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CHAPTER **1**
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Universal Primary Education:
The Unfinished Agenda

1.1 Introduction

Universal primary education (UPE) is the Millennium Development Goal and Education for All goal that has received the most attention from the international community since these goals were established in 2000. This is largely because of the importance of UPE as a foundation for further levels of education, and the high returns that additional years of primary education can offer, particularly for low-income countries.

The attention of the international community is now shifting to other cycles of education, but as this chapter shows, the work of achieving UPE is not yet done in the poorest countries. In GPE developing country partners, one in four children were still not completing primary education in 2012. In addition, global progress towards UPE has slowed in recent years, particularly in developing country partners.

Despite the distance still to go, developing country partners have, on average, made substantial progress on access and completion of primary education. But progress is fragile and

could be easily reversed, particularly in fragile and conflict-affected countries (FCACs). Current trends also show that, while most children now have access to school, more attention should be paid to keeping children in school. More effort and targeted policies are also required to reach out-of-school children, who tend to be members of vulnerable and marginalized groups.

This chapter analyzes the status of universal primary education in developing country partners. Section 1.2 describes the progress in these countries in primary gross enrollment rates (GER). Section 1.3 explains the importance of reaching children who are out of school and shows that out-of-school rates are still high in many countries. Section 1.4 examines gross intake rates (GIR) and section 1.5 primary completion rates (PCR) in developing country partners. National targets for primary completion are analyzed in section 1.6. Section 1.7 discusses the fragility of gains in primary school access and completion. Section 1.8 details the key findings of the chapter.

While the attention of the international community is now shifting to other cycles of education, this chapter shows that the work of achieving universal primary education is not yet done in the poorest countries.



Photo credit: GPE/Natasha Graham

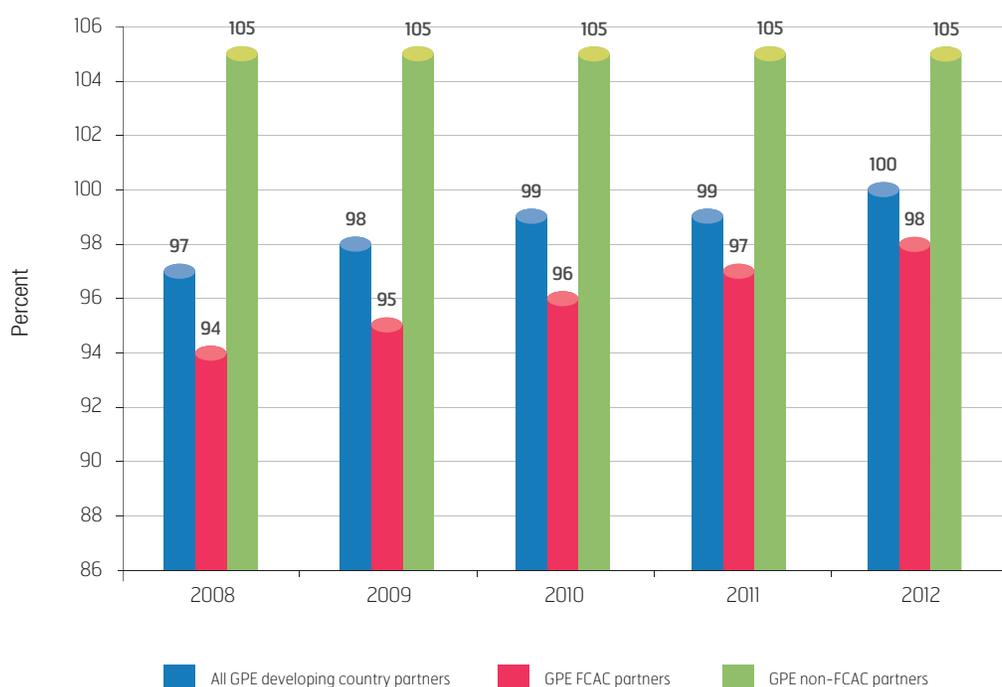
1.2 More children are enrolled in primary school

Intake capacity has increased significantly in GPE developing country partners. Between 2008 and 2012, total enrollment in primary education rose from 169 million to more than 185 million, bringing 16 million more children into school. In addition, the GER in primary education was on average 100 percent in 2012 (98 percent in FCACs) compared with 97 percent in 2008

(94 percent in FCACs), showing that most education systems have the capacity to enroll all primary school age children. Gross enrollment ratios reflect a country's intake capacity: a GER of 100 percent does not mean that all children have access to primary education, but that the number of places in primary education is equal to the number of primary school age children.

Between 2008 and 2012, total enrollment in primary education rose from 169 million to more than 185 million, bringing 16 million more children into school.

Figure 1.1 **Gross enrollment ratio in primary school, GPE developing country partners**



Source: Estimates of the UNESCO Institute for Statistics.

