources, abilities, and life circumstances, individuals may require varying levels of support to achieve equal educational opportunities.³

Education is widely regarded as a key mechanism for ensuring equal opportunities and reducing social inequality. At the same time, numerous studies demonstrate that education systems do not always fulfill this function in practice. On the contrary, under certain conditions, **they may reproduce or even reinforce existing social inequalities** if access to quality education and educational resources remains uneven.

Educational inequality is a component of a broader system of social inequalities, reflecting and reproducing existing disparities in access to resources, opportunities, and life trajectories across different social groups. Educational inequalities create challenges at both the individual and societal levels, preventing students from fulfilling their potential and widening social and economic divides.⁴

To explain the mechanisms behind the emergence and reproduction of educational inequalities, researchers draw upon various theoretical approaches, one of the most influential being Pierre Bourdieu's **theory of different types of capital**

² For instance, Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights; the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights; the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

³ Campos, D. G., Koskinen, A., Munkácsy, B., Rolfe, V., Patsis, P., Tóth, E., Olsen, R. V., Scherer, R., Söldner, L., Danek, A. H., Greiff, S., & Vainikainen, M.-P. (2025). Educational inequalities in Europe: A scoping review of longitudinal studies in K–12 education. *Studies in Educational Evaluation*, 87, Article 101523. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.stueduc.2025.101523>

⁴ Campos, D. G., Koskinen, A., Munkácsy, B., Rolfe, V., Patsis, P., Tóth, E., Olsen, R. V., Scherer, R., Söldner, L., Danek, A. H., Greiff, S., & Vainikainen, M.-P. (2025). Educational inequalities in Europe: A scoping review of longitudinal studies in K–12 education. *Studies in Educational Evaluation*, 87, Article 101523. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.stueduc.2025.101523>

(social, economic, cultural, and symbolic).⁵ This theory posits that the school, as an institution, privileges and grants educational access to individuals with varying levels of capital. Economic capital, in Bourdieu's terms, consists of material resources that can cover access to private schools, tutoring, extracurricular activities, and the like. Cultural capital encompasses intangible resources, such as education, intellect, and language proficiency. Social capital refers to social connections, such as peer networks and parental contacts with teachers. Symbolic capital is any of the previously mentioned types of capital that is recognized by society and deemed legitimate.⁶

In this study, Bourdieu's theory serves as an analytical framework to explain how different vulnerability factors influence children's access to these forms of capital. The assumption is that socioeconomic status, gender, disability, ethnicity, place of residence, forced displacement, or living in war-affected territories can limit children's opportunities to accumulate various types of capital. Furthermore, individual vulnerability factors can overlap, compounding educational barriers.

Identifying the diverse factors that influence educational opportunities has driven the development of distinct approaches to understanding educational equality itself and ways of achieving it. Researchers classify educational equality based on the following principles:

- Equal opportunities (rights enshrined in legislation)
- Equal access (school engagement and enrollment)
- Equal treatment (the presence of identical approaches and practices)
- Equal outcomes⁷ (ensuring identical chances of success among students)

A key factor highlighted by most studies is the **socioeconomic status of the family**, which largely determines a child's access to educational and other resources. The scope and nature of support that parents can provide, including investments

⁵ Aiston, S. J., & Walraven, G. (2024). A re-view of educational inequalities. *Educational Review*, 76(1), 1–12. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00131911.2023.2286849>

⁶ Kumar, B. (2025). Capital, habitus and symbolic violence: A Bourdieusian analysis of mode of reproductions in Indian schools. *International Journal of Social Science and Human Research*, 8(9), 7416–7422. <https://doi.org/10.47191/ijsshr/v8-i9-87>

⁷ Kumar, B. (2025). Capital, habitus and symbolic violence: A Bourdieusian analysis of mode of reproductions in Indian schools. *International Journal of Social Science and Human Research*, 8(9). <https://doi.org/10.47191/ijsshr/v8-i9-87>

of time, effort, and financial capabilities, are shaped within existing resource constraints, directly affecting the child's educational opportunities.⁸ Students from low-income families face numerous difficulties, such as a lack of permanent housing, limited access to healthcare, and restricted educational opportunities, all of which directly affect their academic performance. This issue can also be exacerbated by the limited funding of schools in low-income areas.⁹

At the same time, contemporary research on educational inequality emphasizes that **different forms of vulnerability can overlap and must be examined comprehensively**. The intersectional approach involves analyzing the totality of a person's life circumstances and how they interact with discrimination and inequalities. The overlapping of multiple vulnerability factors (for example, living in a remote area, low income, and disability) can create deeper barriers to educational access than each of these factors would individually.¹⁰

Educational inequality leads to significant gaps in academic performance. One of the tools that illustrate educational inequalities through the prism of achievement is the international PISA study, which assesses the performance of 15-year-old students in three domains: reading, mathematics, and science. PISA results demonstrate a close link between poverty and academic performance: as poverty levels rise within a country, academic performance declines. Gender inequality also directly impacts educational outcomes. According to PISA surveys, in most EU and OECD countries, girls demonstrate higher academic achievement, although in some countries, performance declines equally among girls and boys.¹¹ Ethnic minorities may also score lower than their peers, particularly due to language barriers. For instance, according to PISA results in Georgia, Azerbaijani-speaking students lag behind their Georgian-speaking peers by approximately four years.¹²

⁸ Blanden, J., Doepke, M., & Stuhler, J. (2022). *Educational inequality* (IZA Discussion Paper No. 15225). Institute of Labor Economics (IZA). <https://hdl.handle.net/10419/263441>

⁹ Sigin, A. (2024). The causes and solutions of educational disparities are discussed in inequality opportunities. *Sociology and Criminology*, 12(2), 1-2.

¹⁰ Codioli McMaster, N., & Cook, R. (2018). The contribution of intersectionality to quantitative research into educational inequalities. *Review of Education*, 7(2), 271-299. <https://doi.org/10.1002/rev3.3116>

¹¹ OECD. (2025). *Gender equality in a changing world: Taking stock and moving forward*. OECD Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.1787/e808086f-en>

¹² Nikoladze, T. (2023, December 6). Georgia in global school performance ranking: Results worse compared to 2018. *JAMnews*. <https://jam-news.net/georgian-school-performance/>

PISA findings also show that place of residence is a significant factor—children in rural areas have poorer educational outcomes than their urban peers due to higher poverty rates and limited resources.¹³

The vulnerability of different groups can become **particularly acute as a result of crises, such as wars, natural disasters, pandemics, or economic shocks**. For instance, the impacts of crises can affect girls to a greater extent than boys, particularly due to pre-existing gender inequalities.¹⁴ At the same time, crises disproportionately affect other vulnerable groups, including children with disabilities, members of ethnic minorities, children from low-income families, or those residing in remote or conflict-affected areas, thereby deepening existing educational inequalities. A lack of inclusivity and equality directly affects education system resilience, as a system cannot be considered resilient if it is incapable of ensuring continuous and equal access to quality education for all children, especially during crises. Enhancing the resilience of education systems requires integrating the principles of equality and inclusion into strategic planning, developing mechanisms for learning continuity, and proactively considering the needs of diverse groups of children when preparing for potential crisis situations.

¹³ OECD & UNICEF. (2024). *Education in the Eastern Partnership: Findings from PISA*. OECD Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.1787/d5d6f109-en>

¹⁴ Cameron, L., Thomas, E., Ameny, D., West, H., Mugiraneza, J.-P., & Page, E. (2024). Education system resilience: GPE KIX scoping study working paper. GPE KIX. https://www.gpekix.org/sites/default/files/Media%20Document/Observatory%202.0%20scoping%20study_EN.pdf

● Educational Access and Vulnerable Groups in the Official Documents of the Region's Countries

In Eastern Europe, the Caucasus, and Central Asia, the issue of equal access to education is addressed at various policy and regulatory levels. The foundational principles for ensuring equal access are enshrined in **educational legislation, which establishes every person's right to education**. At the same time, the rights of specific groups (for instance, persons with disabilities, members of national groups, girls, and women) are often detailed in specialized sectoral policies aimed at ensuring equal opportunities.

Beyond the regulatory framework, the issue of unequal access to education and the mechanisms to overcome it are incorporated into strategic educational documents, particularly education development strategies. These documents typically identify key challenges and target groups.

However, **the term *vulnerable groups* or its synonyms do not always appear in strategic documents**. Some countries tend not to use this term in educational policies or documents at all, while others explicitly detail all groups experiencing vulnerabilities. For example, Ukraine's regulatory and strategic documents do not employ the term and instead focus on equal access for all population groups without providing a detailed breakdown. Meanwhile, the Law of Ukraine on Complete General Secondary Education states: "The right to obtain complete general secondary education is guaranteed regardless of age, sex, race, skin color, health status, disability, special educational needs, citizenship, nationality..." A related term in use is *privileged categories of children*,¹⁵ which refers to children who are legally entitled to educational benefits (for instance, free meals in institutions of general secondary education). Conversely, the educational strategies of Uzbekistan, Georgia, Tajikistan, and Moldova explicitly list specific vulnerable groups that require additional support. Mongolia's education action plan up to 2030 mentions *vulnerable groups* without explaining the term's scope, while

¹⁵ Such categories are defined by social policy legislation.

separately mentioning ethnic minorities, children with disabilities and special educational needs (hereinafter SEN), and children from rural areas.¹⁶ In Kyrgyzstan, strategic documents channel support toward inclusive education and children from families with low socio-economic status.

Across most countries in the region, the list of vulnerable child groups is generally similar; however, **the prioritization of specific groups sometimes varies**. In particular, Uzbekistan's education strategy identifies children living in remote rural and/or mountainous areas as the most vulnerable group, reflecting the significance of the territorial factor in unequal access to education. Georgia's education strategy emphasizes IDPs, a group not singled out in the documents of other countries, with the exception of Ukraine. Broadly, student groups in more vulnerable positions include:

- children with disabilities and SEN
- girls
- national minorities
- children from low-income families
- children from rural and remote areas
- children of migrants
- children deprived of parental care
- internally displaced persons.

Additionally, some countries have strategic documents addressing the inequalities faced by specific groups, though these are general and do not focus exclusively on education. For example, Albania utilizes the National Action Plan for Equality, Inclusion and Participation of Roma and Egyptians.¹⁷ A notable exception is Ukraine, which adopted a dedicated Strategy for Gender Equality in Education.

Most of the countries reviewed in this report have ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), which guarantees the right of every person with a disability to an inclusive education under Article 24. Ukraine

¹⁶ Ministry of Education and Science of Mongolia. (2020). *Education sector mid-term development plan 2021–2030*. <https://www.globalpartnership.org/node/document/download?file=document/file/2020-12-17-gpe-mongolia-education-sector-medium-term-development-plan-2021-2030.pdf>

¹⁷ UNDP. (2022). *The national action plan for equality, inclusion and participation of Roma and Egyptians in Albania*. <https://www.undp.org/albania/publications/national-action-plan-equality-inclusion-and-participation-roma-and-egyptians-albania>

and Mongolia ratified the Convention in 2009, Moldova in 2010, Albania in 2013, Georgia in 2014, Kyrgyzstan in 2019, and Uzbekistan in 2021. Tajikistan, conversely, has not ratified the Convention, having only signed it in 2018.

Overall, all the countries focus on improving inclusive education. The greatest emphasis on strategies for implementing inclusive education is observed in countries whose political course involves closer ties with the EU. The adoption of national strategies for inclusive education entails strengthening the education system's capacity to work with students with disabilities and those with SEN. They include initiatives to construct or upgrade school infrastructure, improve educational access and quality for these students, and enhance teacher professional development and incentives.

● Gender Equality

Bourdieu's theory demonstrates that inequalities between social groups can be shaped not only by the specifics of the education system itself, but also by how different types of capital (economic, cultural, social, and symbolic) are distributed within society. Members of certain social groups may be deprived of particular types of capital or face restrictions regarding their use. This leads to unequal access to education and affects the types of capital an individual can acquire in the future. One characteristic that can create disparities in the distribution and utilization of capital is gender. In this section, we examine how gender inequality affects access to education and the state-level policy measures being implemented to overcome such inequalities.

