Learning Poverty: What’s New?

July 2021
What is Learning Poverty?

The share of children who cannot read & understand a simple text by age 10
Learning Poverty: A combined measure of schooling and learning, fully aligned with SDG 4

- **Schooling** is a necessary yet not sufficient condition for learning
- Contributes to the socio-emotional development of children above and beyond learning, in addition to children’s nutrition, safety and social cohesion.
- School Deprivation component of Learning Poverty tied to SDG indicator 4.1.4

- **Learning** is critical to build human capital
- Reading is a crucial gateway to further schooling and learning
- Children who don’t read by late primary find it hard to catch up later
- Literacy is highly correlated with other cognitive skills
- A target based on reading makes learning goals concrete and compelling: everybody understands it
- Learning Deprivation component of Learning Poverty tied to SDG indicator 4.1.1
What’s new?

• New assessment data in 2019:
  - Learning poverty estimates available for 120 countries
  - Learning poverty estimates updated or revised for 33 countries -- only a little more than half are temporally comparable across assessment rounds
  - Learning poverty estimates available for the first time for 5 countries (Albania, Guinea, Lao PDR, Montenegro, Myanmar)
  - The updated numbers are pre-COVID estimates of Learning Poverty; and no global update is being released

### Updates and revisions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Temporally comparable</th>
<th>Not temporally comparable</th>
<th>Available for first time</th>
<th>Interim SDG reporting</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>33</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>5</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NO. OF COUNTRIES</th>
<th>0 20 40 60 80 100 120</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total Learning Poverty estimates</td>
<td>120</td>
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However, big gaps in learning data still exist

- Globally, **18%** of the school-age population has no Learning Poverty data.
- No learning poverty data for more than half of the school-age population in **Sub-Saharan Africa**.

![Bar chart showing % of the school age population with no learning data.](image)

Note that calculation is based on countries included in the reporting window for the estimation of global and regional aggregates.
We need better data to understand the magnitude of the learning crisis

• New SEA-PLM data show that prior learning poverty estimates in several East Asian countries significantly underestimated the magnitude of the learning crisis.

• Need better data, such as SEA-PLM, that are aligned with SDG minimum proficiency levels.
Need more frequent data to track progress on eliminating Learning Poverty

• Latest PASEC data show that several African countries were further off-track to meet the global goal of halving learning poverty by 2030 even before Covid-19

• Need for more timely data on learning to tackle the global learning crisis, and to recover COVID-19 learning losses
A stronger global effort is needed to measure Covid-19 learning losses

- Only 7 LICs report conducting formative assessments to measure learning losses in 2020; only 8 LICs conducted standardized assessments

- COVID-19 is likely to worsen Learning Poverty

- Utilize data to identify the extent of the crisis and design effective mitigation strategies

Source: Joint Survey, Wave 3. Survey question: “Have there been any steps taken to assess whether there have been learning losses as a result of COVID related school closure in 2020?”

For the latest learning poverty country briefs, see: