

# Education

**Do you like school?**

Many children in the world take going to school for granted. Most of these children have probably wished they didn't have to go several times. It's only natural; we all have mornings when staying in bed seems like a much better option than...well, anything else.

But what would your life be like if you couldn't go to school? What would you do all day?

What would your future be like if you had never been to school? How many of your dreams could you achieve if you couldn't read, write or do simple sums to manage your money?

**121 million children in the world do not go to school.**

Who are these children and why do some children receive their right to an education while others don't? The answer is in your identity. The different parts of what makes you 'you' add up to make you educated and able to reach your full potential, or not. **Who you are affects whether you can go to school.**

## What nationality are you?

In most Western countries school education is free and compulsory. Practically every child goes to primary and secondary school. You don't really have a choice, parents, teachers and social services make you go. The government in the UK has even started fining parents whose children don't go to school.

Most European countries have an average of between 15 and 20 years of school, whilst many African countries send their children to school for less than 10 years.

There are many different reasons why a child in one country goes to school for longer than one in another. We will look at some below and what people are doing to try and change them. Whatever the problems, the result is that which country you are born in is probably the biggest influence over how long you get to school for and whether you go at all.

See country by country information:

<http://unstats.un.org/unsd/demographic/products/socind/education.htm#acc>

### Did you know?

The UK has the highest average school life expectancy – people in Britain will on average attend formal education for 22 years.

At the other extreme a child in Burkina Faso can only expect to go to school for 3 years.

How much you learn at school also depends on what country you live in. British schoolchildren can take it for granted that there will be a comfortable classroom, pens and paper for them to use in school and that they will be able to hear what the teacher is saying and get some individual help from the teacher when they get stuck. The government make sure all schools have these basics to create an environment where children can learn. But school in other countries can be very different.

## Real Life

Tobias Mwandila is a History teacher in Zambia. Pupils start arriving at 6.45 and he starts his classes at 7am. Lessons finish at 5pm. Last year he has 67 pupils in his grade 7 class.

“More and more pupils are coming in and yet we are using the same structures, which are so old and compact. You have to handle 70 pupils in a room which has 40 desks, it's not easy. And the pupils are not comfortable. I must assess and evaluate all these pupils' work.”

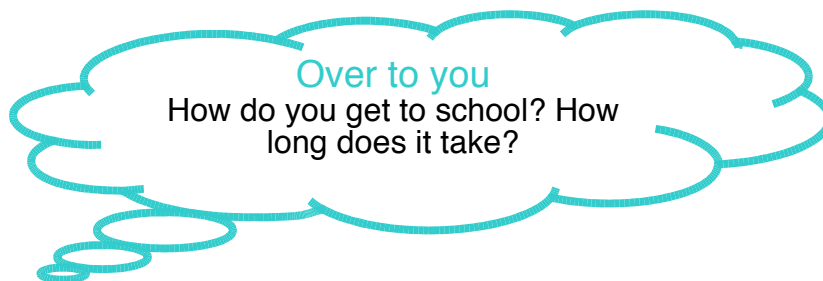
A lack of materials is also a problem in Mr Mwandila's school. He says the government supply few books, not nearly enough for all his pupils, and, as some of his pupils are orphans, they can not afford to buy books or even uniforms themselves. The teachers also experience financial problems;

“They are supposed to be paid on the 15th. Sometimes they wait 45 days to get their salaries. But their rent is due on the same day every month!”

He became a teacher after taking his uncle, also a teacher, as a role model. He describes how, as children, “We would sit around him and watch him as he read the books; it gave me a great interest.”

He says overall he likes being a teacher “even though there are some hassles and difficulties”.

## Where do you live?



Some children cannot go to school simply because there isn't a school in their area for them to go to.

