

Global Coalition to

End Child Poverty

Child poverty and adolescent transitions



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Contents

Introduction	3
Why Focus on Poverty During Adolescence.	5
Policy frameworks for adolescence and youth.	7
Tackling adolescent poverty: the data and evidence challenge.	8
What matters to adolescents?	9
Policy and interventions to address poverty and its consequences during adolescence.	10
Health and well-being: supporting a healthy adolescence.	12
Education: Ensuring adolescents can stay in education and make good progress in their learning	14
Protection from Harm	16
Economic opportunities	18
Participation, Engagement, and Citizenship	20
Social Protection: Protecting adolescents from the impact of poverty and shocks	21
Looking to the future: reducing the intergenerational transmission of poverty.	22
Who can make a difference?	23

Cover Photo:
Mame (12) at La Maison Rose, a centre created to protect girls and young mothers in vulnerable situations
 Credit: Jordi Matas/Save the Children

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Introduction

KEY MESSAGES

- Adolescence is a time of great potential as well as vulnerability, and a window of opportunity for addressing child poverty and its consequences. Strategies to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals and eradicate child poverty must invest in adolescents in order to be successful.
- Effective policies and services during adolescence have the potential to generate what the Lancet Commission on Adolescent Health and Well-Being calls a ‘triple dividend’ - improving adolescents’ lives now, into adulthood, and for the next generation of children.
- High-quality, multi-dimensional and disaggregated data from adolescents underpins good policy and programming, contributes to strategies to tackle gender and other inequalities, and supports the monitoring of progress against the Sustainable Development Goals.
- Adolescence is a time when gender and other inequalities can deepen. Supporting adolescents living in poverty requires coherent, cross-sectoral policies, investments in adolescent-responsive services, effective platforms for adolescent engagement, and attention to the rights and needs of girls and boys.
- We highlight how effective interventions can support disadvantaged adolescents’ health and well-being, education and learning, protection from harm, economic opportunities, participation and engagement, and social protection. Scaling-up and financing programmes, and achieving sustainable benefits for disadvantaged adolescents are key challenges. Building wider economic and social opportunities for young people is an important complement to targeted interventions.

This brief from the Global Coalition to End Child Poverty is intended as a tool for governments and their partners. It shows why reducing poverty during the second decade of a child’s life is necessary to promote children’s rights and is a sound investment for the future. It identifies actions that governments and others can take, and the data and evidence gaps that need to be addressed in order to tackle adolescent poverty and its consequences.

The Global Coalition to End Child Poverty was launched in September 2015 and brings together research, policy and implementing organisations with a shared commitment to ending child poverty. This brief has been prepared by these organisations, and brings together members’ learning from research and programming. It

builds on the publications ‘Towards the End of Child Poverty’, and ‘Putting Children First: A policy agenda to end child poverty’.



Credit: Young Lives / Sebastian Castañeda Viza

Childhood, adolescence, and youth - overlapping life phases and definitions

This brief focuses on poverty in the second decade of life, with a focus on children aged 10-17 years. Childhood, adolescence, and youth are subject to overlapping definitions:

- The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child define children as those younger than 18 years of age.
- The term 'adolescence' has its origins within medicine and has been used to signify a phase from the onset of puberty and towards early adulthood. UN agencies have operationalised that to 10-19 years, sometimes split between very young adolescents (aged 10-14 years) and older adolescents (aged 15-19 years).
- Youth is defined very differently across countries, but typically encompasses the transition through early adulthood. Within the UN system, youth has generally been defined as between 15 and 24 years. The African Union Youth charter defines young people as those between 15 and 35 years.

Policy necessarily uses ages to inform definitions and policy design, but the realities of children's lives are more complex, with life events happening at different ages in different contexts. Many children take on adult responsibilities early, whilst transitions to adulthood may happen much later for others. 'Child', 'adolescent' and 'youth' may have different meanings and positive or negative connotations in different societies and for children and young people themselves.



Photo Credit: Young Lives/Sarika Gulati

Why focus on poverty during adolescence?

Tackling poverty during children's early years is essential, but adolescence offers another crucial window of opportunity to mitigate the impact of poverty on children's development, to build on investments in the early years, and to promote gender equality and social mobility for all young people so that the whole of society benefits.

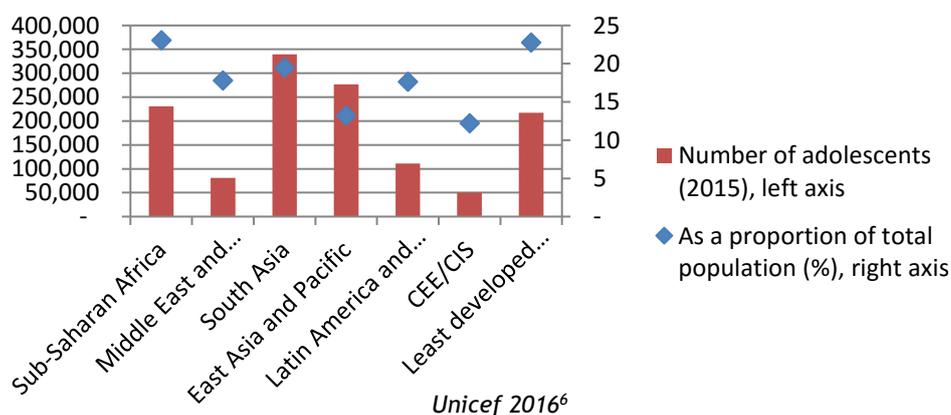
Every child is entitled to enjoy the rights set out in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. Under international law, governments are required to devote maximum possible resources to fulfilling children's rights. Poverty and discrimination are violation of children's rights. They also have consequences for the realisation of children's other economic, social and protection rights. The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child notes that adolescents' responses to poverty may include "dropping out of school, being involved in child or forced marriage, becoming involved in sexual exploitation, trafficking, hazardous or exploitative work or work that interferes with education, becoming members of a gang, being recruited into militias and migrating."¹

