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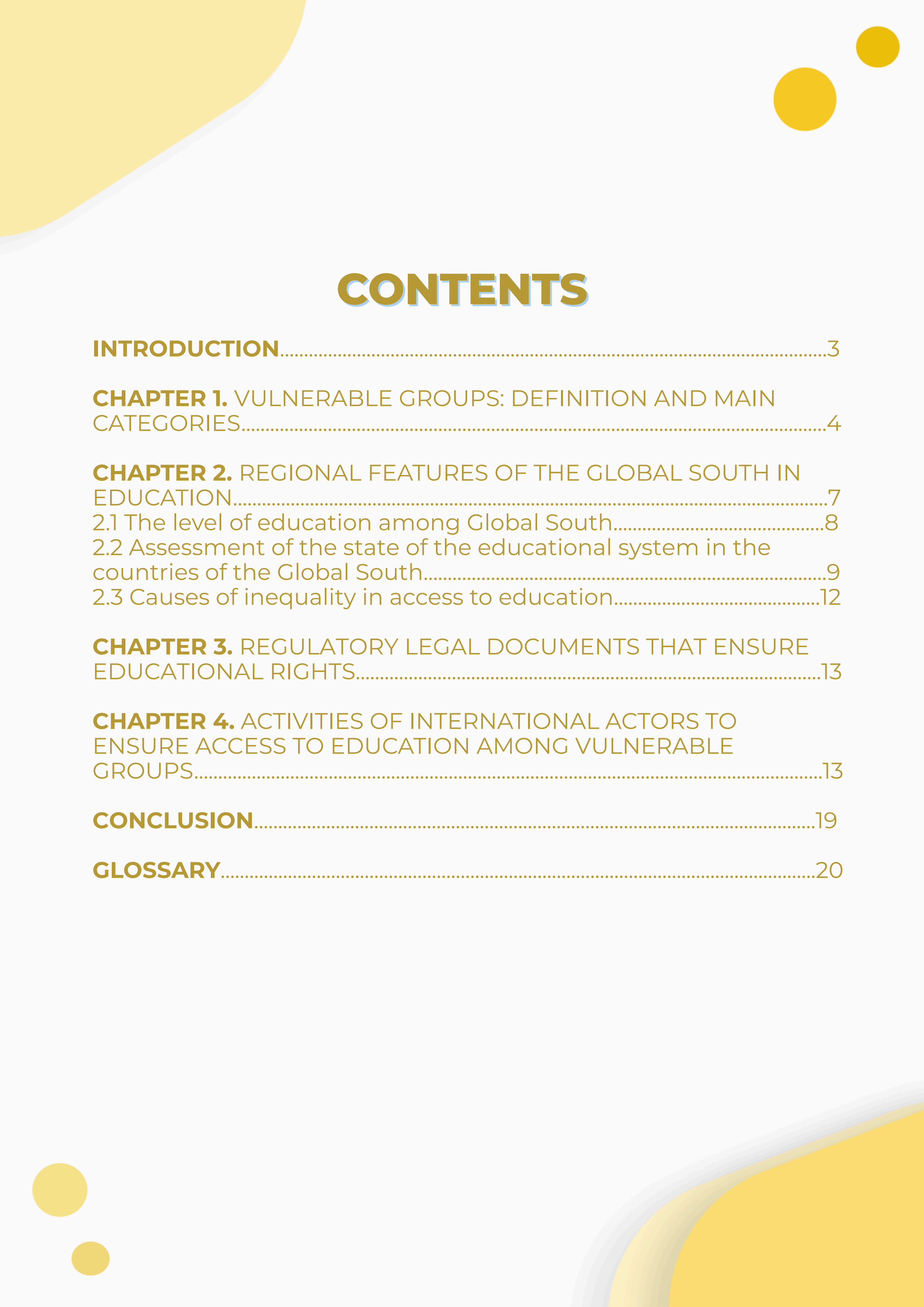
AND CULTURAL ORGANIZATION

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ENSURING ACCESS TO QUALITY EDUCATION FOR VULNERABLE GROUPS IN THE GLOBAL SOUTH



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INTRODUCTION

The issue of the proliferation of education is acknowledged to have been on the cutting edge for years as an essential measure in order to create an open and inclusive society with equal rights and opportunities. Undoubtedly, all people have the right to non-discrimination and equality in education according to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Article 26)¹, the Convention on the Rights of the Child (Article 28)², and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (Article 13)³. This commitment is reaffirmed by the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4, which ensures inclusive and equitable quality education and promotes lifelong learning opportunities for all.⁴ Despite notable progress toward this goal, the democratization of education, especially among vulnerable social groups such as girls and women, refugees and migrants and disabled people, is still a pressing issue. The consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic, conflicts and rising discrimination have deteriorated the situation. The 2030 Agenda's motto "no one will be left behind" is under threat. Overcoming this crisis demands a comprehensive, rights-based strategy which is to focus on reducing institutional barriers, fostering inclusivity, and ensuring that education systems are customized to meet the particular needs of disadvantaged communities.