Children who live in cities or other urban areas usually have a school nearby. They can either walk to school or take a bus. In the countryside the journey to school can take longer. Schools can include children from several villages, meaning that for some it is impossible to walk and they must go by bus or car. In developing countries this can be a big problem. Public transport can be very unreliable or not exist at all in rural areas. In many areas the nearest school is in the nearest city, sometimes almost a day's journey away. Parents don't want to send their young children on tiring and even dangerous long journeys to school. In some areas parents won't allow their daughters to travel to school as they are afraid they may be attacked on their way. This makes it impossible for children who live in the countryside to go to school.

School building programmes are taking place in many countries around the world to try and solve this problem.

## Real Life

In Sierra Leone, the civil war, which ended in 2002 after 11 years of fighting, destroyed many of the buildings and transport links, especially in rural areas. This means about 60% of school aged children can not go to school because they live in the countryside where there are no schools.

UNICEF has begun working with the Sierra Leonean government to build low-cost child-friendly schools in remote areas. The first 400 community schools means that 19 000 more children can go to school. By 2007 they hope to build 1 300 similar schools, which are designed to be used by the community for other purposes outside lesson time. They are also providing new books and other materials, as well as training teachers to make sure the children learn as much as they can at school.

In the Bombali district Chief Sullay Turay, head of the Rorinka community was pleased with the new school. He explained,

“This is a new thing that has come to our community. Our little children can now attend school without waiting until they are ten years old to be able to walk to the nearest school. Indeed this is development.”

[http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/sierraleone\\_30628.html](http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/sierraleone_30628.html)

## What do your parents do?

If your parents went to school then they are more likely to understand the value of education and send you to school. Educated parents are more likely to have higher paying jobs, therefore enough money to give their children an education. There are also many parents who did not have the chance to go to school themselves, who want their children to get an education so they can have a better life.

But many parents simply can not afford to send their children to school. Parents who work in low paying jobs may struggle to earn enough to feed and clothe their children, and sending them to school is an added cost they just can't afford.

Sending a child to school costs families in three different ways:

1. **School fees.** The money parents pay directly to the school to allow their child to attend lessons. In many countries, the government pays for children to go to primary, and maybe secondary, school, so it is free to families. But in some countries parents have to pay school fees. This happens in many developing countries, which means the poorest families have to pay for their children's education; money they simply don't have.
2. **Hidden extra costs.** This is money for school uniforms, pens, books, school bags and other things children need at school. For families who are already spending all the money they can afford on school fees, these extra costs can force them to take their child out of school.
3. **Opportunity cost.** This is the cost of the missed opportunity for the child to work while they are at school instead. In the poorest families children must find paid work so the family has enough money for their basic needs.

Children may be needed to help with farming, family business or in the home, looking after younger brothers or sisters for example, so the parents can go to work. If parents send their child to school then they may have to pay someone else to work for them, or to work less themselves so they can look after their youngest children or do essential household chores, like collecting water. This loss in the family's earning can be too much for the family to afford, meaning the child can not go to school.

For many families, sending their child going to school means their income will fall and, at the same time, they need to find extra money. For poor families the choice may be to buy food for your child or send them to school. It is not surprising that children from the poorest families are less likely to go to school.

Some families can afford to send a child to school, but only one. Families usually choose to send their sons, not their daughters, in this case because of traditional attitudes about what men and women should do. Orphans, or children abandoned by their parents, have even less chance of going to school. Even if another family member takes them in, they may have to pay their way if the family is poor or already has many children.

## Real Life

In Kenya school tuition fee used to be \$133 and school uniform cost \$27. The average annual income in Kenya is \$390. This means school costs were over a third of the average family's income, much more for the poorest families; a price which stopped many families from sending their children to school.

But in 2003 the Kenyan government abolished school fees for primary schools. Since then, the number of children going to school has risen from 5.9 million to 7.2 million, that's 1.3 million children going to school for the first time. Malawi, Uganda and Tanzania have had similar success.

Silvia, aged 10, had never been to school. Her family just did not have enough money to send her. But when the government abolished school fees, she started school for the first time. Now, at Ayany Primary School, in Kibera, she is busy practising her writing on a chalkboard – something she would never have been able to do if you still had to pay to go to school.