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) have set a transformational course for the future of

human development. World leaders have now recognized the central importance of child poverty, with Goal 1 aiming to eradicate extreme poverty and halve the proportion of men, women and children living in poverty in all its dimensions.² Today the world has the largest adolescent population the world has ever known, and this population is set to rise in absolute terms. There are 1.2 billion adolescents aged 10-19 years, 89% of whom live in developing countries. Meeting the SDGs is simply not achievable without attention to adolescents' needs and priorities.

Although accurate figures for poverty during adolescence are scarce, one estimate puts the number of 10-17 year olds living in extremely poor households at 145 million: this age group makes up 15.9 per cent of those living in extreme poverty, although only 13.7 per cent of the population in sample countries.³ In fragile states, 50 per cent of the population is under 20 years, compared to 38 per cent in other developing countries.⁴ Children and adolescents living in fragile states and in humanitarian settings face exposure to multiple serious risks, reduced access to health and education, and potential set-backs to their development.⁵

Adolescent Population (10-19 years old) by region.



Adolescence is a window of opportunity and a time of great potential when young people experience rapid biological and social change, take on new responsibilities, engage with wider groups of people and social expectations and norms become increasingly important. Adequate support and investment in adolescence can help young people make positive transitions to adulthood. In some areas - for example in education⁷ or nutrition⁸ - effective interventions may mitigate against early disadvantage. Yet adolescence is also a time of vulnerability, when poverty and discrimination can compound existing disadvantages and create new ones. In many contexts, poor girls face a double disadvantage as a consequence of growing gender inequality in adolescence, although the pressures on boys can also lead them to fall behind in certain areas.⁹

And while child marriage rates are falling in some societies, both child marriage and early child-bearing remain common.¹⁰

Finally, investment in adolescents can generate wider social and economic benefits for communities and countries.¹¹ In an uncertain economic climate, investing in the human capital of young people is an important strategy. Supporting the human development of adolescents and young people also helps to mitigate the intergenerational transmission of poverty.¹² The challenge is to establish policies and investments which can reap this demographic dividend, and avoid the loss of human potential and risk to social cohesion which result from large numbers of young people being underemployed and unable to form families of their own.

Resources

- George Patton et al (2016) '[Our future: A Lancet Commission on Adolescent Health and Well-being](#)', The Lancet 387.10036: 2423-78
- UNICEF, (2011) '[The State of the World's Children: Adolescence: An Age of Opportunity](#)', New York: UNICEF.
- Judith Diers (2013) '[Why the world needs to get serious about adolescents: A view from UNICEF](#)', Journal of Research on Adolescents, 23(2), June 2013, 214-222
- Kirrily Pells and Woodhead, M (2014) '[Changing Children's Lives: Risks and Opportunities](#)', Policy Paper, Oxford: Young Lives.
- United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child (2016) '[General Comment on the implementation of the rights of the child during adolescence](#)', Geneva: United Nations.
- Elizabeth Saewyc (ed) (2017) The Global Early Adolescent Study: An Exploration of the Factors that Shape Adolescence, [Journal of Adolescent Health](#), Volume 61, Issue 4, Supplement, S1-S54, October 2017.



Policy frameworks for adolescence

There are a range of relevant international, regional and national level policy frameworks and commitments. Many focus on youth (including older adolescents) and employment, whilst issues specifically relating to adolescence are sometimes addressed within policy on children.

Child poverty and adolescence: selected international and regional frameworks

Global

- The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child's [General Comment on the Implementation of the Rights of the Child during Adolescence](#) provides guidance for states parties and others on the fulfilment of their obligations towards adolescents.
- [The UN's System-Wide Action Plan](#) is a framework guiding youth programming for the UN system, covering youth employment and entrepreneurship, protection of rights and civic engagement, political inclusion, education, and health.
- [The Global Strategy for Women's, Children's, and Adolescents' Health \(2016-2030\)](#) is a roadmap for ending preventable deaths of women, children and adolescents within a generation and ensuring their well-being. New guidance - Accelerated Action for the Health of Adolescents (AA-HA! Guidance) will support implementation.

Regional

- Africa: Introduced in 2006, the [African Youth Charter](#) sets out the rights, freedoms, and duties of youth (aged 15 - 35 years). The Africa Union Commission has named 2017 the year of "Harnessing Demographic Dividend through Investments in the Youth".
- Asia and the Pacific: The Regional Coordination Mechanism - United Nations Development Group Asia-Pacific Thematic Working Group on Youth, co-chaired by ESCAP and ILO has produced '[Switched On: Youth at the Heart of Sustainable Development in Asia and the Pacific](#)'.¹³ ESCAP is developing a youth policy toolbox focused on SDG 4 (education) and 8 (employment).
- United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia has published [Reaping the Rewards of Demographic Transitions: Investing in Arab Youth](#)¹⁴, and the UN Interagency Technical Task Team on Young People has published a Regional Framework on Young People for the Arab States/Middle East and North Africa Region
- Latin America and the Caribbean: The Economic Commission on Latin America and the Caribbean has published [Juventud: realidades y retos para un desarrollo con igualdad](#)¹⁵
- Europe and high income countries: Strategies are set out in the EU youth strategy 2010 -18 and OECD action plan for youth

Tackling adolescent poverty: the data and evidence challenge

High quality data collection, evidence and analysis have a key role in national strategies to support the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals for adolescents.