As of 2012, seven countries still had primary GERs below 90 percent, meaning that they still face serious access problems: Burkina Faso, Djibouti, Eritrea, The Gambia, Mali, Niger and Senegal (Table 1.1). Among them, substantial progress has been made in Burkina Faso, where the GER increased from 73 percent in 2008 to 85 percent in 2012, and in Niger, where the GER rose from 57 percent to 71 percent over the same period. But the situation has worsened in

Eritrea, with the GER falling from 47 percent to 42 percent, and The Gambia (from 88 percent to 85 percent) and will have to be closely monitored. In addition, no progress was registered in Mali and Senegal. In Mali, the recent political crisis has significantly worsened most education indicators. In particular, the GER, which had improved by 4 percentage points between 2008 and 2011, fell back to its 2008 value in 2012.

As of 2012, seven countries still face serious access problem, having primary GERs below 90 percent: Burkina Faso, Djibouti, Eritrea, The Gambia, Mali, Niger and Senegal.

Table 1.1 GPE developing country partners with primary GERs below 90 percent

Country ¹	2008 GER	2012 GER
Burkina Faso	73	85
Djibouti	62	70
Eritrea	47	42
Gambia, The	88	85
Mali	88	88
Niger	57	71
Senegal	85	84

Source: GPE compilation based on UNESCO Institute for Statistics data.

In many countries with GERs of 100 percent or above, significant segments of the population are still not in school; the GER is high due to the high number of repeaters in the system. To know whether UPE has been reached, one should therefore examine other indicators that show better whether all children have access to and complete a full primary education cycle² :

- The number and rate of out-of-school children in primary education, which reflect how many primary school age children are not enrolled, because they will enter late or never enter school, or because they have dropped out.
- The gross intake ratio (GIR) to the first grade of primary education, which reflects the number of new entrants to primary education as compared with the expected number of children of primary entrance age.³
- The primary completion rate (PCR), which reflects the proportion of a cohort reaching the last grade of primary education. Low PCRs may be due to low entrance rates to primary education and/or high dropout rates during the cycle.



Photo credit: **GPE/Deepa Srikantaiah**

¹ Guyana would also appear to have a primary GER significantly below 90 percent, with a drop from 91 percent in 2008 to 75 percent in 2012. However, the country was not included in the table because of concerns about data reliability.

² See <http://glossary.uis.unesco.org/glossary/en/home> for the definitions.

³ A GIR below 100 percent indicates that some children still never enter primary education. GIR may exceed 100 percent if there is an upsurge in the number of overage or underage entering school.

1.3 One in five primary school age children were still out of school in GPE developing country partners in 2012

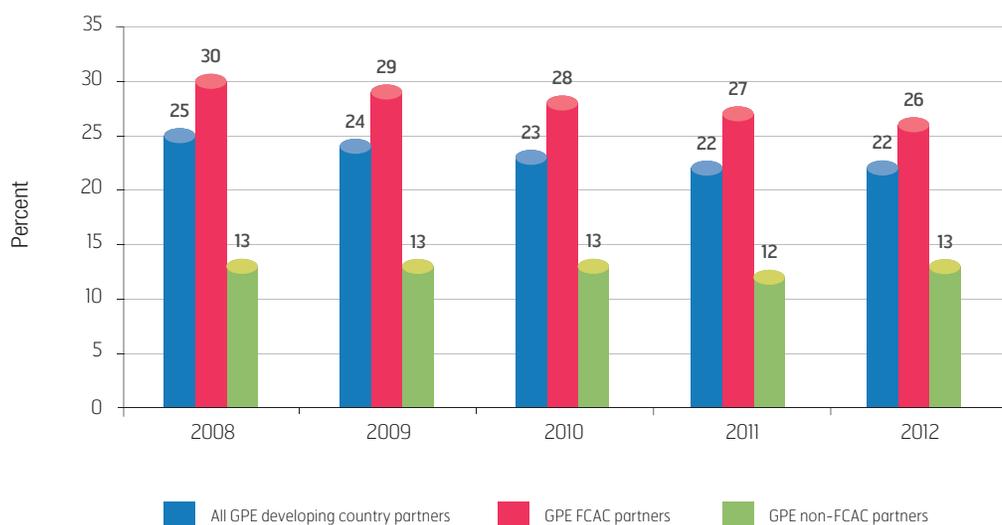
From 2008 to 2012, the rate of out-of-school children of primary school age in developing country partners decreased by 4 percent in FCAC partners, to 26 percent, and remained stable in non-FCAC partners at 13 percent (Figure 1.2). In 2012, the average for developing country partners was 22 percent, meaning that more than one child in five remains out of school.

At the same time, the total number of out-of-school children in partner developing countries fell by 2 million, from 43 million in 2008 to 41 million in 2012. Of these 41 million, 82 percent (down from 84 percent in 2008) or 33.5 million, are living in fragile or conflict-affected countries, 2.3 million less than in 2008.

At the global level, the number of out-of-school children of primary school age has stabilized from 59 million in 2008 to 57 million in 2011 and 58 million in 2012. In developing country partners, the overall situation is more positive: while there was a slight increase in the number of out-of-school children in countries that are neither fragile nor conflict-affected, numbers have continued declining in fragile and conflict-affected countries. The analysis of the 2008-2012 trend shows that, while the decline in the number of out-of-school children was 1.6 percent worldwide, and 2.9 percent in developing countries, it was 4.4 percent in GPE developing country partners.