Of course, this hasn't been easy for the government. They had to find tables, chairs, pens and pencils for 1.3 million extra students. The Child-Friendly Primary School Initiative, run by UNICEF and the Kenyan government, has made sure that the quality of classes in schools is good. Before they dropped school fees, around 6 000 new teachers were trained, to teach the students they knew would start coming to school. International funding paid for extra textbooks and other materials to make classrooms exciting and stimulating places for children to learn.

Introducing free primary school has given hope and a new chance in life to millions of Kenyan school children.

[http://www.unicef.org/sowc04/sowc04\\_goodbye\\_to\\_fees.html](http://www.unicef.org/sowc04/sowc04_goodbye_to_fees.html)

## Do you have a legal identity?

Your first step to having a legal identity is getting a birth certificate when you are born. This tells the government that you exist, you're a citizen of your country and you have rights. Without a birth certificate you can't prove you have the right to attend school. Without a birth certificate your government can't make plans to provide schools for you because they won't know you even exist.

Many children do not have this essential piece of paper. Around 50 million babies each year do not get birth certificates - to find out why look at our "Birth Registration" resource book. These children face problem after problem in being allowed to go to school, sit exams, get qualifications and access many more services which they have the right to.

**A birth certificate is the key to unlocking your right to education.**

### Real Life

Eighteen year old Awawou lives in Kpessi, a small village in East Mono, Togo. Awawou grew up without a birth certificate as her mother did not understand how important it was to get one for her daughter. Her mother and father both died when she was very young and she was brought up by her grandmother.

Awawou saw her friends and cousins start school; but she couldn't join them: no birth certificate meant no school. Desperate to learn how to read and to write, Awawou convinced her grandmother to persuade the headmaster to allow her to attend school.

Awawou studied hard and in the last grade of primary school she tried to register for her final test, which would allow her to pass on to the next grade. However, to register for the test she needed a birth certificate.

A late registration in Togo (thirty days or more after birth) costs around US\$10. The average yearly income of a Togolese is less than US\$310. Awawou's grandmother earned far less than this average and she did not have enough money to get her granddaughter a birth certificate. Awawou could not take the school exam. She spent the rest of that year and the following year at home. She did do whatever work she could to earn some money for the certificate – running errands, petty trading, whatever was available.

Awawou eventually made it: the following year, she went with her birth certificate and sat her exams. She passed, but found herself in a class full of much younger children. Uncomfortable and feeling strange, she dropped out and left her village in search for other opportunities in Lomé, the capital. But things did not work out for the young girl alone in the big city and she went back to her village, with stories she does not want to tell. Now, she lives to support her old grandmother.

Awawou still dreams of learning something, of becoming a dressmaker. But for the moment, she can only concentrate on how to keep herself and her grandmother alive.

## Are you a boy or a girl?

In many Western countries girls are more likely to stay in education longer than boys and girls are getting better results in almost all subjects than the boys in their classes. When we look at the world as a whole the picture changes. According to Save the Children, out of the 125 million primary age children not in school, 60% are girls. Two thirds of the illiterate adults in the world are women.

International law says you should have the same rights whether you are male or female. Girls are not getting the same chance to get an education as their brothers. The Millennium Development Goals were targets agreed by countries from all over the world about what they wanted to achieve in the 21st century. They gave a special focus to giving all girls their right to an education. They want to eliminate any difference between the number of male and female students at all levels of education, from primary school to university, by 2015.

The biggest problem in getting more girls to school is discrimination.

“Many girls want to go to school but they can't because their parents say that the kitchen is a better place for girls”. Indira, aged 14.

Some parents have traditional attitudes and believe that a girl does not need an education because her job will be to get married and have children. They

### Real Life

One girl in Togo told Plan that after she'd enrolled in school her father “said that in his day, women didn't go to school, only men...[he] beat me and insulted me every time he saw me going to school...in the third year..[he] confiscated all my exercise books and school documents, and I had to abandon school....When I think about it I want to cry.”

don't believe their daughters should or could get paid jobs outside the home. They don't see the point of sending their daughters to school or forbid their daughters to go as it 'isn't a place for women'.