Building a coherent picture of priorities for adolescents

A comprehensive evidence base is essential in order to drive national policy for adolescents and monitor the Sustainable Development Goals. The linkages between adolescents' needs require multi-dimensional data, inter-disciplinary and participatory research which engages with adolescents, and longitudinal studies which place adolescents' experiences in the context of the life course. Adolescents' diversity, their position within households, and ethical considerations involved in collecting data from younger adolescents all present challenges to building such an evidence base.

UNICEF and partners have developed the Adolescent Country Tracker (ACT)¹⁶ an outcome-based framework and set of indicators that are globally comparable and linked to the Sustainable Development Goals. The indicators are designed to track progress across 5 domains of adolescent development and well-being:

- Health and Wellbeing
- Education and Learning
- Protection
- Transition to Work and
- Participation and Engagement

The framework also includes indicators designed to track enabling environments for adolescent development, and can incorporate country-specific indicators.

Filling data gaps

Datasets on adolescents are often scarce. This is an obstacle to identifying priorities and assessing progress, particularly for young adolescents, and makes it hard to monitor gender inequalities.¹⁷

Key sources such as UNICEF's Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICs) focus mainly on young children and those over 15 years (although a learning module on 8-13 year olds is under development), whilst others such as the widely used Demographic and Health Survey (DHS) collects information on 15 - 49 year olds. Important steps to support a data revolution for adolescents include:

- Investment in civil registration and vital statistics: accurate data on births, marriage, divorce and cause of death are vital for policy and support adolescents' rights.
- Extending and adapting individual questionnaires within household surveys to include those aged 10 years and above, with age-appropriate questions and attention to sensitivities around parental consent, and reporting using 5 year age bands (10 - 14 and 15 - 19 years).
- Booster surveys where needed to ensure the needs of marginalised groups of adolescents are understood and to support the 'no one left behind' agenda.
- Data-gathering in areas of adolescents' lives where less information is available including participation/ engagement; protective factors; and skills development.

Improving accountability

Finally, data has the potential to support adolescent engagement. Methodologies such as the U-report* are now being used in a number of countries to provide real time polling on young people's views. Accessible data is a tool for adolescents who want to take action on issues that matter to them.

* See <https://ureport.in/> for more information

What matters to adolescents?

In preparing this brief, members of Global Coalition drew on research and consultation with adolescents about the impact of poverty on their lives. Emerging themes included:

1. Young people are acutely aware of the impact of poverty on their day to day lives.¹⁸

“For us to survive we need more money, we have no disposable cash for anything, it affects our food, education clothing, medicine... we are unable to do anything timely, in contrast to the people who have money.” (14-year-old boy, rural village, Bihar, India)¹⁹

2. The stigma associated with poverty has a strong impact on adolescents. Whilst many young people avoid describing themselves as ‘poor’, they do talk about the difficulty of not being able to keep clean, dress adequately or participate in social activities, as well as bullying and teasing.

“For teenagers it is important to have nice clothes and to go to disco. It’s very important for children and young people to dress the same way as everybody else. It’s shameful if you don’t have it.” (17 year-old girl, Minsk, Belarus)²⁰

3. Family is important to many young people, and many adolescents contribute money or work to help support their family.

“All the pocket money and allowance I got from my Dad, yeah, tried to use it to help my Mum as much as I could with it.” (Abiola 11 years old, UK)²¹

4. Education is seen by young people as key to escaping poverty and living a better life in the future, but the reality of education often does not match young people’s aspirations.

“We’re not going to suffer like this in the mud ... it’s better that I go and study.” (Girl, Peru, who works on her family’s farm and wants to be a nurse, Young Lives)

“We cannot study because we always worry about the boys’ threat. We are frightened always.” (12 year-old girl, Ethiopia, Young Lives)

“Poverty affects me as I cannot [concentrate] on my lessons in school. I am always thinking about what to eat or wear when I am in school” (12 year old boy, Ghana)²²

5. Expectations about pathways to adulthood vary by gender, location and family circumstances

“It may be a while before we get married ... I have to wait until she gets a stable job, then we can get married ... Now she does not have a job, she is still in school, so we cannot get married.” (19 year old man in Vietnam, who has been with his girlfriend for 6 years, Young Lives)

“I am the oldest and only after I get married can [my sisters] think about getting married. If the river takes the house it will be hard for them to get married.” (Azima, 14 years old, already married, Bangladesh)²³