From 2008 to 2012, the rate of out-of-school children of primary school age in GPE developing country partners decreased by 4 percent in FCAC partners, to 26 percent, and remained stable in non-FCAC partners at 13 percent.

Figure 1.2 **Rate of out-of-school children of primary school age, GPE developing country partners**



Source: GPE compilation based on UNESCO Institute for Statistics data.

Table 1.2 **Number of out-of-school children of primary school age in GPE developing country partners (thousands)**

	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
All GPE developing country partners	42,888	42,132	41,308	40,821	40,982
GPE FCAC partners	35,827	34,846	33,933	33,760	33,515
GPE non-FCAC partners	7,061	7,286	7,375	7,062	7,467

Source: Estimates of the UNESCO Institute for Statistics.

Despite the more positive trend in developing country partners than in the world in general, the slight increase in out-of-school numbers in non-FCAC partners is worrying at a time when donor interest in education – particularly basic education – is declining (see Chapter 3 section 3.3). It also illustrates the challenge of reaching the marginalized and raises questions about the effectiveness of current equity policies in non-FCAC partners. At the current rate of progress, the world will still be far from achieving UPE in 2015 – the deadline for the Millennium Development Goals and the Education for All goals – or even within coming decades.

It is all the more important to maintain efforts to increase enrolment rates as out-of-school children represent a sizeable share of the primary school age population in many developing country partners. In 18 countries, at least 25 percent of primary school age children were out of school in 2012. Among these countries, the number of out-of-school children varies from 39,000 in Djibouti to 8.7 million in Nigeria. In three of these countries (Eritrea, Liberia and Mauritania), the percentage of out-of-school children increased between 2008 and 2012.

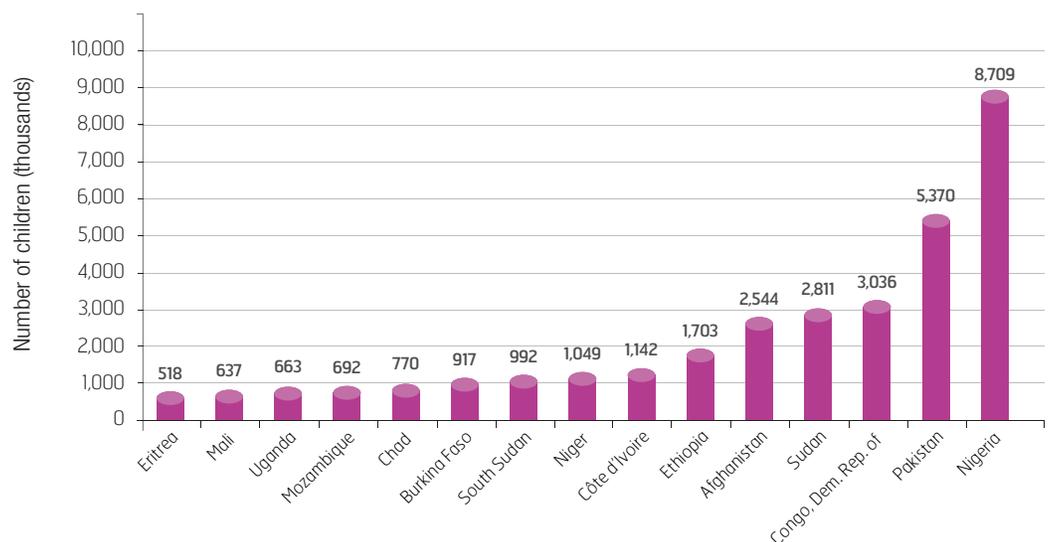
77 percent of the total number of out-of-school children in GPE partner developing countries live in 15 countries.

More than 500,000 children are out of school in 15 countries for which information is available

from the UIS database or household survey estimates. The UIS database does not have data for Afghanistan, Democratic Republic of Congo, and Ethiopia, three large GPE developing country partners. However, recent Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) and the UN population data (2012 revision) were used to estimate that 2.6 million children were out of school in Afghanistan in 2011 and 3 million in the Democratic Republic of Congo in 2010. Due to inconsistencies between population data⁴ and enrollment data, population-based indicators were not published for Ethiopia this year but we chose to use data published by UIS last year that estimated the total number of children out of school in Ethiopia at 1.7 million. Among these countries, the rate of children out of school ranges from 10 percent in Uganda to 66 percent in Eritrea. Except for Ethiopia, Mozambique and Uganda, all of them have 25 percent or more of children out of school.

In total, 31.6 million out-of-school children – 77 percent of the total number of out-of-school children in partner developing countries – live in these 15 countries. In eight of these countries, the number of out-of-school children is higher than 1 million (Figure 1.3).

Figure 1.3 **GPE developing country partners with the most children out of school, 2012**



Source: GPE compilation based on UNESCO Institute for Statistics data and Household Survey data.