Gender inequality in education within the region's countries is caused by a range of sociocultural and economic factors. These include traditional, stereotypical perceptions of women's and men's roles, according to which women are expected to care for the home and children, as well as such phenomena as child marriage and child labor.^{18,19}

Across most countries, there is a noticeable gap in secondary school completion rates between boys and girls, with girls more frequently failing to complete the full cycle of secondary education, although the opposite is also observed, with boys more likely to drop out of school. In the countries of Central Asia, it is predominantly girls who drop out of education, whereas in Mongolia, Albania, and Georgia, it is boys, especially those from rural areas. In Ukraine, enrollment rates for girls and boys remain the same, and school dropout rates are primarily due to emigration abroad. For instance, as of 2021, the situation across the studied countries was as follows:

- In Tajikistan, the rate of non-enrollment in education is higher among girls than boys: 26% of girls and 10% of upper-secondary-school-age boys are neither in education nor undergoing any vocational training.²⁰

¹⁸ UNICEF. (2022). *The power of education to end child marriage*.

<https://data.unicef.org/resources/child-marriage-and-education-data-brief>

¹⁹ UNICEF. (2021). *Towards ending child marriage: Global trends and profiles of progress*. <https://data.unicef.org/resources/towards-ending-child-marriage/>

²⁰ UNESCO. (2021). *Policy brief: Gender equality in and through education in Central Asia*. <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000377910>

The upper secondary school completion rate stands at 74% for men, compared to just 50% for women.²¹

- In Kyrgyzstan, 22% of girls and 16% of boys are out of upper secondary school.²²
- In Mongolia, by contrast, more boys than girls are out of school. While primary school enrollment rates are nearly identical for boys and girls, the gap widens sharply in lower secondary school: approximately 6% of boys and only 2% of girls are not enrolled.²³ In upper secondary school, this figure reaches 14% among boys and 5% among girls. The gender gap is most pronounced in schools at the sum (district) level, followed by the gap at the aimag (provincial) center level, and is narrowest in Ulaanbaatar.²⁴

In most countries of the region, **the teaching profession is feminized**, with the vast majority of educators being women. This disproportion, combined with low salaries in the education sector, reinforces gender inequality. Research indicates that the gender imbalance among teaching staff negatively impacts the formation of positive role models for both girls and boys. For instance, statistics show that in primary schools in Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan, over 90% of teachers are women, while in Tajikistan, this figure is 76%.²⁵ Women account for 83% of schoolteachers in Ukraine,²⁶ 78% in Albania,²⁷ and 88% in Georgia.²⁸

²¹ UNESCO. (2021). *Policy brief: Gender equality in and through education in Central Asia*. <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000377910>

²² UNESCO. (2021). *Policy brief: Gender equality in and through education in Central Asia*. <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000377910>

²³ Loo, B., Narantuya, D., & Enkhtuya, G. (2022, August 8). Education in Mongolia. *World Education News + Reviews*. <https://web.archive.org/web/20220809085925/https://wenr.wes.org/2022/08/education-in-mongolia>

²⁴ World Bank (2020). *Towards Mongolia's long-term development policy Vision 2050: Advancing education equity, efficiency and outcomes*. <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/server/api/core/bitstreams/762456dd-63c0-59fe-b709-fc047f3d325c/content>

²⁵ UNESCO. (2021). *Policy brief: Gender equality in and through education in Central Asia*. <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000377910>

²⁶ Kovalenko, A. (2026, March 8). Babak: V Ukraini ponad 80% vchyteliv i maizhe 60% vykladachiv – zhinky. [Babak: Women comprise over 80% of school teachers and nearly 60% of university teachers in Ukraine.] *Ukrainska Pravda*. <https://life.pravda.com.ua/society/yaka-chastka-zhinok-pracyuye-vchitelyami-ta-vykladachami-statistika-313687/>

²⁷ Instituti i Statistikave [INSTAT]. (2024). *Education enrollment statistics*. <https://www.instat.gov.al/media/13263/education-enrollment-statistics-2023-2024.pdf>

²⁸ Civil Georgia. (2023, March 14). *Analyzing Georgia's teacher workforce: Findings from CCIIR's analytical bulletin*. <https://civil.ge/archives/531295>

Another factor deepening gender inequality in education is **uneven access to digital resources**. In some countries, particularly in Central Asia, students gained access to smartphones during the pandemic; in certain areas, such as Tajikistan, the proportion of girls with access even surpassed that of boys. Overall, however, boys scored higher on the Digital Readiness Index across all regions of Tajikistan. Furthermore, disparities persisted across different types of hardware, with access to laptops, computers, and tablets considerably lower than that of smartphones.²⁹ While other countries in the region show no acute gender gap in device access, disparities can still emerge due to intersecting factors; for instance, girls from ethnic minorities or rural families with low socio-economic status have significantly fewer opportunities to use gadgets.

Gender inequality in educational access is frequently **linked to economic pressure and the necessity of entering the workforce at an early age**, particularly as migrant workers in cities or abroad. Among the countries in the region, there is a trend toward higher involvement of boys in household chores and child labor, making them more likely to drop out of the school system entirely or fail to complete their education.

- In Kyrgyzstan, 34% of boys and 19% of girls are involved in child labor.³⁰
- In Mongolia, particularly low school attendance rates are characteristic of boys from rural, low-SES families, as well as from farming or herding families — social groups where involving children in household labor is often a necessity due to economic vulnerability. A significant gender gap is also observed in the eastern aimags. These disparities persist after secondary education: more women than men are enrolled in higher education.³¹
- In Moldova's rural areas, boys are more likely to leave

²⁹ Harden-Wolfson, E. (n.d.) *Going the distance: Readiness for digitalization and distance education in Tajikistan*. GPE KIX. https://www.gpekix.org/sites/default/files/webform/submit_to_the_library/943/Goin_the_distance_Readiness_for_digitalization_and_distance_education_in_Tajikistan.pdf

³⁰ Taalim Forum. (2024). *School education in Kyrgyzstan: Readiness for digital education*. https://kix.taalimforum.kg/report/Analytical_Report_School_Education_in_Kyrgyzstan_Readiness_for_Digital_Education_en.pdf

³¹ Loo, B., Narantuya, D., & Enkhtuya, G. (2022, August 8). Education in Mongolia. *World Education News + Reviews*. <https://web.archive.org/web/20220809085925/https://wenr.wes.org/2022/08/education-in-mongolia>

school to start working, whereas girls are encouraged to be diligent and obedient, which influences student academic performance and integration.³²

Among the 18–25 age cohort, the school dropout rate in 2019 was 23% for young men and 15% for young women.³³

One of the reasons girls interrupt their education across all the countries of the region is **child marriage**.³⁴ Its prevalence varies by country and can stem from different causes. Across the region's countries, the official legal marriage age is 18, though exceptions are permitted almost everywhere. For instance, local authorities may authorize marriages involving minors (or where one partner is a minor) under certain circumstances, such as pregnancy.

Data indicate that early marriage remains a predominantly gendered phenomenon: in most countries in the region, the proportion of girls marrying before the age of 18 is significantly higher than that of boys. Disparities in the prevalence of this phenomenon are observed between countries, with the highest rates recorded in Georgia, Kyrgyzstan, Albania, and Moldova, while Uzbekistan has the lowest rates among the studied nations. At the same time, these findings may depend on how complete and up-to-date the data are.

³² Ministerul Educației și Cercetării al Republicii Moldova (2023). *Programul de implementare a Strategiei de dezvoltare "Educația 2030" pentru anii 2023–2025* [The program to implement the Development Strategy "Education 2030" for the years 2023–2025]. https://www.legis.md/cautare/getResults?doc_id=136600&lang=ro

³³ UNFPA. (2022, June 8). *Moldova lags behind in achieving gender equality in all spheres of life according to the UN Moldova Country Gender Assessment*. <https://moldova.unfpa.org/en/news/moldova-lags-behind-achieving-gender-equality-all-spheres-life-according-un-moldova-country>

³⁴ UNESCO. (2021). Policy brief: Gender equality in and through education in Central Asia. <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000377910>

Table 1. Distribution of early marriage among girls and boys by country in the region³⁵

Country	Marriage before the age of 18 (%)		Marriage before the age of 15 (%)
	girls	boys	
Albania	12% ³⁶	-	1%
Georgia	14%	-	-
Kyrgyzstan	13%	-	-
Moldova	12%	1%	-
Mongolia	12%	2%	1%
Tajikistan	9%	9%	-
Ukraine	9%	4%	-
Uzbekistan	3%	1%	-

Source: [Girlsnotbrides.org](https://girlsnotbrides.org)

Main causes of child marriages:

- **Poverty.** In Mongolia, girls from households with the lowest socio-economic status marry at an earlier age than those from wealthier families, as child marriage is often used as a means of economic survival and security for families.
- **Regional differences.** In most countries of the region, child marriages are more prevalent in rural areas. For instance, in rural Georgia, 24% of women aged 20 to 49 were married before age 18, compared with 14% in urban areas. In Kyrgyzstan, 16% of women aged 20–24 living in rural areas married before 18, while in urban areas, this figure stands at 9%. Additionally, child marriage is more prevalent in specific regions within some countries.
- **Traditions and the division of gender roles.** In several countries in the region, adherence to traditions that dictate that women focus on domestic chores and household management rather than education or self-actualization remains a core cultural component.

³⁵ The table presents data for various years, predominantly from 2018 onward.

³⁶ Percentages are calculated based on the total number of girls and boys aged under 15 and 18, respectively.

In Albania, the framework governing marriage is heavily influenced by the Kanun, a traditional code of laws. Specifically, its prominent variant—the Kanun of Lekë Dukagjini—historically regulated social norms, including marriage customs. Under these norms, marriages without the girl's consent were frequently permitted, sometimes at a very early age, to strengthen family ties or resolve conflicts.

- *Ethnic and religious specifics.* In some countries of the region, a portion of child marriages occurs within specific ethnic communities. In Ukraine, Moldova, and Albania, this applies to the Roma community, while in Albania, it also extends to the Egyptian community. In the Roma community, where marrying girls off at the age of 12 to 14 is reportedly considered a norm, this practice can take the form of forced marriage, where a girl is married to an adult man against her will, or arranged marriage, where families or matchmaking intermediaries negotiate a future union between two children. In both cases, this occurs without official documentation or registration. In Georgia, this involves the religious and ethnic communities of Azerbaijani and Armenian minorities. In several countries, marriages are solemnized through religious rites rather than legal procedures. For instance, in Uzbekistan, these religious rites are called nikah. The official state registration of such marriages takes place only after the individuals reach adulthood.
- *Social isolation.* This issue particularly affects ethnic minorities who mostly reside in remote regions, may lack identification documents, and have limited access to social infrastructure. For example, in the Kvemo Kartli region of Georgia, which is home to 11% of the country's population, 32% of married women from ethnic minorities were wed before age 18; 5% at ages 13–14, and 16% at ages 15–16.
- *Human trafficking.* In Mongolia, there are cases where Mongolian girls are entered into marriages for the purpose of human trafficking and sexual exploitation.