Photo Credit: Young Lives/Antonio Fiorente

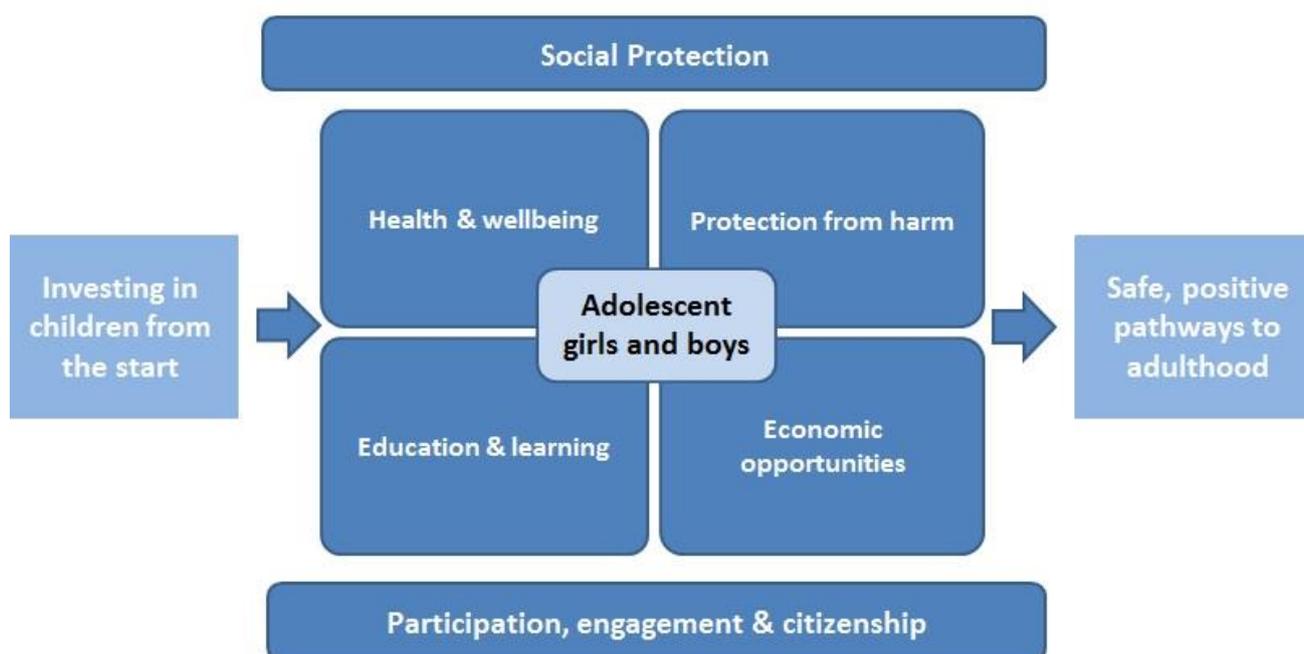
Policy and interventions to address poverty and its consequences during adolescence

Supporting adolescent transitions

Adolescence is a time of multiple transitions. Beyond the biological transition of puberty, many adolescents will undergo other transitions, such as going to a new school, taking on more work responsibilities, leaving school, going to college, and job hunting. Some will experience marriage, parenthood, migration, changes in their household, or external events which affect their lives. Each girl and boy has their own unique pathway through adolescence, and many transitions are positive and welcomed. However, poverty, gender discriminatory norms, and adverse events often result in early or abrupt transitions which put adolescents' learning, well-being and development at risk and exacerbate childhood inequalities.

Coherent, cross-sectoral policies which address the needs of the whole child help to ensure that adolescents living in poverty receive the right support at the right time. This section draws on evidence from published reviews and Coalition members' experience to highlight actions which support disadvantaged adolescents' rights to learn, to have good health, to build their capabilities for life and work, and play a full role in society, whilst being protected from harm, and from the impact of external shocks. These need to go hand-in-hand with broader economic and social policies for poverty reduction, and the national building blocks set out in the Global Coalition to End Child Poverty's briefing document *Putting children first: A policy agenda to end child poverty*.

Supporting adolescent transitions: the building blocks



Addressing poverty and its consequences during adolescence

Getting policy right for adolescents requires an evidence-based approach which

- Promotes a positive development approach to young people, their capabilities and wishes
- Includes adolescents in policies and solutions
- Is adolescent-responsive: genuinely accessible, flexible, respectful and confidential for both girls and boys, including those who are most excluded.
- Addresses gender inequalities and promotes the rights of both girls and boys
- Considers the adolescent within the household and community, and works constructively with the adults in adolescents' lives.
- Does no harm: anticipating, avoiding or mitigating adverse impacts on adolescents.
- Intervenes early and sustains interventions across sectors. Early intervention, through nutrition, social protection and early schooling are vital to create a foundation for adolescence, and these investments need to be sustained at the same time as meeting emerging needs, for example, for sexual and reproductive healthcare.
- Meets the needs of excluded adolescents, including those affected by conflict, or disasters, adolescents growing up without parental care, and those discriminated against due to ethnicity, health or disability, sexual orientation and/or gender identity.
- Focuses on scalable and sustainable actions and systems from the very beginning of a project or pilot.

These principles build on the themes in [Advancing child-sensitive social protection](#), a Joint Statement from DFID, UNICEF, Save the Children, ODI, IDS, World Bank and other organisations.



Health and well-being: supporting a healthy adolescence

Adolescence is a time of physical, social and emotional development. While the early years have a profound influence on children's healthy development, there is increasing evidence of adolescence as a second critical window. Investment in the health and well-being of disadvantaged adolescents has been limited in the past, but can contribute to better outcomes, and prevent the onset of health risks linked to tobacco and alcohol use, mental health problems, sedentary behaviour and injuries.²⁵

Our future: A Lancet commission on Adolescent Health and Wellbeing draws on analysis of adolescent disease burdens to identify three categories of countries with differing adolescent health priorities;

- **Multi-burden countries:** adolescent health burdens are highest in these countries and diseases of poverty remain prominent. Infectious diseases including HIV, sexual and reproductive health, and under-nutrition are important causes of disease burden. Policy measures to address injuries are also now essential in this group of countries.
- **Injury excess countries:** For these countries, preventive efforts targeting the social and structural determinants of injuries, violence, and high rates of early pregnancy are priorities.
- **Non-Communicable Disease (NCD) countries:** The great variation in the pattern and level of adolescent NCD burden across all countries indicates great scope for accelerating investments in the treatment and prevention of adolescent NCDs and NCD risks.