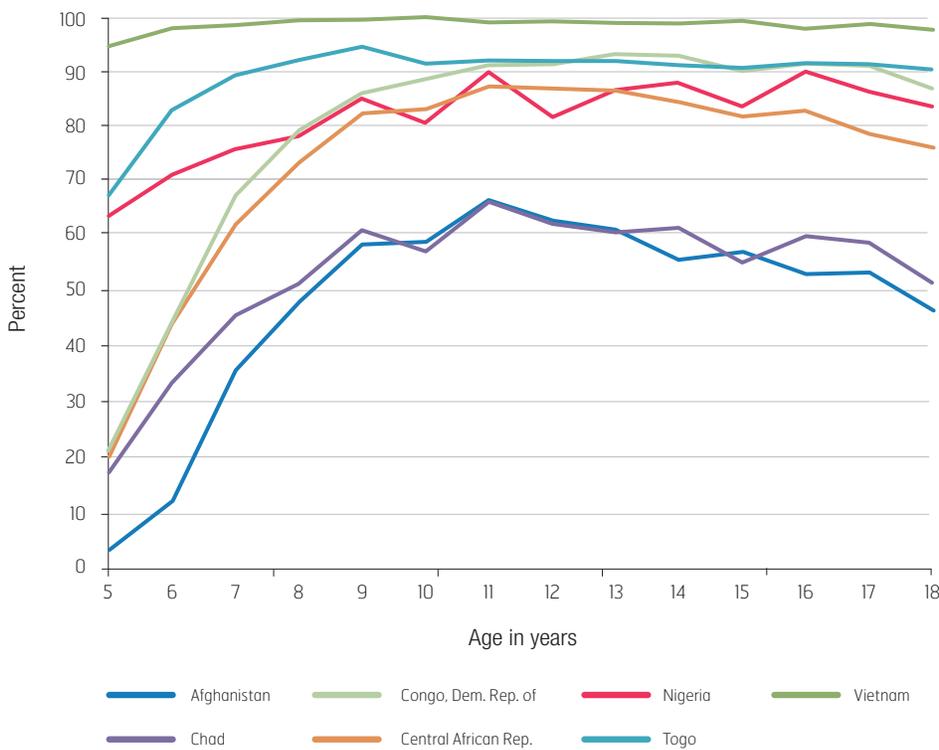
⁴ 2012 revision of the UN Population Division

Box 1.1 Late entry to primary education in GPE developing country partners

Out-of-school children of primary school age include children who will never enter school, children who had access to school but dropped out, and children who will enter school later than the official entrance age. UIS estimated in 2013 that 49 percent of out-of-school children (28 million) will never enter school, 23 percent (13 million) have dropped out, and 28 percent (16 million) will enter school late. This means that among children who have never been to school, over a third are expected to enter at some point.

While late entry is rare in some developing country partners, such as Vietnam, it is common in countries such as Afghanistan, the Central African Republic, Chad and Nigeria, where many children do not enter school until they are over 10 years of age. In Afghanistan, only around 10 percent of children enter primary school at age 6.

Figure 1.4 Percentage of those aged 5 to 18 who have ever attended school



Source: GPE compilation based on MICS household survey data, 2010 and 2011

Over a quarter of developing country partners' out-of-school children are expected to enter school late, however, and may even complete a full primary education cycle (Box 1.2).

Although the number and rate of children out of school worldwide seems to have stabilized, the situation varies widely from country to

country. In four countries, the percentage of children out of school increased substantially from 2008 to 2012: Eritrea (+22 percent), Honduras (+54 percent), Liberia (+17 percent) and Mozambique (+33 percent). In Eritrea and Liberia, more than half of primary school age children are currently not in school.

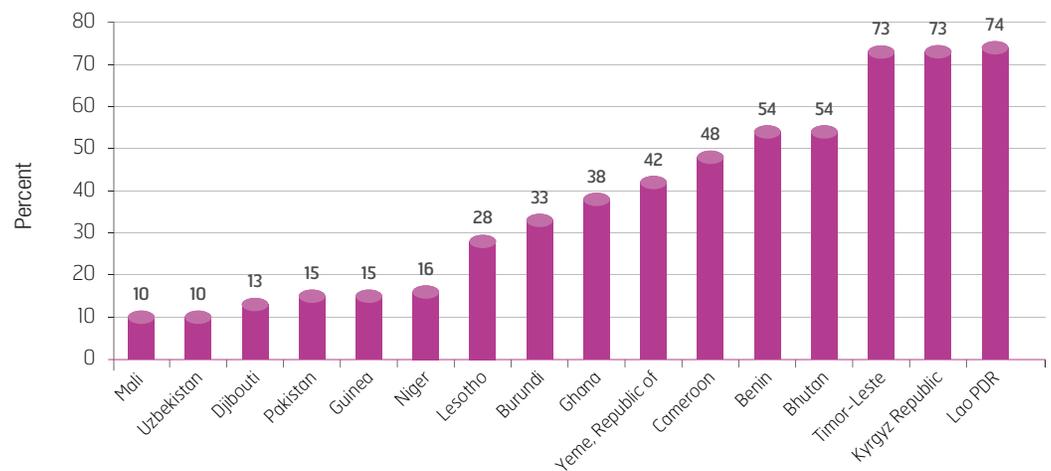
In four countries, the percentage of children out of school increased substantially from 2008 to 2012: Eritrea (+22 percent), Honduras (+54 percent), Liberia (+17 percent) and Mozambique (+33 percent).