In most countries, there is a problem with tracking child marriages because they predominantly occur unofficially, with the marriage being registered only after adulthood is reached; therefore, even available data may be inaccurate. For instance, despite Uzbekistan raising the marriage age to 18 in 2019, some families resort to “workarounds,” such as bride kidnapping, which in some cases is initiated by the child’s parents as a way to conclude a marriage contract.³⁷ Parents can still marry off their children through informal religious nikah ceremonies without official state registration. This is indirectly evidenced by the number of births among girls under 18, given that in Uzbekistan, girls rarely give birth outside of marriage. In 2021, nearly 1,500 such births were recorded, representing a 56% increase over the previous year, whereas only 88 early marriages were officially registered in 2020 and 92 in 2021.³⁸

In the countries of Central Asia, homosexuality is criminalized and punishable by imprisonment. Across all nations in the region, LGBTQ+ individuals constitute one of the groups experiencing severe stigmatization and discrimination; they also face the risk of psychological and sexual violence, including within educational institutions and from teachers and peers. This can prompt students to interrupt their education or transition to individualized learning.³⁹ In Ukraine, a school-based study conducted in 2019–2020 revealed that only 20% of adolescents identifying as members of the LGBTQ+ community feel safe at school, while 43% feel uncomfortable or unsafe due to their sexual orientation.⁴⁰

A significant **lack of sexuality education** serves as a major factor increasing gender inequality. For instance, in Central Asian countries, overall educational quality is hindered by the absence of a systemic approach to sexuality education, as well as a lack of curricula addressing topics of sexual orientation, gender identity, and self-expression. In none of these countries is sexuality education a standalone subject;

³⁷ UNFPA. (2014). *Child marriage in Uzbekistan* (Overview). <https://eeca.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/unfpa%20uzbekistan%20overview.pdf>

³⁸ Saïda, N. (2024, July 18). Brides too soon: The rising trend of early marriages in Uzbekistan. *The Diplomat*. <https://thediplomat.com/2024/07/brides-too-soon-the-rising-trend-of-early-marriages-in-uzbekistan/>

³⁹ ADC Memorial. (2020). *LGBTI+ in the region of Central Asia: Repressions, discrimination, exclusion*. <https://adcmemorial.org/en/publications/lgbti-in-the-region-of-central-asia-repressions-discrimination-exclusion/>

⁴⁰ Komisarova, O. (2021, March 16). 80% pidlitkiv-LHBT ne pochuvaïutsia v bezpetsi u shkoli — doslidzhennia [Eighty percent of LGBT teenagers feel unsafe at school, a study shows]. *Suspilne News*. <https://suspilne.media/114071-80-pidlitkiv-lgbt-ne-pochuvautsa-v-bezpeci-u-skoli/>

instead, isolated components and topics are integrated into other subjects, such as Biology or Health Basics.⁴¹ Research indicates that the lack of comprehensive sexuality education has likely caused the rise in adolescent pregnancies and sexual health issues. For example, the adolescent birth rate is 32 per 1,000 women in Kyrgyzstan, 57 per 1,000 in Tajikistan, and 24 per 1,000 in Uzbekistan. Meanwhile, research among adolescents in Ukraine illustrates that 58% of youth obtain information about sexual life from the internet, which serves as their primary source of information. Friends and peers rank second at 41%.⁴² Inadequate sexuality education impacts not only the number of unintended pregnancies but also student dropout rates, while further reinforcing gender inequality.⁴³

Policies and Solutions

The issue of gender equality in educational access and the pathways to ensuring it are reflected in the strategic state documents of most countries in the region. At the same time, **such goals are not always singled out as a distinct policy area; instead, they are frequently addressed within a broader context** alongside tasks aimed at increasing inclusivity and improving the conditions and quality of education for other vulnerable groups. Overcoming gender inequality in education is typically integrated into broader strategies for the development of the education sector, although some countries also design dedicated strategies, specialized programs, and action plans addressing this topic.

- In Albania, ensuring equal rights and opportunities for girls from all backgrounds, social, and ethnic groups, as well as recognizing girls' achievements in education, constitutes one of the core principles of the National

⁴¹ UNESCO Institute for Information Technologies in Education, Bundeszentrale für gesundheitliche Aufklärung, International Planned Parenthood Federation, & United Nations Population Fund. (2023). *Sexuality education status: Georgia* (Summary Report). EU Neighbours East. https://euneighbourseast.eu/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/cse_georgia_summary_report.pdf

⁴² Balakirieva, O., Bondar, T., Danylenko, H., Levin, R., Nguen N.-M., Pavlova, D., Pyvovarova, N., Sakovych, O., Fliarkovska, O., & Shevchenko, S. (2019). *Sotsialna obumovlenist ta pokaznyky zdorovia pidlitkiv ta molodi* [Social conditionality and indicators of adolescent and youth health in Ukraine]. UNICEF; Oleksandr Yaremenko Ukrainian Institute for Social Research. <https://www.unicef.org/ukraine/media/921/file/Social%20conditionality%20and%20indicators%20of%20adolescent%20and%20youth%20health%20in%20Ukraine.pdf>

⁴³ UNESCO. (2021). *Policy brief: Gender equality in and through education in Central Asia*. <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000377910>

Strategy for Gender Equality (NSGE 2021–2030).⁴⁴

The strategy incorporates awareness-raising activities regarding gender inequality. In 2021–2022, 13 training sessions were conducted for gender equality officers (1 at the national level and 12 at the local level) to provide them with information on the Council of Europe’s recommendations for combating sexism.⁴⁵

- In Kyrgyzstan, one of the initiatives aimed at strengthening resilience is the EU-funded support project to improve the education system for 2021–2027, which is designed to bolster the education system’s resilience to COVID-19 and future crises. One of its main tasks is overcoming gender inequality in education. The project outlines specific targets to improve the access of female students with disabilities to inclusive public education, as well as to train teachers and specialists in inclusive and gender-responsive education. Notably, all new textbooks, educational standards, curricula, and instructional materials will be gender-responsive.⁴⁶
- In Moldova, the Education 2030 Strategy envisages the provision of necessary conditions for all girls and boys to complete a secondary education that is equitable and high-quality, leading to relevant and effective learning outcomes.⁴⁷

Various **initiatives supported by international development organizations** are also being implemented across the region’s countries **to prevent gender inequality**. A significant share of these initiatives focuses on teacher professional development and on supporting girls in specific fields of study, such as STEM.

⁴⁴ Ministry of Health and Social Protection. (2022). *National strategy for gender equality 2021–2030*. https://albania.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2022-02/WEB_Strategjia%20Kombetare%20-%20EN.pdf

⁴⁵ Ministry of Health and Social Protection. (2022). *National strategy for gender equality 2021–2030*. https://albania.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2022-02/WEB_Strategjia%20Kombetare%20-%20EN.pdf

⁴⁶ European Commission. (2021). *Education sector reform in the Kyrgyz Republic: Building a sustainable, inclusive, and future-ready education system*. https://international-partnerships.ec.europa.eu/policies/programming/projects/education-sector-reform-kyrgyz-republic-building-sustainable-inclusive-and-future-ready-education_en

⁴⁷ Republica Moldova. (2023). *Hotărâre nr. 114 din 07-03-2023 cu privire la aprobarea Strategiei de dezvoltare “Educația 2030” și a Programului de implementare a acesteia pentru anii 2023-2025* [Decision No. 114 of 07-03-2023 on the approval of the Development Strategy “Education 2030” and its Implementation Program for the years 2023-2025]. Guvernul Republicii Moldova. https://www.legis.md/cautare/getResults?doc_id=136600&lang=ro

- In Kyrgyzstan, at the initiative of UN Women and with the support of the Ministry of Education and Science, activities were conducted in 2020 by international development organizations for teachers, focusing on overcoming gender stereotypes in instructional materials and curricula, as well as reducing discrimination within the school environment.⁴⁸
- Mongolia's Girls Code program operates to overcome gender inequality in the technology sector and train future female programmers. The goal is to provide girls with coding and STEM skills, foster gender equality in IT, and promote digital literacy. The participants include 30 girls in grades 9–12 from 21 aimags and Ulaanbaatar, who complete a 2.5-month in-person summer camp.^{49,50}
- In Georgia, the U.S. Millennium Challenge Corporation, in partnership with Girl Up, hosted the Women in Science (WiSci) Girls STEAM Camp in Tbilisi in August 2018 for young women from Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan, and the United States.⁵¹
- In Moldova, a series of initiatives aimed at supporting and empowering girls and women in IT and STEM has been implemented. These include projects such as Tekwill, Tech Women Moldova, the National IT Training Program for Girls and Women, GirlsGoIT, and others.⁵²

⁴⁸ UN Women. (2020). Removing gender stereotypes from education in Kyrgyzstan. <https://eca.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2020/9/removing-gender-stereotypes-from-education-in-kyrgyzstan>

⁴⁹ Kouassi-Komlan, E. (2024, September 17). *Time to revamp education: Mongolia's path to a brighter future*. UNICEF Mongolia. <https://www.unicef.org/mongolia/stories/time-revamp-education-mongolias-path-brighter-future>

⁵⁰ Battulga, B. & Enkhstogt, T.-A. (2024, September 6). Empowering young girls and fostering equal opportunities in technology across Mongolia. UNICEF Mongolia. <https://www.unicef.org/mongolia/stories/empowering-young-girls-and-fostering-equal-opportunities-technology-across-mongolia>

⁵¹ Millenium Challenge Corporation. (2018, August 14). *Millennium Challenge Corporation, Girl Up, Intel, Google, U.S. Department of State launch Women in Science Camp in Tbilisi*. <https://www.mcc.gov/news-and-events/release/release-81418-wisci-launch-mcc/>

⁵² Rajasekaran, S. & Casap, L. (2022). *Moldova – Digital Education Readiness Assessment (2021-22)*. World Bank. <https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/099120006252220689/pdf/P17773104ea6f2040a88e02bdf9bbd04f6.pdf>

● Children with Disabilities and Special Educational Needs

Another group that may face restricted access to education comprises children with disabilities and children who require a modified educational process. In this case, Bourdieu's theoretical framework allows us to trace how the education system, functioning as a "field," establishes specific rules of entry and demands the possession of certain resources. Non-inclusive infrastructure, an unadapted educational process, a shortage of teachers skilled in educating students with SEN, and a lack of technology and necessary equipment result in children with disabilities or SEN being unable to participate in the educational process on an equal footing with other children. The parents of these children require additional capital to overcome these inequalities and secure an education for their children, as the education system frequently fails to address this situation. For instance, a larger volume of social capital can grant access to networks where information about available programs and support is shared, while economic capital can enable a family to relocate to a community where the educational process is more inclusive. As a result, the education system remains significantly less accessible for children with disabilities and SEN, and overcoming this inequality is often possible only due to the additional capital possessed by their parents. In this section, we analyze the accessibility of the education systems in the countries studied, the subsequent impact on the education of children with disabilities and SEN, and the measures aimed at enhancing accessibility.

Across the countries in the region, problems related to the development of inclusive education share many commonalities. In several of them, these are consequences of the Soviet model of a "medical approach" to disability, which viewed disability as an individual's personal problem that needed to be altered and cured. This contributed to the stigmatization of people with disabilities, making them invisible to society. After gaining independence, countries that had been part of the Soviet Union gradually began to develop inclusive education, initially through civil society

initiatives and later with support from international partners and the expert community.⁵³

The primary actors in implementing inclusive education are state institutions, international development organizations, NGOs, and parents.⁵⁴

One consequence of the dominant medical model of disability is the **limited capacity to collect data on the number of children with disabilities and SEN due to the complexity of identifying such children within the education system.** Most countries in the region tend to focus their identification and support systems primarily on children with formally confirmed statuses. This restricts educational access for children without such status.

- Georgia does not collect statistics on out-of-school children with disabilities and their specific needs.⁵⁵
- In Tajikistan, the medical definition of disability remains enshrined in legislation, which complicates systematic data collection. While the Ministry of Health and Social Protection of the Population reports 28,286 children with disabilities, this figure covers only those who are officially registered and receive relevant state aid.⁵⁶
- In Ukraine, the medical model of disability also remains dominant, and experts assert that obtaining official disability status can be hindered by institutional, financial, and physical barriers.⁵⁷

⁵³ Dunajeva, J. (2025). *Comparative study of inclusive education practices: The cases of Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Moldova, Kyrgyzstan and Georgia*. GPE KIX EMAP Hub. <https://www.gpekix.org/sites/default/files/2025-02/kix-emap-comparative-study-on-inclusive-education-practices-the-cases-of-uzbekistan-tajikistan-moldova-kyrgyzstan-and-georgia.pdf>

⁵⁴ Dunajeva, J. (2025). *Comparative study of inclusive education practices: The cases of Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Moldova, Kyrgyzstan and Georgia*. GPE KIX EMAP Hub. <https://www.gpekix.org/sites/default/files/2025-02/kix-emap-comparative-study-on-inclusive-education-practices-the-cases-of-uzbekistan-tajikistan-moldova-kyrgyzstan-and-georgia.pdf>

⁵⁵ UNPRDP & UNDP. (2022). *Situation analysis of the rights of people with disabilities in Georgia*. https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/migration/ge/pwds_situation_analysis_2021_eng.pdf

⁵⁶ Government of the Republic of Tajikistan. (2020). *National strategy for education development of the Republic of Tajikistan for the period until 2030*. Global Partnership for Education. <https://www.globalpartnership.org/library/tajikistan-national-strategy-education-development-2021-2030>

⁵⁷ War Child. (2025). *Invisible at the Frontline: Disability and Childhood in Wartime Ukraine - Needs and Barriers Faced by Children with Disabilities and their Families in War-affected Communities of Ukraine*. <https://reliefweb.int/report/ukraine/invisible-frontline-disability-and-childhood-wartime-ukraine-needs-and-barriers-faced-children-disabilities-and-their-families-war-affected-communities-ukraine-april-2025-enuk>

Across the countries in the region, the prevalence of specialized institutions of general secondary education for children with disabilities and/or SEN varies with the level of development of educational infrastructure and available funding. However, the existing network of these institutions **fails to accommodate** all children who require inclusive learning. As a result, the enrollment rate of children with disabilities in education remains low, and their **risk of early school drop-out** is significantly higher than that of their peers without disabilities.