The Lancet commission report includes recommended action bundles covering adolescent sexual and reproductive health, under-nutrition, infectious diseases, violence, unintentional injury, alcohol and illicit drugs, tobacco, mental disorders and suicide, chronic physical disorders, and obesity.²⁶

Substantial investment, effective prevention strategies and strong, coordinated inter-sectoral strategies are needed to realise adolescents' right to the highest attainable standard of health.²⁷ Health programmes need to sit alongside broader efforts to improve the social determinants of health by enhancing protective factors and reducing risks, for example, improving education, tackling inequalities, addressing transport safety and improving the environment. All services need the skills to provide confidential and non-judgemental care for both girls and boys.



Habibo, 16, holds her four-month-old daughter

As young people go through puberty, sexual and reproductive health become important. These rights are critical for girls and women, particularly those from poor households, who are disproportionately affected by unwanted pregnancy and HIV infection. In 2015, 450,000 new HIV infections occurred among adolescent girls and young women aged 15 to 24 years, with

exceptionally high numbers of new infections in sub-Saharan Africa.

Universal health coverage, family planning and maternal health services together with access to menstrual hygiene products and facilities for girls, are key to adolescents' sexual and reproductive health. Building community support for sexual and reproductive health, shifting social norms and support for parent-child communication around sexual health are also important.²⁸ Addressing school retention, gender inequality, human rights abuses, child marriage and socio-economic marginalisation make

important contributions to reducing teenage fertility.²⁹

During humanitarian crises, adolescents are at particular risk of sexual exploitation, unwanted pregnancy, STIs and HIV infection. Adolescents' sexual and reproductive health should be mainstreamed into emergency responses.³⁰

Addressing gender inequality involves effective service provision and working with girls and women, and boys and men to consider not only unequal power dynamics, but also risk practices and underlying social and gender norms.

Resources:

- George Patton et al (2016) '[Our future: A Lancet Commission on Adolescent Health and Well-being](#)', The Lancet 387.10036: 2423-78
- World Health Organisation (2015) '[Global standards for quality health care services for adolescents](#)', Geneva: WHO
- UNAIDS (2016) '[HIV prevention among adolescent girls and young women: Putting HIV prevention among adolescent girls and young women on the Fast-Track and engaging men and boys](#)' Geneva: UNAIDS.
- Save the Children, UNFPA (2009) '[Adolescent Sexual and Reproductive Health Toolkit for Humanitarian Settings: A Companion to the Inter-Agency Field Manual on Reproductive Health in Humanitarian Settings](#)', New York: UNFPA
- Kapungu, C. and Petroni, S. (2017). [Understanding and Tackling the Gendered Drivers of Poor Adolescent Mental Health](#). Washington, DC: International Center for Research on Women.



Education: Ensuring adolescents can stay in education and make good progress in their learning



Photo Credit: Young Lives / Antonio Fiorente

Education is every child's right, and free, quality primary and secondary education for all adolescents represents an important investment in addressing poverty. Education has the potential to increase skills for jobs and livelihoods, combat stigma and discrimination, empower people to claim their rights, increase resilience to shocks and conflict, and reduce violence³¹. The Lancet Commission 'Our Future' argued that;

'Guaranteeing and supporting access to free, quality secondary education for all adolescents presents the single best investment for health and wellbeing'³²

Education is frequently seen as a 'silver bullet' to improve equality of opportunity, but the power of education for adolescents living in poverty risks being undermined by inequalities in access and quality and limited economic opportunities for educated young people from poorer backgrounds.

Globally, enrolment in both primary and secondary school has substantially increased since 2000. However, further action is needed in order to;

- improve quality and tackling the 'global learning crisis' so that every student can make real progress at both primary and secondary level
- address poverty and gender inequalities in access to education so that the most disadvantaged adolescents are able to learn
- ensure schools are supportive and safe for all girls and boys
- support adolescents to 'catch-up' through alternative provision or re-entry to school
- provide alternative pathways to learning for the most excluded adolescents where re-entry to formal schooling is unlikely
- meet adolescents' wider needs - for social support, reproductive and sexual health needs, advice and information - through the school environment.

Evidence from a recent systematic review concludes that education interventions must be tailored to national systems and needs. In many contexts, cash transfers have increased school participation. Structured pedagogy focused on lesson effectiveness - usually through the development of evidence-based curricula and

instructional approaches, along with lesson plans and training for teachers - are important in improving learning outcomes. In all cases, implementation quality is key to success.³³

Improving girls' education usually requires a combination of interventions. A systematic review finds that cash transfers or in-kind support can be effective, but depend on careful targeting. Health support can enhance school enrolment and may result in learning gains for girls and boys. Infrastructure such as sanitation

and school buildings improve enrolment and potentially learning but more research is needed to show how. Well-trained teachers, gender equitable schools, teachers and administrators, girls' clubs, engaging faith communities, working with boys, and strategies to include marginalised women in decision-making have a role to play in supporting girls' access to education.³⁴ During adolescence, pressures on boys from poorer backgrounds to earn an income may lead them to leave school or fall behind; strategies are needed to support them.