In 16 countries, however, the number of children out of school fell by at least 10 percent between 2008 and 2012 (Figure 1.5). In Benin, Bhutan, Timor-Leste, the Kyrgyz Republic and Lao PDR, the decrease in out-of-school children was higher than 50 percent. In Burundi, Cameroon, Ghana, Lesotho and the Republic of Yemen, the decrease was 25 to 50 percent. In Djibouti, Guinea, Niger, Pakistan and Uzbekistan, there was a moderate decrease (below 25

percent) in the number of children out of school.

These trends are analyzed in depth at the end of this chapter, where they are compared with the progression in gross intake rates (GIR) and primary completion rates (PCR), which offer a better idea of how many children never access school, as compared with how many never complete their education.

Figure 1.5 Percentage decrease in the number of children out of school between 2008 and 2012



Source: GPE compilation based on UNESCO Institute for Statistics data.

1.4 Important progress in intake capacity in first grade

Overall rates of children out of school can be better understood by considering how many children do not enter school. GIR represents the number of new entrants to primary education, of all ages, divided by the population of primary school age. As such, it does not reflect the exact proportion of children who enter school. A GIR of 100 percent or above does not mean that all children necessarily have access to school. A better estimate of the proportion of children who have access to school can be made by using household survey data to calculate a generation access rate, which is the probability that a child will enter school one day. However, GIR does provide a good idea of overall trends in access to education.

An analysis of the GIR in developing country partners shows that the number of new entrants to the first grade of primary education is increasing (Figure 1.6). On average, GIR is above 100 percent in developing country partners, but these aggregate figures hide disparities, as there are still four countries with GIRs below 90 percent: Eritrea (45 percent), Djibouti (65 percent), Mali (75 percent) and Niger (89 percent). In these countries, a significant proportion of children are still expected never to enter school and efforts must be maintained to reach out to all segments of the population. In Mali, gross intake was reaching 89 percent pre-crisis but has been significantly affected by the recent conflict. Average GIR is higher in GPE

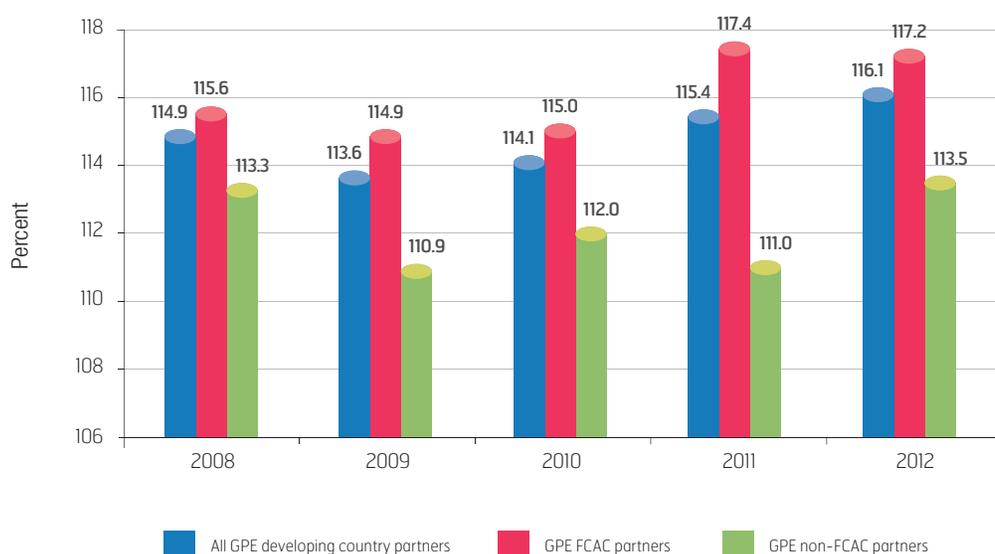
FCAC partners than in non-FCAC partners: as access to education increases in countries with traditionally low access rates, children of different ages enter primary education at the same time.

Among the 10 developing country partners with the highest increase in the number of new entrants to primary education between 2008 and 2012, some saw an increase of 40

to 50 percent, including Chad, Eritrea, Niger, Sierra Leone and Togo. In Eritrea and Liberia, however, the number of children out of school has also increased, which indicates that many children are entering school but then dropping out: in both countries, data show that survival rates have declined significantly in recent years. Improved entry into the system, while a crucial first step, is not enough on its own to ensure high levels of completion.

In the four countries with GIRs below 90 percent (Eritrea, Djibouti, Mali and Niger), a significant proportion of children are still expected never to enter school.