- In Kyrgyzstan, 50% of out-of-school children have a disability.⁵⁸
- In Uzbekistan, only 40% of children with disabilities are enrolled in general education schools.⁵⁹
- In Mongolia, it was only in 2019 that the right of children with disabilities to attend mainstream schools began to be integrated into policies. Previously, these children were sent to one of six special schools located in the capital. Data from 2021 indicate that over 80% of children with disabilities are now enrolled in schools.⁶⁰
- In Georgia, school attendance rates are lower among children with disabilities and SEN. At the lower secondary education level, boys with disabilities attend school less frequently than girls with disabilities or their peers without disabilities. At the upper secondary school level, attendance drops for both girls and boys with disabilities, but boys with disabilities remain the least likely to attend school.⁶¹ Furthermore, only 65% of public schools report having students with SEN.⁶² According to EMIS data, the number of boys with SEN who drop out of school is three times higher than the number

⁵⁸ Taalim Forum. (2024). *School education in Kyrgyzstan: Readiness for digital education*. https://kix.taalimforum.kg/report/Analytical_Report_School_Education_in_Kyrgyzstan_Readiness_for_Digital_Education_en.pdf

⁵⁹ UNICEF. (2021). *Curriculum reform to meet the individual needs of students (Uzbekistan)*. <https://www.unicef.org/documents/curriculum-reform-meet-individual-needs-students-uzbekistan>

⁶⁰ UNICEF. (2021). *Curriculum reform to meet the individual needs of students (Uzbekistan)*. <https://www.unicef.org/documents/curriculum-reform-meet-individual-needs-students-uzbekistan>

⁶¹ UNICEF & UN Women. (2021). *Women and children with disabilities in Georgia: An overview of the data*. <https://georgia.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2022-05/Women%20and%20Children%20with%20Disabilities%20in%20Georgia%20%28002%29.pdf>

⁶² Drugescu-Radulescu, A. (n.d.). *Educational challenges in Georgia*. Broken Chalk. <https://brokenchalk.org/educational-challenges-in-georgia/>

of girls with SEN who interrupt their education. The data also show that approximately half of all students with SEN drop out of school. Boys with SEN are 1.6 to 1.9 times more likely to drop out of school during the academic year than girls.⁶³

One of the primary challenges contributing to restricted educational access is the **lack of inclusive infrastructure**, including transport and sidewalks, as well as school buildings and premises that remain unadapted for persons with disabilities, thereby limiting physical access to education.

- In Kyrgyzstan, 41% of respondents from vulnerable youth groups believe that schools are completely physically inaccessible, and only 7% reported full physical accessibility. Physical accessibility refers to the presence of specialized infrastructure for individuals with disabilities, including ramps, spacious elevators, and accessible sanitary facilities.⁶⁴
- In Moldova, a 2024 assessment of school hygiene conditions revealed that among 968 schools (which constitute 80% of the country's secondary education institutions), toilets are inaccessible for people with reduced mobility in 640 institutions, while only partial access is provided in 224. Furthermore, handwashing sinks are inaccessible to low-mobility groups in 430 institutions and only partially accessible in 226.⁶⁵
- According to the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine, in the 2024–2025 academic year, out of the 12,248 functioning general secondary education institutions (including special schools), barrier-free access to the first floor is provided in 9,514 institutions, which represents 78% of the total number of such schools in Ukraine.⁶⁶

⁶³ Drugescu-Radulescu, A. (n.d.). *Educational challenges in Georgia*. Broken Chalk. <https://brokenchalk.org/educational-challenges-in-georgia/>

⁶⁴ United Nations Kyrgyz Republic. (2021). *Access of vulnerable youth to key services in the Kyrgyz Republic*. UNDP. <https://files.acquia.undp.org/public/migration/kg/2bbc38566c477806530e367516f14557be038e8ca34ee53b8554424cfbd4e457.pdf>

⁶⁵ UNICEF. (n.d.). *Assessment of WASH facilities in Moldovan schools*. UNICEF Moldova. <https://www.unicef.org/moldova/en/documents/assessment-wash-facilities-moldovan-schools>

⁶⁶ Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine. (2025). *Informatsiina dovidka "Monitorynh shchodo stvorennia inkluzyvnykh hrup u zakladakh doshkilnoi osvity"* [Information brief "Monitoring the establishment of inclusive groups in pre-school education institutions"]. <https://mon.gov.ua/osvita-2/inkluzivne-navchannya/statistichni-dani>

In several countries, an additional challenge is **classroom overcrowding** where children with disabilities and SEN study. This situation complicates the organization of an effective learning process and restricts access to high-quality education for this group of children.

- In Albania, the number of children per class can exceed 40. Classrooms may be small in size, which complicates access for children with disabilities.⁶⁷
- In Ukraine, according to the regulatory procedure for organizing inclusive education, classes may include 1 to 3 children with disabilities; however, in practice, the number of such students can reach up to 8 individuals.⁶⁸

Another challenge facing inclusive education is the **shortage of qualified pedagogical staff** trained to work with children with SEN. Furthermore, not all teachers possess the knowledge and competencies required to adapt learning processes. The lack of pedagogical personnel across most countries stems from the same root causes: unsatisfactory working conditions, low pay, and insufficient preparation for working with this group.

- Kyrgyzstan experiences a shortage of teachers, with educators most frequently lacking in subjects such as English, History, Physics, and Computer Science. Generally, experienced teachers are not interested in working with children with disabilities and/or SEN due to low salaries and difficult working conditions; consequently, these positions are most often filled by young specialists.⁶⁹
- In Ukraine, due to Russia's full-scale invasion, a portion of specialists relocated within Ukraine or moved abroad. According to the Ministry of Education and Science, functioning Inclusive Resource Centers are staffed with

⁶⁷ Çuko, O., Kulla, F., & Kasapi, E. (2012). *Inclusive education in Albania: Analytical study*. Save the Children. https://csl.edu.al/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/inclusive_education_in_albania_-_analytic_study.pdf

⁶⁸ State Service of Education Quality of Ukraine. (2021). *Doslidzhennia yakosti inkluzyvnoho navchannia dlia ditei z osoblyvymy osvithnyimi potrebamy* [Study of the quality of inclusive education for children with special educational needs]. https://mon.gov.ua/static-objects/mon/sites/1/inkluzyvne-navchannya/2021/04/02/Doslidzhennia_yakosti_inkluzyvnoyi_osvity_1_02_04.pdf

⁶⁹ United Nations Kyrgyz Republic. (2021). *Access of vulnerable youth to key services in the Kyrgyz Republic*. UNDP. <https://files.acquia.undp.org/public/migration/kg/2bbc38566c477806530e367516f14557be038e8ca34ee53b8554424cfbd4e457.pdf>

pedagogical personnel (speech therapists, special education teachers, rehabilitation therapists, and practical psychologists) at 81% of the total requirement (4,015 persons).⁷⁰

- In Mongolia, teachers face challenges related to their knowledge, skills, and teaching methodologies: a lack of specialized methods; insufficient knowledge and skills to diagnose, identify, and support student development; and poorly defined assessment tasks and methodologies.⁷¹ The country needs more educators trained in approaches to teaching children with SEN, as well as comprehensive support services for students with disabilities and their families.⁷²

Children with disabilities across all countries in the region also experience **stigmatization and discrimination** both inside and outside of school, which increases social pressure on them.

- In Tajikistan, social and psychological discrimination, alongside prejudiced attitudes toward special educational needs, remains one of the primary barriers for children with disabilities. In some instances, doctors and teachers hold biased views, believing that children with disabilities and SEN should only study in specialized institutions, as they argue that proper care and educational support—unavailable in mainstream schools or at home—can only be provided there.⁷³
- Over 80% of children with disabilities in Kyrgyzstan experience psychological pressure, compared to 72% of children without disabilities.⁷⁴

⁷⁰ Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine. (2025). *Informatsiina dovidka "Monitorynh shchodo stvorennia inkluzyvnykh hrup u zakladyakh doshkilnoi osvity"* [Information brief "Monitoring the establishment of inclusive groups in pre-school education institutions"]. <https://mon.gov.ua/osvita-2/inkluzivne-navchannya/statistichni-dani>

⁷¹ World Bank. (2020). *Towards Mongolia's long-term development policy Vision 2050: Advancing education equity, efficiency and outcomes*. <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/server/api/core/bitstreams/762456dd-63c0-59fe-b709-fc047f3d325c/content>

⁷² Education Out Loud. (2023, July 13). *Making education more inclusive in Mongolia: Meet Oyunjargal*. <https://educationoutloud.org/impact/making-education-more-inclusive-mongolia-meet-oyunjargal/>

⁷³ Republic of Tajikistan. (2020). *Tajikistan national strategy for education development 2021–2030*. Global Partnership for Education. <https://www.globalpartnership.org/library/tajikistan-national-strategy-education-development-2021-2030>

⁷⁴ UNICEF. (2023, December 1). *Children with disabilities across Europe and Central Asia 'face exclusion in many settings', depriving them of basic services and care*. <https://www.unicef.org/eca/press-releases/children-disabilities-across-europe-and-central-asia-face-exclusion-many-settings>

- In Moldova, 14% of parents and guardians noted that their children face bullying and physical violence from peers.⁷⁵

All the previously mentioned factors critically impact the **educational access and quality** for children with SEN and disabilities. Data regarding the academic assessment levels of children from these social groups remain limited. However, **existing studies point to lower academic performance among children with SEN and disabilities**. For instance, according to a 2023 UNICEF study in Kyrgyzstan, among children aged 7–14, 83% of those with disabilities and SEN read books, compared with 93% of those without health impairments. Furthermore, children with disabilities are significantly less likely to possess foundational numeracy skills (39%) than children without disabilities (53%).⁷⁶

Policies and Solutions

Some countries in the region have **various forms of dedicated institutions to support the development of inclusive education**. In Tajikistan, these take the form of resource centers attached to schools, where children with disabilities and SEN can acquire additional knowledge through play-based methods.⁷⁷ In Ukraine, there are Inclusive Resource Centers (IRCs), institutions that ensure the right to education for individuals with disabilities and SEN. IRCs conduct comprehensive psychological and pedagogical assessments of children, provide ongoing guidance for students with SEN, and deliver psychological, pedagogical, correctional, and developmental services.⁷⁸

⁷⁵ Munteanu, P. & Vasian, T. (2024). *Knowledge, attitudes and challenges of parents and caregivers of children with disabilities in the Republic of Moldova*. UNICEF. <https://www.unicef.org/moldova/media/14311/file/Knowledge>

⁷⁶ UNICEF. (2023). *Children with disabilities in Europe and Central Asia: A statistical overview of their well-being*. <https://data.unicef.org/resources/children-with-disabilities-in-europe-and-central-asia-a-statistical-overview-of-their-well-being/>

⁷⁷ Dunajeva, J. (2025). *Comparative study of inclusive education practices: The cases of Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Moldova, Kyrgyzstan and Georgia*. GPE KIX EMAP Hub. <https://www.gpekix.org/sites/default/files/2025-02/kix-emap-comparative-study-on-inclusive-education-practices-the-cases-of-uzbekistan-tajikistan-moldova-kyrgyzstan-and-georgia.pdf>

⁷⁸ Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine. (n.d.). *Inklyuzyvno-resursni tsentry [Inclusive Resource Centers]*. <https://mon.gov.ua/dlya-batkiv/inklyuzivno-resursni-tsentry>

One of the initiatives to support inclusive education involves **funding additional educational resources**, particularly teacher remuneration and specialized programs, which can be facilitated either through international partners or allocated within state budgets, depending on national capacity. For instance, in Moldova, under the Moldova Education Reform Project funded by the World Bank, 100 schools were provided with inclusive equipment, including tablets, laptops, attention trackers, educational robots, digital magnifiers, voice recorders, visual memory training kits, high-visibility keyboards, talking boards, three-handle joysticks, and hearing aids.⁷⁹ In Georgia, under the updated Law on General Education, the state is mandated to finance specialized and integrated classrooms, as well as programs, services, and sufficient personnel to ensure the integration of students with disabilities into the general education system.⁸⁰

Another area of focus for improving inclusive education is **teacher professional development**, a process that frequently involves higher education institutions and centers for pedagogical professional development.