Resources:

- The International Commission on Financing Global Education Opportunity (2016) '[The Learning Generation: investing in education for a changing world](#)' New York: International Commission on Financing Global Education Opportunity
- Snilstveit, B, et al (2016) '[The impact of education programmes on learning and school participation in low- and middle-income countries: a systematic review summary report](#)', 3ie Systematic Review Summary 7. London: International Initiative for Impact Evaluation (3ie)



Protection from harm



Adolescence is a time of growth and change, but young people also need protection so that they can learn and develop safely. Poverty contributes to children's vulnerability, although children from all backgrounds are affected by violence and harmful practices.

During adolescence children may be exposed to many different forms of interpersonal violence, in a range of different settings.³⁵ Girls are more vulnerable to sexual violence and harassment in most contexts, whilst boys may be at greater risk of other forms of physical violence. Many adolescents experience bullying with long term consequences for their well-being and relationships.³⁶

As children's social roles and responsibilities increase, so too does the impact of norms - the informal rules shape behaviour.³⁷ Many norms are supportive, but gender-discriminatory practices such as child marriage and female genital mutilation/cutting (FGM/C) persist, with consequences for girls' rights and well-being, and economic costs for the wider community.³⁸ On current projections, the total number of women married as children is likely to remain at around 700 million, as declining rates of child marriage are offset by population growth.³⁹ The data on FGM/C is mixed, with little or no decline in 15 countries, and some evidence of decline in 14

countries. In a number of countries, the majority of girls who have undergone FGM/C are cut before they reach adolescence. Even in places where the practice commonly occurs at older ages, there has been a downward shift in the average age at which FGM/C is carried out.⁴⁰

Safeguarding adolescents from harm requires action at many different levels. The focus should be on supporting children, and ensuring they are not put at greater risk by punitive approaches. Above all, adults need to listen to what girls and boys themselves say about their experience and what they need. Some adolescents may require targeted support, including those living outside households or in institutions, those affected by conflict, adolescents in hazardous or exploitative work, those involved in the criminal-justice system, and adolescents who are migrants, disabled, or from ethnic, cultural or minorities.

Evidence on preventing violence against adolescent girls specifically is limited. Approaches which are multi-dimensional and tackle underlying gender discrimination appear most effective. Working with both men and women and some element of face-to-face engagement appears necessary to achieve change.⁴¹ A forthcoming report by Know Violence in Childhood will examine effective strategies to

prevent violence against children in a range of settings.

The law in many countries outlaws child marriage and FGM/C, but law is seldom enough.⁴² In resource-poor contexts, such practices are sometimes thought to be ‘protective’ of girls’ reputations, marriageability and future security.⁴³ Political and economic instability often increase risks of child and forced marriage. Interventions need to take these factors into account, matching legal change with community led initiatives which involve both men and women in changing norms, tackling gender discrimination and reducing economic risk.

Many child marriage programmes are focused on cash transfers or reducing school-associated costs. Although most have a significant impact, evidence of cost effectiveness or long term impacts is rare.⁴⁴ Evidence is needed on whether large-scale school-based and incentive-based programmes can lead to sustainable change, or whether holistic programming at local level is also essential.⁴⁵

time. FGM/C-focused interventions need to be designed to reflect local practices, even within high-prevalence areas. Some groups may be more ready to change than others and may provide a starting or tipping point for abandonment.⁴⁶

New technologies and the internet offer adolescents important opportunities for learning, skills development and social networking, although they also pose risks. Strategies to protect adolescents on line need to take into account these potential benefits and recognise adolescents’ desire to experiment and the strategies they use for dealing with problems themselves.⁴⁷

Where children are involved in or at risk of involvement in criminal, terrorist or armed political groups, the response should focus on protection, prevention and rehabilitation, as required under the UNCRC and associated guidance.

Resources

- Know Violence in Childhood. 2017. [Ending Violence in Childhood. Global Report 2017](#).
- Know Violence in Childhood. New Delhi, India.
- Population Council (ongoing) ‘[A Research Agenda to End Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting \(FGM/C\) in a Generation](#)’, www.popcouncil.org
- International Center for Research on Women, Girls Not Brides (2016) ‘[Taking Action to Address Child Marriage: the role of different sectors. An overview](#)’, Washington: ICRW. London: Girls not Brides.



Economic opportunities



Photo Credit: Sarah Pilchick/Save the Children

Zana*, 16 is originally from Amuda, Syria, and has been resident in Qushtapa refugee camp since 2013.

Economic and employment opportunities give adolescences incentives to invest in learning and skills, and an enabling environment for them to develop their livelihoods. Strategies to increase economic opportunities are vital to address the mismatch between the large number of young people entering the labour market and low demand for labour in many LMICs.⁴⁸ In some contexts, improved agricultural productivity and overcoming constraints to young men and women's involvement in agriculture is key. In fragile states or local areas with low growth, support for self-employment with low barriers to entry may be most appropriate. In rapidly growing economies, training and information can enable disadvantaged young people to benefit from private sector employment opportunities.⁴⁹

Interventions to tackle the higher unemployment, poor remuneration and lack of rights experienced by young women and men are increasingly multidimensional - combining training and education, access to reproductive health information and services, childcare, financial literacy and advice. A recent review of the impact of active labour market programmes for youth - skills training, entrepreneurship promotion, employment services, and subsidized

employment - finds that skills training, entrepreneurship interventions, and multiple component programmes produce the greatest impacts in youth employment in low and middle income countries. Targeting disadvantaged youth as well as providing incentives for participation, appropriate profiling mechanisms and schemes to motivate service providers are key. There do not appear to be differential effects by gender. There is no one-size-fits all, and intervention design needs to be carefully tailored to each country's income level.⁵⁰