Figure 1.6 **Gross intake rates in primary education, GPE developing country partners**



Source: Estimates of the UNESCO Institute for Statistics.

Table 1.3 **Ten countries with the highest increase in the number of new entrants to primary education**

Country	2008	2012	Change (%)
Côte d'Ivoire	417,698	512,449	23
Guinea	248,554	313,647	26
Cameroon	602,66	769,864	28
Liberia	119,427	158,189	32
Afghanistan	855,432	1,159,081	35
Niger	342,360	475,186	39
Togo	180,127	252,825	40
Chad	355,936	504,870	42
Sierra Leone	184,284	273,794	49
Eritrea	51,784	78,198	51

Source: GPE compilation based on UNESCO Institute for Statistics data.

1.5 One in four children still did not complete primary education in GPE developing country partners in 2012

One in four children in GPE partner developing countries still does not complete primary education, this corresponds to an estimated 8 million non-completers in 2012.

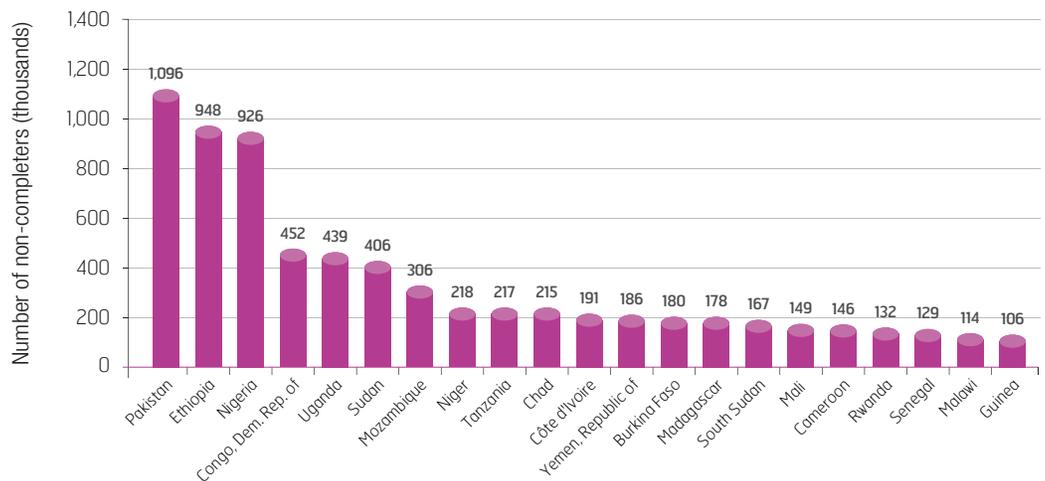
Universal primary education means getting all children not just to start primary education but also to complete it, so the number of children who do not complete should be monitored as well as the number of children out of school.

While gross intake rates in developing country partners are mostly above 100 percent, one in four children in these countries still does not complete primary education – this corresponds to an estimated 8 million non-completers in 2012. (Completion is estimated by measuring how many children enter the last grade of primary school.) In some countries, the increase in

intake rates is recent, so its impact on primary completion has not yet been felt. In other countries, many children drop out of school before completing primary education.

Among developing country partners, 21 had over 100,000 non-completers in 2012 (Figure 1.7).⁵ Together, these 21 countries have 7.2 million non-completers, or close to 89 percent of the total number of non-completers in developing country partners with data (around 8 million).⁶

Figure 1.7 **GPE developing country partners with the largest number of children who do not complete primary school, 2012**



Source: GPE compilation based on UNESCO Institute for Statistics data.

These 21 countries also appear in the list of countries with the most children out of school, but here their ranking is slightly different. Ethiopia and Pakistan, for example, are ahead of Nigeria, where completion rates are higher.

Alongside data for absolute numbers of non-completers, the primary completion rate (PCR) offers another snapshot of progress towards

UPE. In developing country partners, the average PCR rose from 68 percent in 2008 to 73 percent in 2012.⁷ The increase occurred mainly in fragile and conflict-affected countries, where the PCR went from 61 percent to 68 percent while the average PCR in non-FCAC partners remained almost unchanged, moving from 82 percent to 83 percent (Figure 1.8).

The average PCR rose from 68 percent in 2008 to 73 percent in 2012. The increase occurred mainly in fragile and conflict-affected countries, where the PCR went from 61 percent to 68 percent while the average PCR in non-FCAC partners remained almost unchanged, moving from 82 percent to 83 percent.

⁵ Computed as the number of children of the official age for the last grade of primary education minus the number of non-repeaters to that grade.

⁶ Data are missing for Afghanistan, one of the GPE developing country partners with the largest number of children out of school.

⁷ Computed for all 59 GPE developing country partners using the 2012 revised UN population database.

Figure 1.8 Average primary completion rates in GPE developing country partners


Source: Estimates of the UNESCO Institute for Statistics.