- Tajik National University and Tajik State Pedagogical University (featuring its Center for Inclusive Education) provide training for teachers and other specialists, while other higher education institutions train experts within their departments of speech language pathology, special education, and education for the deaf and hard of hearing.⁸¹
- Georgia established the National Center for Teacher Professional Development and introduced teacher training programs in special education, which have been active in the country since 2013. These initiatives have facilitated systemic training and professional development for specialists in the field of inclusive education.⁸²

⁷⁹ World Bank Group. (2024, January 23). *Rehabilitating schools, revitalizing learning: Moldova invests in its future*. World Bank. <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/feature/2024/01/23/rehabilitating-schools-revitalizing-learning-moldova-invests-in-its-future>

⁸⁰ United Nations Georgia. (2022). *Situation analysis of the rights of people with disabilities in Georgia*. UNPRPD MPTF. https://globaldisabilityfund.org/new/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/CR_Georgia_2021-e23.pdf

⁸¹ Dunajeva, J. (2025). *Development and current state of inclusive education practices: The cases of Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Moldova, Kyrgyzstan and Georgia*. NORRAG. <https://www.norrageducation.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/KIX-EMAP-Webinar-23-Jekatyerina-Dunajeva.pdf>

⁸² Dunajeva, J. (2025). *Comparative study of inclusive education practices: The cases of Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Moldova, Kyrgyzstan and Georgia*. GPE KIX EMAP Hub. <https://www.gpekix.org/sites/default/files/2025-02/kix-emap-comparative-study-on-inclusive-education-practices-the-cases-of-uzbekistan-tajikistan-moldova-kyrgyzstan-and-georgia.pdf>

- In Moldova, a course on inclusive education was integrated into the university curriculum for initial teacher training across all majors in 2012, and the Institute of Inclusive Education Sciences introduced continuous professional training for educators in this domain.⁸³
- Mongolian National University of Education introduced mandatory credits in inclusive education, and master's degree graduates are permitted to write their theses on topics related to inclusive or special education.⁸⁴

The provision of educational literature and materials

for students with SEN and disabilities is another pillar in the implementation of inclusive education. For example, 329,300 textbooks and 2,320 books for children with visual impairments were published in Kyrgyzstan in 2021.⁸⁵ In 2022, work was underway to develop an electronic library intended to host 1,536 books, including educational literature, alongside 538 digitized textbooks in four languages of instruction; however, data confirming the full completion of this initiative remain unavailable.⁸⁶

⁸³ Dunajeva, J. (2025). *Comparative study of inclusive education practices: The cases of Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Moldova, Kyrgyzstan and Georgia*. GPE KIX EMAP Hub. <https://www.gpekix.org/sites/default/files/2025-02/kix-emap-comparative-study-on-inclusive-education-practices-the-cases-of-uzbekistan-tajikistan-moldova-kyrgyzstan-and-georgia.pdf>

⁸⁴ World Bank. (2020). *Towards Mongolia's long-term development policy Vision 2050: Advancing education equity, efficiency and outcomes*. <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/server/api/core/bitstreams/762456dd-63c0-59fe-b709-fc047f3d325c/content>

⁸⁵ Ministry of Education and Science of the Kyrgyz Republic. (2022). *Education joint sector review in the Kyrgyz Republic*. Global Partnership for Education. <https://www.globalpartnership.org/node/document/download?file=document/file/2023-04-joint-sector-review-synthesis-report-kyrgyz-republic.pdf>

⁸⁶ Ministry of Education and Science of the Kyrgyz Republic. (2022). *Education joint sector review in the Kyrgyz Republic*. Global Partnership for Education. <https://www.globalpartnership.org/node/document/download?file=document/file/2023-04-joint-sector-review-synthesis-report-kyrgyz-republic.pdf>

● Children from Different Ethnic Groups

In this section, we examine how educational access varies by the child's ethnic group. In this case, we draw upon Bourdieu's theory to trace how cultural differences, stereotypical perceptions, discrimination against minorities, and the duration of residency in a country can influence children's educational opportunities. In some societies, ethnic minorities have significantly fewer opportunities to utilize their existing forms of capital and to acquire new ones. For instance, the cultural capital possessed by ethnic minorities (knowledge of an ethnic language, modes of communication, knowledge and skills pertaining to their ethnic culture, etc.) may not be deemed valuable in their country of residence; thus, even when such capital is present, individuals are unable to leverage it. Depending on a society's level of tolerance, ethnic groups may be deprived of a broad network of social contacts, thereby lacking access to networks where information is shared about educational opportunities, access to support, and so on. Exclusion from society also affects their economic capital, which could otherwise be used, for example, to overcome learning losses or to master the local language. Below, we examine the level of educational accessibility for children from ethnic minorities, the root causes of this situation, and the policies aimed at its improvement.

The countries in the region are multiethnic and possess diverse cultural and historical contexts that influence societal attitudes toward members of ethnic minorities. Nevertheless, most of the challenges these countries face in the sphere of education are similar. Key challenges include low enrollment rates in secondary education, language barriers, a shortage of instructional materials and qualified teachers, and limited access to electronic devices and the internet. These factors significantly complicate the acquisition of a high-quality education for children from this social group. In every country, specific ethnic minority groups face restricted access to education. For instance, in Ukraine and Moldova, this affects the Roma population; in Central Asian countries, it involves Tajik, Uzbek, Kyrgyz, and Kazakh minorities; and in Georgia, it impacts Azerbaijani and Armenian populations.

Members of ethnic groups are significantly **less likely to complete a full secondary education**, and a portion of them lack access to it entirely. They may either fail to enter school at all or drop out before the specified timeframe.

- In Moldova, the attendance rate for Roma children is substantially lower across all levels of education. Some children do not attend school at all, some start schooling later, and others drop out.⁸⁷ Only one in two Roma children is enrolled in primary and secondary education, whereas among the rest of the population, this figure reaches 90%. Furthermore, Roma individuals are much more likely to drop out of school.⁸⁸
- In Georgia, school attendance rates are lower among certain ethnic groups, particularly Armenian and Azerbaijani children. These minority groups tend to start school later. At the upper secondary school level, the gap between Georgian youth and other ethnic groups becomes more substantial. For example, 39% of young Azerbaijani girls and 28% of boys leave school after the compulsory nine years of basic education, representing an 11% gender gap. Dropout from school is frequently linked to work responsibilities or child marriages, especially among young women.⁸⁹
- In Ukraine, according to the Ukrainian Crisis Media Center, as of 2018, 24% of the Roma population had no education at all. Additionally, 31% of Roma children do not attend school, and nearly one in four is unable to read or write in Ukrainian. Only 1% of Roma children received a certificate of complete general secondary education in 2019.⁹⁰

One of the key issues limiting access to school education is the **language barrier** and the low proficiency level in the national language of instruction.

- In Georgia, lack of Georgian language proficiency is one of the greatest obstacles to the integration of ethnic

⁸⁷ UNICEF Moldova. (n.d.). *Education*. <https://www.unicef.org/moldova/en/what-we-do/education>

⁸⁸ UNICEF Moldova. (n.d.). *Roma children*. <https://www.unicef.org/moldova/en/what-we-do/roma-children>

⁸⁹ Jibladze, G. & Skhiladze, E. (2023). *Country gender equality profile of Georgia*. UN Women. https://georgia.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2024-04/cgep_eng_web_1.pdf

⁹⁰ Ukrainian Crisis Media Center. (2018). *Lyshe 38% romiv maiut robotu — doslidzhennia* [Only 38% of Roma people have jobs, a study shows] <https://uacrisis.org/uk/66005-roma-communities-in-ukraine>

minority members—in 2021, approximately 47% did not speak the state language.⁹¹ In the 2021–2022 academic year, schools where instruction was not conducted in Georgian constituted 10% of the public sector. Nine percent of all students attend schools with alternative languages of instruction (non-Georgian).⁹²

- In Tajikistan, challenges in learning Tajik are highlighted both for Tajiks themselves and for national minorities. Among the greatest difficulties for linguistic groups are the outdated Soviet methodology of teaching the Tajik language, a lack of online learning tools, and the high cost of private Tajik language lessons. According to the results of one study, non-native Tajik speakers noted that the level of Tajik language education they received was unsatisfactory.⁹³

Another challenge in educating children from ethnic groups is the **shortage of qualified teachers** capable of teaching in the native language of the respective ethnic group. This exacerbates the general problem of teacher shortages for instruction in national languages across many countries, rendering educational access for ethnic minorities even more restricted.

- In Georgia, only 21% of teachers had undergone retraining by 2021. Teachers who do not speak the Georgian language cannot teach effectively using Georgian textbooks and instructional materials. Because teacher certification exams are conducted in Georgian, some teachers are unable to pass them to confirm their qualifications. This also filters out a portion of candidates who could otherwise fill teaching positions.⁹⁴
- In Tajikistan, the issue regarding teaching staff lies in the fact that the current faculty predominantly

⁹¹ Slobodov, S. (2022, October 25). *Georgians increasingly agree that minority groups face challenges in Georgia*. OC Media. <https://oc-media.org/georgians-increasingly-agree-that-minority-groups-face-challenges-in-georgia/>

⁹² IDFI. (2022). *Overview of the educational sector and identification of challenges faced by ethnic minorities and socially vulnerable groups*. https://idfi.ge/en/overview_of_the_education_sector_and_identification_of_challenges_faced_by_ethnic_minorities_and_socially_vulnerable_groups

⁹³ Berdiqulov, A. (2024, September). *The situation of minorities in Tajikistan*. Minority Rights Group. <https://www.ecoi.net/en/file/local/2120258/mrg-tajik-en-1.pdf>

⁹⁴ Adeishvili, G., Saghareishvili, M., & Zhamurashvili, L. (2022, August). *Overview of the education sector and identification of challenges faced by ethnic minorities and socially vulnerable groups*. Institute for Development of Freedom of Information. https://idfi.ge/public/upload/00_studies/EnG_IDFI_Education_2022.pdf

consists of specialists trained during the Soviet period. Once they retire, the number of educators will decrease substantially. This reduction will particularly affect schools where the medium of instruction is a minority language, which are already facing teacher shortages.⁹⁵ A lack of access to digital resources, including gadgets and the internet, creates unequal access to quality education for ethnic minority children.

- In Ukraine, a study on Roma education during the war revealed that 74% of teachers reported children experiencing technical difficulties.⁹⁶ Meanwhile, similar data regarding other ethnic groups are not publicly available.
- During distance learning in the COVID-19 pandemic period in Kyrgyzstan, among students studying in ethnic minority languages (Uzbek or Tajik), only 55% received smartphones, and 39% received tablets or laptops. For many, this was their first experience accessing technology. These figures are lower than those in schools that teach in Kyrgyz and Russian, where over 70% of students had such devices even before the pandemic began.⁹⁷

Among other reasons why children from certain ethnic groups may not attend school is their involvement in household chores and caring for other family members.