In countries where there is no free education poor families may only have enough money to send one of their children to school. Parents often choose to send their son to school instead of their daughter as they believe he will have more chance of getting a job after he finishes his education.

Girls are also more likely to drop out of school early. One of every four girls in the developing world never even completes fifth grade. (UN Millennium Project).

In some cultures girls are expected to get married and have children at an early age. Looking after their own children makes it nearly impossible for any girls to go to school, and in some places pregnant girls and young mothers are even not allowed to go to school and are forced to drop out.

In most developing countries there are far more male teachers than female ones. There are also few women in business or politics. This means the girls have no role models to look at and say “That is what I can do if I go to school”. Many text books have hardly any female examples in them, which means the girls may feel like what they are learning does not relate to them. This means girls can become de-motivated and feel like there is no point in

them going to school or studying hard.

Some girls experience discrimination when they are at school. Sometimes girls have been made to do cleaning work in the schools instead of going to class as the teachers believe this is "women's work". Girls can also suffer sexual harassment, even rape, while they are at school.

### Real Life

A girls' scholarship group in Togo has created a song, dedicated to Suzanne Aho, the minister for health and probably the most prominent female role model in Togo. It encourages girls to raise their ambitions and believe they can succeed through education.

"Girls, go to school;  
Suzanne Aho, we can be like you and succeed;  
Girls, become ministers,  
Girls, become lawyers,  
Girls, become teachers!"

### Real Life

Compared to other neighbouring countries girls in South Africa have more opportunity to go to school. But according to research by Human Rights Watch many girls suffer sexual harassment and rape - while they are at school.

*"All the touching at school, in class, in the corridors, all day everyday bothers me. Boys touch your bum, your breasts. Some teachers will tell the boys to stop and they may get a warning or detention, but it doesn't work. Other teachers just ignore it. You won't finish your work because they are pestering you the whole time."*

MC, age fourteen, sexually harassed at school

Girls from all backgrounds are at risk of this type of abuse. Some girls suffer extreme verbal abuse, harassment as the girl describes above and some have even been raped in empty classrooms or school toilets. This means that they can not study, learn and concentrate in the same way as the male students because of emotional trauma from this abuse or because they feel so afraid that it will happen to them.

*"I didn't go back to school for one month after I came forward. Everything reminds me, wearing my school uniform reminds me of what happened."*

PC, age fifteen, sexually assaulted at school

Many girls change schools and some drop out of school altogether because it brings back too many distressing memories. Other girls' parents take them out of school because they know their daughters are not safe there.

<http://www.hrw.org/reports/2001/safrica/index.htm#TopOfPage>

Girls can not succeed at school if they can't feel confident and safe there. That's why UNICEF is supporting the Girls Education Movement (GEM) in South Africa to help end sexual violence in schools and allow girls to do the best they can at school. They run workshops with both boys and girls to discuss the issues, tell them about their rights and break the silence on this problem.

"It is through the GEM that we are able for the first time to listen properly to what girls feel and think about us. This has made a difference because it has taught us to respect everyone's rights", said 15 year old Bethuel, a boy at one of the GEM workshops. [http://www.unicef.org/southafrica/reallives\\_2537.html](http://www.unicef.org/southafrica/reallives_2537.html)

Girls should have equal opportunities to go to school as boys. It is unfair that they don't. But educating girls also makes sense financially. Educated women help a country's development. If only boys go to school, only men can do important jobs in society. If girls get an education then a country will have far more workers to help it develop.