The overall annual growth in PCR for developing country partners was 1.8 percent; in FCAC partners it was 2.7 percent but in non-FCAC partners it was only 0.4 percent. In nine developing country partners – Eritrea, The Gambia, Mozambique, Timor-Leste, Uganda, Uzbekistan and Zambia – PCR is below its 2008 value. Among these countries, Uzbekistan and Zambia were close to UPE in 2008 with more than 95 out of 100 children completing primary education.

The stagnation of PCR in non-FCAC partners – and the fact that some countries that had almost achieved UPE may still fall behind in terms of primary completion – shows that making further progress is difficult, requiring policies targeted at reaching the marginalized. At the same time, the gains that have been obtained are still fragile and could be reversed if the countries and the global community do not maintain their emphasis on the achievement of the Education for All goals, and particularly that of UPE. At the same time, the decline since 2010 in aid to FCAC partners (see Chapter 3, section

3.3), poses a high risk of reversing progress in countries that are highly dependent on external support. The full impact of the decline in aid may not be visible in 2012 data; subsequent data may reveal that the situation is worse than it currently appears.

In 11 countries, PCRs increased by more than 3 percentage points a year between 2008 and 2012, and Bhutan, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Lao PDR, Nepal, and São Tomé and Príncipe gained more than 4 percentage points per year on average. Some have been maintaining this progress for many years, achieving huge gains. Between 2002 and 2012, Burkina Faso more than doubled its PCR, from 27 percent to 58 percent, and in Burundi, PCR went from 25 percent to 62 percent.

Overall, primary completion improved between 2008 and 2012, but remains a significant issue in the majority of GPE's developing country partners; 30 countries had PCRs are below 75 percent in 2012 (Table 1.4).

Table 1.4 **PCRs for GPE developing country partners, 2008 and 2012**

		Primary completion rate, 2012 or closest year					
		Less than 50%	50-65%	65-80%	80-90%	Greater than 95%	Not available
PCR, 2008 or closest year	Less than 50%	Central African Republic, Chad, Eritrea , Niger, South Sudan	Burkina Faso, Burundi, Côte d'Ivoire, Djibouti, Ethiopia, Rwanda				
	50-65%		Guinea, Mali, Mozambique , Senegal, Uganda	Benin, Congo, (Dem. Rep. of) Liberia, Malawi, Pakistan, Yemen			
	65-80%			Cameroon, Lesotho, Madagascar, Mauritania, Nigeria, Papua New Guinea, Timor-Leste , Togo	Nicaragua	Lao PDR, São Tomé and Príncipe	Comoros
	80-95%			Gambia, The	Moldova, Tanzania	Bhutan, Cambodia, Ghana, Honduras, Kyrgyz Republic, Nepal, Tajikistan	
	Greater than 95%				Guyana, Uzbekistan, Zambia	Georgia, Mongolia, Vietnam	
	Not available			Sierra Leone, Sudan			Afghanistan, Albania, Guinea-Bissau, Haiti, Kenya, Somalia, Zimbabwe

Source: GPE compilation based on UNESCO Institute for Statistics data.

	Countries with progress in PCR that moved up 2 ranges
	Countries with progress in PCR that moved up 1 range
	Countries in black text
	Countries with decline in PCR but within in the same range
	Countries with decline in PCR that moved down 1 range

1.6 National data show progress, but also that initial ambitions may have been too high

The Global Partnership supports the development of education sector plans (ESPs) in developing country partners that are based upon national commitments and priorities. Many of these plans outline targets for education outcomes, so that progress can be monitored towards national rather than global education objectives.

This section uses national ESPs to compare progress with national targets on primary completion rates.⁸ The analysis was conducted only for countries that have completed their second or third sector plan, in order to assess progress on primary completion since the previous ESP. Due to the limited number of countries repre-

sented in the analysis, caution should be exercised before generalizing these results across the Global Partnership.

While many countries have achieved progress, most have not reached their targets for primary completion. Of the six countries in the analysis, only Burkina Faso achieved its target. Senegal and Sierra Leone came within 5 percentage points of their targets. Cambodia, The Gambia and Mauritania did not come close to their targets; Mauritania was 15 percentage points away from its targets and achieved less than half of the progress expected (13 percentage points instead of 28).

Table 1.5 Primary completion rate – national targets versus actual achievement, selected countries

Country	Baseline		Target		Achievement	Comments
	Year	Value	Year	Value		
Burkina Faso	2008	44	2011	51	52	Target achieved
Cambodia	-	-	2010	90	82	Target not reached
Gambia, The	2006	65	2012	80	72	Target not reached
Mauritania	1998	50	2010	78	63	Target not reached
Senegal	2000	39	2011	70	66	Target almost reached
Sierra Leone	2004	55	2010	79	76	Target almost reached

Source: Data from education sectors plans (baselines and targets).

In the light of such results, many countries have realized that their original ambitions were too high and that they cannot expect to reach universal primary education by 2015. This has already been taken into account by some countries, whose ESPs postpone the goal of universal primary completion to later dates, such as 2020.

Other countries' recent ESPs have revised initial targets for primary completion by 2015, reflecting more realistic approach to setting goals. Among 10 of these countries, the revised targets range from a change of 35 percentage points in Niger to 3 percentage points in Burkina Faso (Table 1.6).