Another challenge related to the language of instruction is the **dominance of a non-national language, specifically Russian**, among the languages of other ethnic groups in some countries. This trend is more characteristic of Central Asian countries. During the Soviet era, language served as one of the instruments for spreading and popularizing socialist ideology. The Russian language was widely accepted as the primary language for communication and accessing services. Consequently, for forcibly displaced ethnic groups and certain national minorities, Russian was a way to interact with those around them. In 1989, the Central Asian countries within

⁹⁵ Berdiqulov, A. (2024). *The situation of minorities in Tajikistan*. Minority Rights Group. <https://www.ecoi.net/en/file/local/2120258/mrg-tajik-en-1.pdf>

⁹⁶ Zhmurko, O. (2023). *Osvita romskykh ditei v Ukraini pid chas viiny* [Education of Roma children in Ukraine during the war]. Vox Populi Agency; REYN-Ukraine; International Renaissance Foundation. https://www.irf.ua/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/report_final.pdf

⁹⁷ Harden-Wolfson, E. (2024). *Innovations and challenges in distance education and the prospects for post-pandemic digital transformation: Evidence from Kyrgyzstan*. GPE KIX. https://kix.taalinforum.kg/report/Policy_Brief_Innovations_and_Challenges_in_Distance_Education_%20and_Perspectives_of_Digital_Transformation_in_the_Post-Pandemic_Period_Evidence_from_Kyrgyzstan_en.pdf

the USSR adopted the Law on the State Language, which continued to function even after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Instruction in public schools had to be conducted in the state language, while national minorities were provided with the option to study in their native languages. However, in the initial years following independence, educational reforms were complicated by a lack of resources and a partial reliance on the Soviet education system (with curricula reflecting Soviet ideology and a significant number of textbooks and materials published in Russian). Furthermore, due to financial difficulties, countries were unable to provide an adequate number of schools that instructed in the languages of national minorities.⁹⁸ In Tajikistan, Russian is widely used as a native language among many ethnic minorities, such as Tatars, Bashkirs, Armenians, Koreans, Bulgarians, as well as Russians themselves. Russian-speaking members of the Armenian, Bashkir, Bulgarian, and Korean minorities studied in schools with Russian as the language of instruction. Some reported attending schools funded by Russia. In such schools, they were forbidden from speaking the Tajik language, despite the fact that proficiency in Tajik is required for university admission.⁹⁹

Policies and Solutions

Across all countries in the region, policies regarding children from different ethnic groups have been developed. For the most part, these are integrated into national strategic documents on education development, which primarily focus on strengthening proficiency in the national language and expanding opportunities for education in the native languages of ethnic minorities. In certain cases, such as in Kyrgyzstan, dedicated departments have been established to work with these groups.

- In Kyrgyzstan, the Department of Ethnic and Religious Policy under the President was established, which

⁹⁸ Ferrando, O. (2020). Education language policies and practices in post-Soviet Central Asia. An historical analysis of ethnic minorities in the Ferghana Valley. *Journal on Ethnopolitics and Minority Issues in Europe*, 19(1), 32–54. https://www.ecmi.de/fileadmin/redakteure/publications/JEMIE_Datens%C3%A4tze/Jemie_2020_1/02_Ferrando.pdf

⁹⁹ Akhmetova, G., Shamatov, D., & Tajik, M. (2022). Education in Central Asia: Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. In C. C. Wolhuter & A. W. Wiseman (Eds.), *World Education Patterns in the Global South: The Ebb of Global Forces and the Flow of Contextual Imperatives* (Vol. 43B, pp. 43–58). Emerald Publishing Limited. <https://doi.org/10.1108/S1479-36792022000043B003>

is responsible for interethnic relations, including the implementation of multilingual education.¹⁰⁰

- In Albania, according to the objectives of the National Action Plan for Equality, Inclusion and Participation of Roma and Egyptians, 80% more Roma and Egyptian children are projected to complete pre-school, primary, and full secondary education by the end of 2025 compared to 2020.¹⁰¹
- In Moldova, the Education 2030 plan incorporates the creation of educational opportunities for students and youth from diverse ethnic groups within the economic and cultural space of the Republic of Moldova, particularly by improving Romanian language learning outcomes among non-Romanian students and youth.
- In Mongolia, the state education policy for the 2014–2024 period dictates that instruction be conducted in the official language, while gradually increasing the use of the traditional Mongolian script, ensuring the availability of primary education in native languages for minorities, and implementing bilingual programs. The 2016 Law on the Mongolian Language aims to support and develop the languages of national minorities and provides for bilingual education in cases where the majority of students belong to a minority group.¹⁰²
- In Georgia, programs have been designed involving both the non-governmental sector and state bodies; notably, pilot initiatives for Georgian as a second language, bilingual education (since 2016), and multilingual education (since 2019) have been implemented.¹⁰³ In 2019, following 15 years of discussions, research, and pilot projects, the implementation of a bilingual model was initiated at the state level.

¹⁰⁰ Nietschke, Y., Dabkowski, A., Conway, M., & Pradhika, C. (2022). COVID-19 Education Response Mapping Study: Building Resilience in the Kyrgyz Republic: Readiness, Response, and Recovery. ACR-Asia. https://ierc-publicfiles.s3.amazonaws.com/public/resources/ACER-RTI%20COVID%20Responses%20Report-Kyrgyz%20Republic_Final_01032023.pdf?RNpWLoCMNgkQcBxVtVo4QWa2wswTof4M

¹⁰¹ Ministry of Health and Social Protection. (2021, November). *National action plan for equality, inclusion and participation of Roma and Egyptians in the Republic of Albania (2021–2025)*. <https://shendetesia.gov.al/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/NATIONAL-ACTION-PLAN-FOR-EQUALITY.pdf>

¹⁰² *Law of Mongolia on Mongolian Language* (2015) (Mongolia). <https://legalinfo.mn/en/edtl/16760272253581>

¹⁰³ Gabunia, V., Gochitashvili, K., & Shabashvili, G. (2022). Ways and needs of transition from monolingual to multilingual teaching model in the Georgian education system. *Educational Role of Language Journal*, 2022-1(7), 47–57. <https://doi.org/10.36534/erlj.2022.01.05>

- In Tajikistan, the medium-term development program for 2016–2020 envisaged the development and publication of new textbooks in the languages of national minorities.¹⁰⁴

One of the primary activities used to implement policies for national minorities was **teacher professional development focused on educating ethnic minorities**.

- In Georgia, general professional and subject-specific training sessions were conducted for teachers involving Estonian and Georgian experts, while school principals received training on creating an appropriate school environment and promoting bilingual education.¹⁰⁵
- In Mongolia, the Education Quality Reform Project facilitated the following initiatives:
 - Implementing adult learning programs to improve Mongolian language proficiency among teachers working with national minority children;
 - Strengthening training curricula for teachers instructing national minority children in Mongolian;
 - Supporting activities to develop native-language reading skills among national minority children.¹⁰⁶

Additionally, scholarships for ethnic minorities were introduced in several countries of the region. In particular, Albania implemented scholarships to retain children from the Roma and Egyptian ethnic minorities in school. These scholarships were provided to children at risk of dropping out or those who had already been excluded from school.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁴ Berdiqulov, A. (2024, September). *The situation of minorities in Tajikistan*. Minority Rights Group. <https://www.ecoi.net/en/file/local/2120258/mrg-tajik-en-1.pdf>

¹⁰⁵ Berdiqulov, A. (2024, September). *The situation of minorities in Tajikistan*. Minority Rights Group. <https://www.ecoi.net/en/file/local/2120258/mrg-tajik-en-1.pdf>

¹⁰⁶ World Bank. (2020). *Towards Mongolia's long-term development policy Vision 2050: Advancing education equity, efficiency and outcomes*. <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/server/api/core/bitstreams/762456dd-63c0-59fe-b709-fc047f3d325c/content>

¹⁰⁷ IIEP-UNESCO. (2024). *Education sector analysis: Republic of Albania 2024*. UNESCO International Institute for Educational Planning. <https://csi.edu.al/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/390365eng.pdf>

● Children from Low-Income Families and Those from Remote Communities

In this section, we focus on two groups: children from low-income families and children from remote communities. The former has limited economic capital, which can affect educational attainment even when secondary education in the country is free of charge. This occurs because obtaining an education entails additional expenses, such as transportation to the educational institution or the purchase of gadgets. Limited amounts of economic capital can also influence the accumulation of other types of capital, since acquiring them may entail financial costs. Financial insecurity can combine with other types of vulnerabilities, significantly complicating children's access to education. One such vulnerability is residence in remote regions or villages. In some countries, the network of schools does not reach remote settlements. Even if such institutions are available, they cannot provide high-quality education (notably due to insufficient funding and a shortage of teachers in certain subjects). In these settlements, overcoming learning losses often falls to parents, requiring them to possess additional capital. Low-income families cannot compensate for the shortcomings of the education system at their own expense to ensure quality learning for the child. Below, we provide an overview of the situation regarding secondary education accessibility for children from low-SES families and remote settlements and describe policies aimed at supporting these groups.

Children from low-income families across all countries may face restricted access to quality education. This group frequently includes girls, children with disabilities, and members of other vulnerable groups, further exacerbating their educational inequalities. **Low income is often coupled with residence in rural areas or remote regions**, as well as situations where children are the offspring of migrant workers or lack permanent housing or parental care. This is also linked to poorly supplied school infrastructure in rural areas, the remoteness of schools, and limited access to digital infrastructure. Consequently, these children are more likely to drop out of the learning process and demonstrate significantly lower levels of academic achievement.

- In Mongolia, only 22% of individuals from the lowest socioeconomic strata complete the full secondary education cycle.¹⁰⁸ According to PISA 2022 data, students from low-income families lag behind their better-off peers by 94 points (equivalent to more than four years of schooling). These gaps are also apparent between urban schools and schools located in aimags and sums.¹⁰⁹
- In Moldova, 90% of children in rural areas attend primary school, but only 85% obtain a basic secondary education.¹¹⁰

In Central Asian countries, mountainous terrain and remote regions also pose a range of challenges for children studying there. Children from rural areas in other countries face identical issues. Specifically, these include shortages of schools and teachers, poor-quality school infrastructure, limited internet access, a lack of instructional materials, and insufficient educational opportunities.

In Mongolia, the situation differs slightly from that in other countries because it features **a high proportion of nomadic population** (ranging from 25% to 40% according to various sources). A large percentage of people also work in professions that require regular migration or relocation for employment, construction, or mining purposes.¹¹¹ The distance to educational services is a substantial barrier to participation in learning. In urban areas of Mongolia, non-migrant households live an average of 1.1 km away from the nearest secondary school. Migrant households are, on average, 6.8 km from a school, often located on the outskirts of cities. Rural households live an average of 14.9 km away from a general education school, and the distances for nomadic families are even greater, which has led to the creation of boarding institutions for children from such families within the country.¹¹²

¹⁰⁸ UNESCO. (2021). *Global education monitoring report 2021 — Central and Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia — Inclusion and education: All means all*. https://www.european-agency.org/sites/default/files/210609_BLS20383_UNE_Eurasia_Report_EN_AV_v02_0.pdf

¹⁰⁹ Government of Mongolia. (2023). *PISA 2022 Mongolia national report*. Ministry of Education and Science. [https://cdn.greensoft.mn/uploads/users/2760/files/PDF/MONGOLIA_Report_English_WEB%20\(1\).pdf](https://cdn.greensoft.mn/uploads/users/2760/files/PDF/MONGOLIA_Report_English_WEB%20(1).pdf)

¹¹⁰ UNICEF Moldova. (n.d.). *Education*. <https://www.unicef.org/moldova/en/what-we-do/education>

¹¹¹ World Bank. (2020). *Towards Mongolia's long-term development policy Vision 2050: Advancing education equity, efficiency and outcomes*. <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/server/api/core/bitstreams/762456dd-63c0-59fe-b709-fc047f3d325c/content>

¹¹² UNESCO. (2020). *Mongolia, education policy review: Towards a lifelong learning system*. <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000373687>

Labor migration is also highly characteristic of the region's countries, particularly in Central Asia. In Kyrgyzstan, due to limited employment opportunities, labor migration is widespread, especially in rural areas. Between 800,000 and 1 million Kyrgyz citizens are engaged in labor migration (both internally and abroad), representing nearly 40% of the country's workforce.¹¹³ This impacts the well-being and educational opportunities of children from low-income families, notably because they lack parental support.¹¹⁴ Children left behind without parental care frequently face psychological trauma, family instability, discrimination, and the risk of early school dropout.¹¹⁵

In Tajikistan, **an increasing number of children are left behind without parental care due to migration**. Every year, out of every 100,000 children, approximately 160 lose parental care, and in many cases, this is directly linked to labor migration. The left-behind children are usually in the care of relatives, most often grandparents, who do not always have sufficient resources or strength to meet the children's needs. A portion of these children is even placed in residential institutions. Children of migrants are often forced to take on additional responsibilities, performing heavy labor at home or in the fields, which leaves them with little free time and even causes them to miss school classes. Consequently, many of them become more vulnerable to violence, exploitation, and abuse.¹¹⁶

Policies and Solutions

In the strategic documents of the region's countries, these categories of children are typically classified as vulnerable groups requiring concrete measures to enhance their educational access and quality. Frequently, these measures involve

¹¹³ Taalim Forum. (2024). *School education in Kyrgyzstan: Readiness for digital education*. https://kix.taalimforum.kg/report/Analytical_Report_School_Education_in_Kyrgyzstan_Readiness_for_Digital_Education_en.pdf

¹¹⁴ Shamatov, D., Tajik, M., Karakus, M., & Mukhamejanova, A. (2024). *Exploring school-based education stakeholders' perspectives on quality of education in Kyrgyzstan in the context of Schools2030*. Schools2030. https://schools2030.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/3.-Nazarbayev_Final-report_Kyrgyzstan_July-clean.pdf

¹¹⁵ UNESCO. (2021). *Kyrgyzstan: Inclusion*. Profiles Enhancing Education Reviews (PEER). <https://education-profiles.org/central-and-southern-asia/kyrgyzstan/~inclusion>

¹¹⁶ UNICEF Tajikistan. (n.d.) *Children of migrants*. UNICEF. <https://www.unicef.org/tajikistan/children-migrants>

increasing digital access, raising the number of teachers, funding, and modernizing school infrastructure.