Vocational and technical education and training (TVET) have had a mixed record in bridging the gap between education and the labour market.⁵¹ A review of youth-oriented TVET programmes found modest positive impacts, but considerable variation and no single model of effective TVET.⁵² Blattman and Ralston (2015) suggest that programmes which provide people with capital, alongside cash-for-work, may be more effective tools than TVET for getting people to work and boosting incomes in poor and fragile states.⁵³

'Transferable' or life skills - including interpersonal, personal and cognitive skills⁵⁴ are increasingly regarded as important for a range of

positive economic and non-economic outcomes for young people.⁵⁵ To date, most transferable skills programmes have involved school-based or alternative learning pathways, such as peer-to-peer approaches. Information about the cost-effectiveness and employability outcomes of such programmes is limited.⁵⁶

Access to financial services can enable young people to manage emergencies, invest in their education, or start a business. Youth savings accounts and tailored financial education can help to promote financial inclusion.⁵⁷ Economic programmes targeted at girls need to encompass girls' work, schooling and safety.^{58,59}

Many children begin paid and unpaid work before adolescence, and such work is often a vital contribution to family livelihoods. However, work

may be precarious and badly-paid, and young people may not have contracts, security or effective labour rights. The ILO estimates that 47.5 million adolescents aged 15 to 17 years are in hazardous work.⁶⁰ They need protection from exploitation, alongside good learning opportunities.

Adolescents - particularly girls - often take on growing responsibility for unpaid care work which may undermine learning and economic opportunities. Water and sanitation and childcare provision can help reduce workloads.^{61,62} Adult-oriented economic and social protection programmes should monitor impacts on girls' and boys' care and domestic workloads.

Resources:

- Justin Flynn, Philip Mader and Marjoke Oosterom with Santiago Ripoll (2017) [Failing Young People? Addressing the Supply-side Bias and Individualisation in Youth Employment Programming](#), IDS Evidence Report 216, Brighton: Institute of Development Studies.
- World Bank Group. (2015). [Toward Solutions for Youth Employment: A 2015 Baseline Report](#). Washington, DC: World Bank.
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- Skills for Youth Employment: [Resource Guide for Economic Programmes for Adolescent Girls](#), www.s4ye.org/agi
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Participation, Engagement, and Citizenship

Adolescence is often the point when children become more involved in communities and with peer groups beyond the family. It can be a time of passionate engagement with social, political and religious issues. Increasingly this engagement involves new technologies. Relationships with supportive adults and mentors have an important role to play during adolescence.

This growing engagement presents many opportunities, including for example;

- working alongside movements and organisations led by adolescents themselves
- using youth clubs, sports groups, peer-based and ‘safe spaces’ programmes to work with disadvantaged adolescents, using a positive approach which builds on their strengths and supports them to build social connections and exercise their political rights
- building connections and capabilities through civic involvement and volunteering
- using new technologies to support disadvantaged adolescents
- supporting young people’s cultural rights and creative self-expression
- involving young people in policies and programmes to tackle poverty and exclusion

Many adolescents already have opportunities to develop connections and confidence through relationships in school, work, with faith, community, or political organisations. Initiatives

such as student councils and local government youth forums help to expand the range of meaningful participation opportunities.

In addition, a wide range of approaches promote safe spaces, peer support or agency. The Developmental Assets approach (led by the Search Institute) is a tool which provides a framework to track the skills, experiences, relationships, and behaviours which enable young people to develop into empowered young adults.⁶³

Strategies to address negative and destructive forms of engagement should focus on protecting adolescents and take an evidence-based and context-specific approach to prevention. For example, one study documents how experiences of discrimination, corruption and abuse by security forces drove youth involvement in political violence, whilst another argues that addressing young people’s need to protect themselves, lack of respect or idleness is key, and that these are more significant drivers of political violence than ideology, or belief in a cause or revenge.⁶⁴

Resource:

- [Search Institute: Developmental Assets](#)



Social protection: protecting adolescents from the impact of poverty and shocks

Household poverty undermines child development in part by forcing choices which then powerfully shape later life chances. Economic shocks or ill-health may result in adolescents leaving school, increasing the amount of paid or unpaid work they carry out, or migrating. The consequences can be different for girls and boys, for instance, if parents invest less in the education of girls because they are expected to marry and move elsewhere, or conversely, if boys are withdrawn from school to work and support family incomes.

Extending the coverage of social protection, including universal health coverage, for households with children is a key strategy to reduce the risks which undermine poorer children's life chances. The design of interventions must fit national and local needs.

The key lesson from experience with social protection programmes is that access, coverage, and for cash transfer programmes, that the amount and regularity of payments are key to positive impacts.⁶⁵ Available evidence shows that cash transfers can work well across all contexts, with appropriate modifications, and have had a wide range of short and long-term benefits for children and their families, including improved food security, productive activities, and secondary school attendance rates. Specific impacts in relation to adolescents are evident in

terms of reducing risky behaviour, including engaging in inter-generational sex, sexual exploitation and delayed sexual debut. There is currently significant interest in 'cash plus' programmes, which link transfers with non-cash support to enhance positive impacts. More evidence is required to understand how to design cash transfer programmes so that benefits to adolescents are sustained in the long-term, and that unintended negative consequences can be identified and addressed.^{66,67,68,69}