⁸ Note that country-level completion rates may differ from UIS values, for instance because of differences in population numbers and methodologies.

Table 1.6 **Primary completion rate target, selected countries**

Country	Initial target 2015	Revised target 2015
Benin	100	83
Burkina Faso	75	72
Cameroon	100	84
Central African Republic	77	<75
Gambia, The	100	<75
Madagascar	94	84
Mali	100	86
Niger	100	65
Rwanda	90	90
Sierra Leone	100	85

Source: FTI Catalytic Fund Application, education sector plans.

1.7 Gains in primary access and completion remain fragile

While trends remain positive overall, the stagnation of the number of primary age children out of school is worrying, and highlights the risk that progress may stall, or even that gains achieved since 2000 may be reversed, if attention does not remain focused on providing children with a complete cycle of primary education.

While a large majority of countries have reached high gross enrolment ratios, only a minority have reached PCRs above 90 percent. Most striking are the cases where gross intake ratios are above 100 percent while primary completion rates are below 75 percent: Benin, Burundi, Cameroon, Chad, Democratic Republic of Congo, Guinea, Lesotho, Liberia, Madagascar, Malawi, Mauritania, Mozambique, Pakistan, Rwanda, Senegal, Timor-Leste, Uganda and Yemen. In some of these countries, progress in intake and survival is too recent to be reflected in PCR values. In other countries with GIRs over 100 percent, PCRs are under 75 percent because many children drop out: Burundi,

Chad, Guinea, Madagascar, Malawi, Mozambique, Rwanda and Uganda have retention rates of less than 60 percent. In Nepal, survival rates have decreased significantly, from 77 percent in 2003 to 62 percent in 2007 and 55 percent in 2012, which suggests that the country's PCR is likely to decrease.

Among GPE developing country partners more broadly, several show a significant decrease in survival rates, which means they will only achieve UPE if current trends are reversed. Survival dropped by over 10 percentage points in Burundi, Malawi, Mali, Mozambique and Uganda. But other developing country partners succeeded in increasing survival rates while increasing or maintaining intake rates: examples of steep increases include Cambodia, Cameroon and Côte d'Ivoire. This suggests that with appropriate commitment and support, countries that currently have high or increasing access rates but low retention rates could start to reduce the number of children dropping out.

While a large majority of countries have reached high gross enrolment ratios, only a minority have reached PCRs above 90 percent.

Table 1.7 **GIR and PCR levels for GPE developing country partners**

	PCR higher than 90%	PCR between 75% and 90%	PCR below 75%
GIR higher than 100%	Georgia, Kyrgyz Republic, Mongolia, Vietnam, Cambodia, Ghana, Honduras, Lao PDR, São Tomé and Príncipe, Zambia, <i>Nepal</i>	Papua New Guinea, Togo	Liberia, Mauritania, Timor Leste, Benin, Cameroon, Congo (Dem. Rep. of), Lesotho, Pakistan, Senegal, Yemen, <i>Burundi, Chad, Guinea, Madagascar, Malawi, Mozambique, Rwanda, Uganda</i>
GIR 90% to 100%	Bhutan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan	Moldova, Tanzania	Burkina Faso, , Côte d'Ivoire The Gambia, <i>Central African Republic</i>
GIR below 90%			Djibouti, Eritrea, Mali, Niger

GPE developing country partners have achieved much progress towards universal primary education since 2000, however, this progress should not mask the fact that pupil retention and primary completion remain challenges for the majority of countries.

Source: GPE compilation based on UNESCO Institute for Statistics data

Countries in bold

GPE developing country partners with high survival rates to grade 5⁹ (above 80 percent)

Countries in italic

GPE developing country partners with low survival rates (below 60 percent)

1.8 Maintaining the priority for primary education

GPE developing country partners have achieved much progress towards universal primary education since 2000. In a small number of countries, universal access to the first grade of primary education is still far from achieved, but in most countries progress in access has been very encouraging, particularly in FCAC partners. However, this progress should not mask the fact that pupil retention and completion of the primary cycle remain challenges for the majority of countries. Increased access has sometimes been accompanied by decreased survival, with the result that increases in primary completion have fallen far short of expectations. In addition, many countries that have made good progress in the past few years nevertheless struggle to enroll and ensure completion of the most marginalized children.

International data show a slowing of progress in access to primary education and of aid to education. While GPE education data appear a little more positive than global figures, a similar trend is nevertheless perceivable among developing country partners. Progress achieved is fragile and may be reversed if targeted action is not taken to ensure all children not only enter primary education but also complete it.

In this context, it is vital that the global education community, while expanding its attention to other cycles of education, does not make the mistake of assuming that universal primary education has been achieved, or soon will be, without sustained attention and effort. Rather, UPE, which also means reaching the marginalized, needs to be part of the post-2015 agenda.

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⁹ Kyrgyz Republic, Moldova, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan only have four grades in primary education, but since all of them have survival rates to Grade 4 over 95 percent, they were included in the "high survival rate" category.