In 2024, a summer program by UNICEF Mongolia was conducted in the Dundgovi aimag, helping children from remote areas catch up on learning and improve their reading skills. This was implemented through the use of play, digital technologies, and practical activities (tree planting, social skills). According to evaluations, the program increased interest in learning from 22% to 92% and improved reading skills by 12%. Plans are in place to expand the program to other aimags and remote communities.¹¹⁷

The Ministry of Education and Research of Moldova launched a national initiative to establish a Network of Model Schools. This project involves the comprehensive renovation and equipping of 25 general secondary education institutions in Moldova, focusing on expanding access to quality education for vulnerable student groups, particularly those residing in rural areas. The goal of the initiative is to overcome disparities in learning achievements between rural and urban students by transforming modular schools into educational hubs that will attract students from less well-resourced institutions.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁷ Davaa, A. (2024, October 30). *Summer Program: Herder's children improve their knowledge and skills while playing*. UNICEF. <https://www.unicef.org/mongolia/stories/summer-program-herders-children-improve-their-knowledge-and-skills-while-playing>

¹¹⁸ Ciobanu, M., Savcenko, S., & Colesnicova, T. (2024). *New model schools in the Republic of Moldova: Current situation and future prospects*. National Institute for Economic Research; Academy of Economic Studies of Moldova. https://ibn.idsi.md/sites/default/files/imag_file/298-308_2.pdf

● Children from the Temporarily Occupied Territories and Those Residing Close to Combat Zones in Ukraine and Georgia

War alters the way the education system functions. Drawing upon Bourdieu's theories allows us to trace how the education system, acting as a "field," shifts its rules, its resource requirements for entry, and the conditions under which forms of capital can be converted into educational opportunities. Consequently, children who find themselves in occupied territories or who reside close to combat zones often lose the ability to fully participate in this field. Furthermore, they lose connections and contact with teachers and peers, as well as opportunities to participate in extracurricular activities, clubs, and the like. This partially mirrors the situation in which overcoming learning losses falls to parents. However, even when additional capital is available, parents often cannot secure their children's entry into the education system. In this section, we describe how the wars initiated by Russia impact educational accessibility for children in Ukraine and Georgia.

Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine has significantly impacted the accessibility and quality of the educational process. According to Ukraine's Ministry of Education and Science, as of the summer of 2026, 4,227 educational institutions in Ukraine had been damaged, and 423 had been completely destroyed.¹¹⁹ As of May 2026, 235 of those were schools that were completely destroyed.¹²⁰ Following the start of the invasion, most schools transitioned to distance learning. Over the past four and a half years, **the number of children studying via distance learning has decreased depending on the security situation.** At the end of 2022, 36% of schools adopted a distance learning format, another 36% used a hybrid format, and only 28% operated in person.¹²¹ As of May 2026,

¹¹⁹ Ministry of Education and Science. (n.d.) *Osvita pid zahrozoiu* [Education Under Threat]. <https://saveschools.in.ua/>

¹²⁰ Institute of Educational Analytics. (2026). *Osvitni statystychni dani (2025–2026 n.r.)* [Educational Statistics for the 2025–2026 Academic Year]. <https://iea.gov.ua/diyalnist/naukovo-analitichna-diyalnist/osnovni-chofry-osvity/>

¹²¹ Cedoss. (2023). *Viina ta osvita: Yak rik povnomasshtabnoho vtorhnnennia vplynuv na ukrainski shkoly. Bryf doslidzhennia* [War and education. How a year of the full-scale invasion influenced ukrainian schools. Executive summary]. savED; International Renaissance Foundation. <https://cedos.org.ua/wp-content/uploads/ua-executive-summary-war-and-education-web.pdf>

72% of schools operated in an in-person format, 17% in a hybrid format, and 11% via distance learning.¹²² The majority of schools operating on a hybrid or distance-learning model are located in frontline regions, where the security situation does not permit in-person schooling.

Access to digital resources directly impacts the accessibility and quality of education and is frequently dependent on a family's economic status. A study conducted in 2025 revealed that for the majority of students, the smartphone remains the primary device used for learning. Approximately half use laptops, which they may be forced to share with other family members. Although regular sociological surveys conducted since the start of the full-scale invasion show that students' access to devices has improved overall, one in five students engaged in hybrid or online learning uses only messaging apps for their education. This can directly compromise educational quality, as these platforms lack the clear structure that tools such as Google Classroom provide.¹²³

An internet connection is also crucial for maintaining access to learning. However, while the divide in internet access previously depended on the type of settlement, in recent years the determining factor has shifted to financial status, which dictates whether a family can afford internet service.¹²⁴

Learning loss constitutes one of the major consequences of the full-scale invasion. According to PISA 2022 data, Ukrainian students lag behind by a year and a half in science and mathematics and by two and a half years in reading.¹²⁵ Non-governmental organizations play a significant role

¹²² Institute of Educational Analytics. (2026). *Osvitni statystychni dani (2025–2026 n.r.)* [Educational Statistics for the 2025–2026 Academic Year]. <https://iea.gov.ua/diyalnist/naukovo-analitichna-diyalnist/osnovni-chofry-osvity/>

¹²³ Karakai, A., Hatsko, V., & Savisko, M. (2025). *Onlain-navchannia v Ukraini: yak vidbuvaetsia i chy znyzhuietsia riven znan (chastyna 1)* [Online education in Ukraine: Implementation and the question of learning loss (Part 1)]. Vox Ukraine. <https://voxukraine.org/onlajn-navchannya-v-ukrayini-yak-vidbuvaetsya-i-chy-znyzhuyetsya-riven-znan-chastyna-1>

¹²⁴ Karakai, A., Hatsko, V., & Savisko, M. (2025). *Onlain-navchannia v Ukraini: yak vidbuvaetsia i chy znyzhuietsia riven znan (chastyna 1)* [Online education in Ukraine: Implementation and the question of learning loss (Part 1)]. Vox Ukraine. <https://voxukraine.org/onlajn-navchannya-v-ukrayini-yak-vidbuvaetsya-i-chy-znyzhuyetsya-riven-znan-chastyna-1>

¹²⁵ Education Ombudsman of Ukraine. (2023). *Osvitni vtraty uchniv v Ukraini ta sviti zrosly: rezultaty mizhnarodnoho doslidzhennia yakosti osvity PISA-2022* [Student learning loss has increased in Ukraine and worldwide: Results of the PISA-2022 international study of education quality]. <https://eo.gov.ua/osvitni-vtraty-uchniv-v-ukraini-ta-sviti-zrosly-rezultaty-mizhnarodnoho-doslidzhennia-iakosti-osvity-pisa-2022/2023/12/05/>

in organizing initiatives and programs to address learning losses, with a particular focus on vulnerable student groups. Despite these efforts, Ukraine **still lacks a national strategy for compensating for learning losses** that could comprehensively cover all regions of the country.¹²⁶

The consequences of the full-scale invasion impact the education of both the children who remained in Ukraine and those who fled abroad. In particular, the latter frequently study in their host countries while simultaneously completing the Ukrainian curriculum via distance learning. At the same time, **students from the temporarily occupied territories and frontline communities remain the most vulnerable categories of children.**

In the temporarily occupied territories of the Luhansk and Donetsk oblasts, as well as the Autonomous Republic of Crimea, approaches within the education system were altered after 2014. Specifically, nearly all instruction transitioned to the Russian language, and Russian educational standards were introduced. An identical situation unfolded in the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine after 2022, as the Russians attempted to rapidly restore the educational process in schools according to their own requirements.¹²⁷ Students still have the option of distance learning at Ukrainian schools, which have schedules specifically adapted for these children. However, they face a double academic workload due to practically parallel enrollment in two schools.¹²⁸

Children from the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine also live in constant physical danger and stress. There are numerous reports of **the occupying authorities prohibiting students from participating in Ukrainian education, as well as cases of detention and torture of families** who attempted

¹²⁶ Teach for Ukraine & Save the Children. (2024). *Rol neuriadovykh orhanizatsii u vyvchenni ta podolanni osvitnikh vtrat v Ukraini* [The Role of non-governmental organizations in addressing learning losses in Ukraine]. https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1FKtzmNL29SvhobTplx8rsLtdHB_sw9N

¹²⁷ Nazarenko, Yu., Kohut, I., & Zheriobkina, T. (2022). *Osvita na okupovanykh terytoriyakh Ukrainy (24 liutoho — 30 kvitnia 2022)* [Education in the Occupied Territories of Ukraine (February 24 – April 30, 2022)]. Cedoss. <https://cedos.org.ua/researches/osvita-na-okupovanykh-terytoriyah-ukrayiny-24-lyutogo-30-kvitnya-2022/>

¹²⁸ Lykhovyd, I. (2024, September 3). *Yak navchajutsia ukrainski uchni v tymchasovii okupatsii ta yakykh zmin potrebuie osvita ditei na TOT* [How Ukrainian students study under temporary occupation and the necessary reforms for education in the temporarily occupied territories]. New Ukrainian School. https://nus.org.ua/2024/09/03/yak-navchajutsya-ukrayinski-uchni-v-tymchasovij-okupatsiyi-ta-yakyh-zmin-potrebuye-navchannya-ditei-na-tot/#google_vignette

to secure opportunities for their children to study online in Ukrainian schools. According to human rights defenders, the Ukrainian education system reaches only 8% of students in the temporarily occupied territories.¹²⁹

Another vulnerable group consists of children residing in frontline regions. They **face constant safety threats and high stress levels**. In most of these regions, conducting in-person instruction is possible only if properly equipped shelters are available, while distance learning is complicated by a lack of necessary devices and internet disruptions caused by frequent power outages. According to a study by the savED charitable foundation, as of 2025, 49% of students from frontline territories studied exclusively online.¹³⁰

The problem of enforcing the Russian language and education is characteristic not only of the Ukrainian temporarily occupied territories but also of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, which were occupied by Russia in 2008. Schools located in the occupied territories suffer from Russian educational policies. Instruction in these territories is conducted in Russian, with no opportunity to establish classrooms or schools where instruction would be delivered in Georgian.¹³¹ The lack of proper Georgian-language education is also an issue for South Ossetia.¹³²

In Georgia, schools located near the administrative boundary line cannot operate under a standard educational plan due to insecurity and a lack of resources (libraries, digital equipment, textbooks, etc.). The absence of a stable and secure environment negatively affects both the quality of education and students' psychological well-being. Furthermore, due to risks and an unfavorable economic situation, retaining qualified teachers remains challenging.¹³³

¹²⁹ Myrnyi, M. (2025, June 25). *Vtrata nadii ta represii: chomu kilnist uchniv z okupatsii v ukrainskykh shkolakh zmenshuietsia i yak tsomu zaradyty* [Lost hope and repression: Why the number of students from occupied territories in Ukrainian schools is declining and how to address it]. ZMINA. <https://zmina.info/articles/vtrata-nadiyi-ta-represiyi-chomu-kilkist-uchniv-z-okupacziyi-v-ukrayinskyh-shkolah-zmenshuetsya-i-yak-czomu-zaradyty/>

¹³⁰ SavED. (2025, Fall). *Osvita v umovakh viiny* [Education in times of war]. <https://saved.foundation/osvita-v-umovah-vijny-analytika-saved-osin-2025/>

¹³¹ Shonia, T. (2021, November 3). *Abkhazia: Georgian now only taught as a foreign language*. Institute for War and Peace Reporting. <https://iwpr.net/global-voices/abkhazia-georgian-now-only-taught-foreign-language>

¹³² Parastaev, A. & Mearakishvili, T. (2016, October 10). *Georgian and Ossetian language schools in South Ossetia*. <https://caucasusedition.net/georgian-and-ossetian-language-schools-in-south-ossetia/>

¹³³ Kordzadze, M., Kalandadze, E., Dvali, I., Kordzadze, E., & Kikodze, N. (2024). *Providing Accessibility of Quality Education in War-Affected Areas: Case of the Georgian Village Avlevi*. *European Journal of Education and Pedagogy*, 5(6), 1–6. <https://doi.org/10.24018/ejedu.2024.5.6.887>

Policies and Solutions

The Ukrainian government provides various forms of support to children who have managed to relocate to government-controlled territories, including financial aid and individual reintegration plans. School graduates from the occupied territories also benefit from simplified procedures to continue their education at vocational and higher education institutions within the controlled territories. The capacity of the Ukrainian government, non-governmental organizations, and international partners to support these children remains extremely limited. Some Ukrainian NGOs (specifically “ZNOvU”) provide assistance to children in the occupied territories, notably support in preparing for External Independent Evaluation exams; however, due to significant risks and strict security protocols, they can only work with small groups of children.