Illness, disability and death can impoverish households with significant consequences for children within them. Universal health coverage, supported by rapid increases of coverage using public funding with an emphasis on access, quality, equity, and minimising out-of-pocket expenses, provides important protections for poor households.⁷⁰ Community-based and national/social health insurance may improve financial protection and enhance the use of health services,⁷¹ although health insurance does not necessarily reach the most disadvantaged, and community and private schemes may be hard to scale-up.⁷²



Looking to the future: reducing the intergenerational transmission of poverty

Tackling poverty across the generations requires attention to the dynamics of chronic poverty: poverty that is extreme and lasting - by tackling poverty directly preventing people become impoverished in the first place, and making it possible for people and families to escape from poverty on a sustainable basis. Alongside the investment in social protection, education and coverage of health services described in this briefing, broad-based economic growth is needed to generate livelihood and employment opportunities for the poorest regions and communities, combined with concerted action and investment to address the causes of insecurity, lack of assets, gender inequality, social exclusion, and discrimination.⁷³

Across children's lifecycle, poverty can have devastating lifelong effects. Adolescence provides a crucial opportunity to break the intergenerational cycle of poverty through specific, supportive interventions. Support for learning, for sexual and reproductive health services, programmes for low-income adolescent mothers and their families, and nutritional support are all important. The role young men can play in supporting their children's development and well-being needs greater attention and support.⁷⁴

Maintaining access to and positive learning outcomes in education is an important contributor to social mobility and future earnings, and better educated people tend to be able to diversify their livelihood strategies in response to economic shocks. Children's cognitive skills, schooling attainment and long term-nutritional status have been shown to be linked to that of their mothers.⁷⁵

Accessible sexual and reproductive services support adolescent girls and young women to have children when they wish and access to maternal and child health services if they do become pregnant. Having a young family during adolescence increases the likelihood that poorer households will struggle to afford enough food, healthcare and education for young children at critical points in their development.⁷⁶ Reaching adolescent pregnant girls and adolescent parents to support them in overcoming these struggles is therefore a priority.

Providing support to adolescent mothers, fathers and other caregivers can help break the intergenerational transmission of poverty. One study found that adolescent childbearing was associated with lower monthly earnings for mothers and lower child nutritional status, but only for poor mothers, suggesting that education and income-earning opportunities for poor women could offset the impact of adolescent pregnancy on intergenerational poverty.⁷⁷



Young Syrians taking part in Save the Children life skills training

Good nutrition for adolescents is important in its own right, and because maternal nutrition plays a key role in foetal growth and development. Maternal stunting is clearly linked with child stunting and underweight, and this relationship persists into middle childhood. A mothers' nutritional status is strongly linked to her early nutrition, but there is evidence that growth and nutrition trajectories are malleable during adolescence, and it may be possible to improve adolescent mothers' nutrition (and thereby that of their children) through effective interventions.⁷⁸ Specific nutritional interventions such as micronutrient supplements should be considered as part of a wider set of actions which support girls' reproductive health and increase their control over household resources.⁷⁹

Who Can Make a Difference?

This paper has set out an ambitious agenda to support every child to thrive during adolescence, to protect them from the harm of poverty, discrimination and gender inequality, and to prevent the next generation of children suffering the effects of poverty and disadvantage. Coalition members' experiences suggest that policy environments for addressing adolescent poverty and its consequences are characterised by

- ☑ National ownership, with political leadership for a positive agenda to address poverty in childhood and adolescence, supported by civil society, and designed to fit the country context
- ☑ Coordination, with inter-sectoral responses, monitoring and sustained interventions which meet multidimensional needs, and underpinned by social protection
- ☑ Adequate financing and strong oversight so that services are free at the point of delivery, and implementation is high quality and reaches girls and boys in the most disadvantaged communities

Every part of government and society has a role to play in addressing adolescent poverty.

- Finance and planning ministries: develop an investment case for services during adolescence, resource investment in social protection, health and education services which are equitable and free at the point of delivery, support inter-sectoral collaboration, and ensure child poverty strategies are evidence-based and meet the needs of the most disadvantaged children and adolescents.
- National statistical offices: ensure that policy and programmes for adolescence are underpinned by adequate age and gender disaggregated data.
- Sectoral ministries, particularly education and health: ensure that education and health services are based on evidence about the specific needs of disadvantaged adolescents, are free at the point of use, equitable, and meet adolescent girls' and boys' need for safe, high quality, youth-friendly and effective services.
- Youth, gender, children's and social affairs ministries: ensure that adolescents are part of the development and monitoring of child poverty strategies, that there is a strong-evidence base underpinning planning and delivery for adolescents, and that holistic strategies for tackling gender and other forms of discrimination are implemented.
- Labour, economic development and education ministries, together with employers' representatives and civil society organisations: collaborate so that adolescents get the right skills and information they need in order to take advantage of employment opportunities, and so that working adolescents are protected from hazards and exploitation.
- Civil society, including social and political organisations: facilitate adolescents' engagement in community, political and cultural life, and support their voice in policy-making and accountability
- Non-government organisations: support the development and evaluation of innovative and adolescent-friendly programming which addresses cross-cutting issues such as violence, safety and discrimination, as well as supporting adolescents' involvement in policy and programmes.



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Statements in sources referenced in this report do not necessarily reflect the views of Members of the Global Coalition to End Child Poverty.





The Global Coalition to End Child Poverty is a global initiative to raise awareness about Children living in poverty across the world and support global and national action to alleviate it. Our members work together as part of the Coalition, as well as individually, to achieve a world where all children grow up free from Poverty.