Girls who have gone to school normally marry later and have fewer children. This means they can give their children better care, and children of educated women are more likely to survive and are healthier. This is also because girls often learn about HIV/AIDS and other preventable diseases at school, meaning they can protect themselves and their children. This improve the health of the country's population overall. Educated women are also more productive in their work, get better paid jobs and are able to make more informed choices about their life and their future. That means they can support their families, make more of contribution to their country's development and build fulfilling, happy lives for themselves.

## Real Life

UNICEF led a global campaign to get equal numbers of girls and boys in to school between 2002 and 2005. Called "25 by 2005" it focused on helping 25 countries get more girls into school. One of these countries was Pakistan. As part of this work they helped local communities in remote areas to build new schools mainly for girls, although some boys could also attend.

Naz Bibi, 11 years old, started going to the new school in her village, with 154 other girls. Before there was no school in walking distance of her home and no public transport, making it impossible for her to get an education.

Her father Jalal Khan was one of the community leaders encouraging the project. He donated land for the school to be built on and started an Education Group to run the school and persuade other parents to enrol their daughters.

"I have no education so my wife and I cut crops in the fields...[if they go to school] the girls can become teachers and earn money that way," says Naz's father.

Around 30 000 girls have started primary school through this project across Pakistan. In Pakistan overall, about 50% of children who even start school

in the first place drop out. But in these community schools, 84% of students complete their studies. This is partly because the parents work closely with the school and see a better future for their daughters through going to school.

Her mother says,

“My daughters will never starve because we have educated them.”

“My dream is to become an accountant and I really want to achieve my goal”, Upile, 14



What are your dreams?

“I would like to be a teacher in the future. This is because I... would like to bring people to the dream light of literacy in a developing country like Ghana.” Narki, 17, Ghana

“I would like to be a nurse to help people in my community. In class I always ask questions because I want to acquire more knowledge.”

Joyce, 18

Children are the future – this is said often because it is true. Today’s children will be tomorrow’s doctors, teachers, company directors and world leaders.

But many children don’t see their own potential. Children who have to spend everyday working hard to get enough clean water and food have no idea of what they could do with an education. They have never even dreamed they could become lawyers, doctors or even simply break out of a day to day life of poverty.

“I want to be a journalist. I have the potential, I am bold and eloquent and I want to serve the public.” Rosamond, Sierra Leone

“[I am an] apprentice at a carpentry shop. The job has done much for my self-esteem and I look forward to the day when I will set up my own shop.” Jimmy, Uganda

"I have just started to study...Leisure and Tourism which I really enjoy. When I have finished school I hope to...join up in either the air force or the army."  
Danny, England

"My dream is to be a doctor, the reason being that my mother fell sick and I wish I could treat her. I will build a dispensary and I will also be treating people in my community." Penina, 15, Kenya

"I would like to complete primary, secondary and even university college. After that I will be the headmaster and I will be going to school with a car. I will make my school the best in the area." Zephania, 14, Kenya

Children need to want to go to school. They need to see how it will help them when they grow up and understand how much they could do. Parents need to learn how an education could give their children a better life.

## Take Action!

Find out all the latest information, see more real life stories of girls in education

<http://www.unicef.org/girlseducation>

Click on "A day in the life of a schoolgirl to see Aminata's story

<http://www.savethechildren.org/education/index.asp>

Get involved in the Global Campaign for Education and read an interview with Angelina Jolie on her work for the campaign.

<http://www.campaignforeducation.org/>

A children's campaign to help other children around the world get an education. Get involved and read day-in-the-life stories from children around the world.

<http://www.sendmyfriend.org/childrens-index.shtml>

Teachers page with lots of resources and ideas.

<http://www.sendmyfriend.org/teachers-index.shtml>

Fun site with true stories, book reviews and also teachers' resources.

<http://www.bookaid.org/cms.cgi/site/kidzone/>

Cool site with lots of info, videos and quizzes.

<http://youthink.worldbank.org/4kids/education/>

Click on the link to read a poem "Mangarap ka Bata! Child, Have a Dream!" by Ivy and find out more about the issue.

<http://www.plan-international.org/action/ourfuture/education/>