The Government of Ukraine has developed the Education Recovery Plan for the De-occupied Territories for 2024–2027,¹³⁴ which envisions achieving three primary goals:

1. Restoring the Ukrainian education system in de-occupied communities;
2. Ensuring the educational process in accordance with Ukrainian standards;
3. Creating a safe educational environment.

To ensure safe educational access for children in frontline territories, the Government of Ukraine planned to construct approximately 200 underground schools in frontline areas in 2025.¹³⁵ Non-governmental organizations also play a significant role in securing access to education for students from frontline territories. For instance, the savED charitable foundation equips school shelters with all necessary supplies, sets up spaces where children can stay during blackouts or shelling, and conducts classes to address learning losses.¹³⁶

¹³⁴ Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine. (2024, September 20). *Uriad zatverdyv plan vidnovlennia osvity na deokupovanykh terytoriakh* [The government has approved a plan to restore education in the de-occupied territories]. <https://mon.gov.ua/news/uriad-zatverdyv-plan-vidnovlennia-osvity-na-deokupovanykh-terytoriakh>

¹³⁵ Ministry for Restoration, Infrastructure, and Transport of Ukraine. (2025, May 27). *Do kintsia roku bude pobudovano blyzko 200 pidzemnykh shkil*, — Oleksii Kuleba [Oleksii Kuleba: Around 200 underground schools will be built by the end of the year]. <https://mindev.gov.ua/news/do-kintsia-roku-bude-pobudovano-blyzko-200-pidzemnykh-shkil-oleksii-kuleba>

¹³⁶ SavED. (2025, Fall). *Osvita v umovakh viiny* [Education in Times of War]. <https://saved.foundation/osvita-v-umovah-viiny-analityka-saved-osin-2025/>

The implementation of these tasks requires significant effort and financial investments from the state, local self-governments, and international partners.

Measures for children from the occupied territories in Georgia primarily focus on learning Georgian, as the language barrier is a key challenge for them.¹³⁷ In some universities in territories near the occupied zones, centers for Georgian-Abkhaz relations have been established to teach language, literature, and history to students from the occupied territories.¹³⁸

Various online language learning tools have also been created, such as The Easy Georgian.¹³⁹ Furthermore, internally displaced persons are provided with free access to education, a simplified school admission procedure for those who have lost documents, and a full supply of textbooks by the Ministry of Education of Georgia. Free textbooks are also sent to Georgian-language schools in the occupied and adjacent territories.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁷ Charity Humanitarian Center "Abkhazeti". (n.d.) Georgian language lessons in a small family-style home in Kurdgelauri. <https://chca.org.ge/eng/item/1042/detail>

¹³⁸ Shota Meskhia Zugdidi State University. (n.d.). *Georgian-Abkhazian Relations Center*. <https://zssu.ge/en/node/3706>

¹³⁹ EasyGeorgian. (n.d.). <https://easygeorgian.com/>

¹⁴⁰ Maglakelidze, N. (2026, August 13). *School textbooks to be delivered to public schools across Georgia in coming days*. Georgia Today. <https://georgiatoday.ge/school-textbooks-to-be-delivered-to-public-schools-across-georgia-in-coming-days/>

● Conclusions

Educational inequalities are a structural problem and a component of broader social inequalities. Equal access to education is a fundamental human right. Vulnerable student groups face not only individual difficulties but also systemic barriers to accessing a quality education. These groups include girls and boys (depending on the context), children with disabilities and SEN, members of ethnic minorities, children from low-income families, children of migrant workers, internally displaced persons, and other groups in vulnerable situations.

Within Bourdieu's framework, various forms of vulnerability shape children's opportunities to accumulate and use economic, cultural, social, and symbolic capital. Concurrently, individual vulnerability factors can interact with one another, exacerbating educational barriers. Children's individual characteristics (for example, gender or disability) interact with structural conditions (poverty, territorial disparities) and institutional features of education systems (insufficient inclusivity, underfunding, and language policy). It is precisely this interaction that creates or reinforces barriers to accessing a quality education.

Education system resilience—its capacity to prepare for, anticipate, and respond to crises—is a crucial factor in ensuring quality education. At the same time, education systems that lack well-developed inclusivity and equality are less resilient to crises, as they are incapable of meeting the needs of diverse population groups with equal effectiveness. The absence of a systematic approach to addressing the needs of vulnerable groups in strategic planning and preparation for future crises causes existing educational inequalities not only to persist but also to deepen under emergency conditions.

In this report, we have examined how equal access to education for vulnerable groups is reflected in the policies of the region's countries. A general trend is the existence of separate legal acts that enshrine the right to education for various groups: women, people with disabilities, and ethnic minorities. At the same time, the strategic documents of some countries include lists of groups considered vulnerable. For the most part, the lists are similar: girls, children with SEN

and disabilities, and children from remote regions. Meanwhile, the list of ethnic minorities varies by country. Additionally, an emphasis on children from remote communities, particularly those in mountainous regions, is more characteristic of Central Asian countries. Children of IDPs and children residing in occupied territories are in the focus of Ukraine and Georgia only, which is caused by their wars against Russia.

The desk research showed no significant differences between countries in the problems affecting vulnerable groups, indicating shared systemic challenges in ensuring equal access to education. Common trends can be traced across all countries. One of them is dropping out of school, or a lack of opportunities among various groups in vulnerable situations to pursue an education. Reasons may vary: outdated perceptions of the division of gender roles and household burdens, which are more typical for Central Asian countries; low proficiency in the national language; the inaccessibility of school infrastructure in remote or rural regions; and a shortage of qualified teachers who possess the competencies to work with specific groups, such as children with disabilities and SEN, as well as ethnic minorities.

Another trend is the disparity in educational outcomes. Children from groups in vulnerable situations are more likely to have lower academic achievement than their peers who do not belong to these groups. Therefore, educational inequalities manifest not only in access to education but also in the quality of the educational process and its outcomes.

Various structural problems lead to differences in educational outcomes and the accessibility of education for vulnerable groups of children. In particular, these include a shortage of qualified teaching staff capable of working with these groups of children, inaccessible school infrastructure, non-adaptive curricula, a lack of technical and digital tools, and a lack of skills to use them. The low level of funding for this sector and the country's general political course also affect the quality and accessibility of education. These two factors frequently cause the structural problems listed above.

Each of the structural problems listed above also has other origins. For instance, the countries this study focuses on experience a **teacher shortage** due to a number of factors. First, the countries in the region are characterized

by the feminization of the teaching profession, with women constituting the majority of the teaching staff. Second, labor migration plays a significant role here, particularly in Central Asian countries, where teachers migrate either internally within the region or to Russia. Third, low salaries play a major role, a feature common to all countries in the region. All these factors affect the ability of vulnerable groups to access quality education.

Accessible school infrastructure, the level of digitization, and the availability of technical tools are also frequently problems for groups in vulnerable situations. The challenges can vary depending on the group. For example, schools lack inclusive infrastructure for children with disabilities and SEN. In the case of ethnic minorities, children from low-income families, and children from remote and rural communities, access to gadgets and the internet may be limited.

Since vulnerable groups are often the focus of sectoral and educational policies across the region's countries, this creates a foundation for implementing various initiatives and measures. For the most part, these consist of projects implemented with the support of international development organizations and the local civil society sector. Some countries establish dedicated departments responsible for the education of vulnerable student groups.

● Recommendations

Strengthen the integration of the needs of vulnerable child groups into strategic education sector planning. It is advisable for states to develop dedicated sectoral strategies or action plans for vulnerable groups, and to ensure the systematic consideration of the needs of vulnerable child groups when formulating national educational strategies and programs.

Develop interagency coordination. Expand mechanisms for cross-sectoral partnership among state bodies, international development organizations, and civil society organizations to pool financial resources, expertise, and practices, as well as to jointly design and implement measures aimed

at improving equal access to secondary education for vulnerable child groups.

Expand the early identification system. Such systems should incorporate regular monitoring of risk factors (prolonged absence from classes, low academic performance, socioeconomic difficulties, disability, forced displacement, or residing in remote or conflict-affected areas) and ensure the timely provision of necessary support through coordination among educational institutions, social services, medical facilities, and other responsible authorities.

Improve access to distance and hybrid learning. Expand distance and hybrid learning opportunities for children who, due to health conditions, remote residence, forced displacement, safety risks, or other circumstances, cannot attend educational institutions regularly. These measures should be accompanied by investments in internet access, digital learning materials, and the training necessary to utilize them. Concurrently, the development of distance and hybrid learning must be viewed as a component of enhancing the resilience of the education system. The presence of an accessible, high-quality digital infrastructure and well-established distance learning mechanisms will ensure the continuity of the educational process or its rapid recovery in the event of future crises.

Improve tools to prepare educators to work with children with diverse special educational needs. Integrate practical competencies into teacher training and professional development programs regarding instruction for children with various special educational needs, adaptation of the educational process, and application of an individualized approach. Additionally, ensure that university curricula are revised to align with contemporary international standards of inclusive education, including the use of non-discriminatory terminology.

Develop teacher competencies in working with diverse ethnic groups. Ensure training and regular professional development for educators working with children from various ethnic and linguistic groups. Specifically, this should aim to prevent the transmission of stereotypes about ethnic groups within the educational process, develop skills to respond to hate speech or other types of violence related to ethnic origin, and foster skills to support children who have undergone such experiences.

Introduce a glossary of non-discriminatory communication.

Develop national recommendations on the use of modern terminology and communication regarding vulnerable groups, targeted at educators, educational institution managers, parents, students, and authorities. As an example, the Ukrainian Barrier-Free Handbook¹⁴¹ can be utilized, which promotes the formation of unified communication approaches and the dismantling of stereotypes and biases.

Develop a data collection system on educational inequalities.

Ensure the regular collection, integration, and analysis of disaggregated data on various groups of children to identify the regions they reside in, determine whether these populations are concentrated in specific territories, establish what support these regions require, and analyze data on the intersection of multiple vulnerability factors.

Introduce regular studies on the educational outcomes of various groups of children.

Ensure the systematic tracking of not only educational enrollment and attendance but also academic performance, learning losses, transitions between educational levels, completion rates, and dropouts from the education system.

Develop programs to compensate for learning losses. Design and implement targeted programs for children who exhibit low academic performance or have experienced learning losses due to socioeconomic factors, forced displacement, prolonged educational interruptions, or other circumstances. Learning losses can arise not only from crises but also from occurrences such as a child's illness that forces them to miss classes. Such programs could also foster the resilience of secondary education through timely identification and a well-established mechanism to compensate for learning losses, enabling a swift response to future challenges and securing quality, accessible education under such conditions.

¹⁴¹ Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine. (2022, January 21). *Dovidnyk berbariarnosti* [The barrier-free handbook]. <https://mon.gov.ua/static-objects/mon/sites/1/news/2022/01/21/Dovidnyk.Bezbaryernosti.21.01.22.pdf>