¹ United Nations. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights : adopted by the UN General Assembly on December 10, 1948. — URL: <https://www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights>.

² United Nations. The Convention on the Rights of the Child ; adopted by the UN General Assembly on November 20, 1989. — URL: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/convention-rights-child>.

³ United Nations. The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights ; adopted by the UN General Assembly on December 16, 1966. — URL: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/international-covenant-economic-social-and-cultural-rights>

⁴ United Nations. Goal 4 / Department of Economic and Social Affairs : Sustainable Development. — URL: <https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal4>.

CHAPTER 1. VULNERABLE GROUPS: DEFINITION AND MAIN CATEGORIES

Throughout the historical and political development of society, there have been special groups of the population with varying degrees of vulnerability, which, due to certain reasons, could not gain equal access to the fulfilling implementation of their rights and freedoms. Nevertheless, the international law does not provide for a universal definition of “vulnerable groups” with criteria by which individuals could be identified as representatives of vulnerable groups. The definitions tend to include a factor determining vulnerability.

According to the World Health Organization, “vulnerability” is a number of conditions determined by physical, social, economic, and environmental factors or processes which increase the susceptibility of an individual, a community, assets, or systems to the impacts of hazards.⁵

The European Commission defines vulnerable social groups as groups of people considered to be at risk of poverty or social exclusion because of physical disabilities, age factors, ethnic origins, lack of housing, or substance abuse.⁶

The Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia claims that a vulnerable group is a population that has some specific characteristics making it at higher risk of falling into poverty than others living in areas.⁷

Additionally, the concept of “vulnerable groups” implies that legal insecurity is observed among certain categories such as women, children, disabled people, the elderly, migrants, refugees, ethnic and religious minorities and indigenous peoples. Moreover, this phenomenon is mainly attributed to widespread violation of democratic norms and human rights.

⁵ World Health Organization. Vulnerability and Vulnerable Populations. – URL: <https://wkc.who.int/our-work/health-emergencies/knowledge-hub/community-disaster-risk-management/vulnerability-and-vulnerable-populations>.

⁶ Kiss M. European Parliamentary Research Service/EPRS. Vulnerable social groups: Before and after the crisis. 2016. P. 2. – URL: <https://epthinktank.eu/2016/07/13/vulnerable-social-groups-before-and-after-the-crisis/>.

⁷ United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia. Vulnerable Groups. – URL: <https://archive.unescwa.org/vulnerable-groups>.

However, there is no universally recognized list of all representatives of vulnerable groups. Instead, the system of international treaties and resolutions focuses on the protection of specific groups:

1. **Convention relating to the Status of Refugees (1951):** defines a refugees' right to be protected from being returned to a country where they face serious threats and outlines the minimum standards of treatment;⁸

2. **International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (1965):** protects the rights of groups that are distinguished based on race, colour, descent, national or ethnic origin;⁹

3. **Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (1979):** dwells on women and girls as groups discriminated against;¹⁰

4. **Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989):** considers children as a vulnerable group due to their age and gives prime importance to protecting their rights;¹¹

5. **International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families (1990):** protects the rights of migrants and their families without discrimination;¹²

⁸ United Nations. Convention relating to the Status of Refugees : adopted by the UN General Assembly on July 28, 1951. – URL: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/convention-relating-status-refugees>.

⁹ United Nations. International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination : adopted by the UN General Assembly on December 21, 1965. – URL: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/international-convention-elimination-all-forms-racial>.

¹⁰ United Nations. Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women : adopted by the UN General Assembly on December 18, 1979. – URL: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/convention-elimination-all-forms-discrimination-against-women>.

¹¹ United Nations. Convention on the Rights of the Child : adopted by the UN General Assembly on November 20, 1989. – URL: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/convention-rights-child>.

¹² United Nations. International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families : adopted by the UN General Assembly on December 18, 1990. – URL: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/international-convention-protection-rights-all-migrant-worker>.

6. Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities (1992): protects the existence and the national or ethnic, cultural, religious and linguistic identity of minorities within their respective territories and encourages conditions for the promotion of that identity;¹³

7. Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006): promotes, protects and ensures the full and equal enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms by all persons with disabilities, and promotes respect for their inherent dignity;¹⁴

8. Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (2007): enshrines the rights of indigenous peoples, who are often vulnerable due to historical marginalization and land loss.¹⁵

To sum up, the concept “vulnerable groups” is characterized by its ambivalent formulation and unclear criteria requiring systematization and classification.

¹³ United Nations. Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities : adopted by the UN General Assembly on December 18, 1992. - URL: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/declaration-rights-persons-belonging-national-or-ethnic>.

¹⁴ United Nations. Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities : adopted by the UN General Assembly on December 12, 2006. – URL: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/convention-rights-persons-disabilities>.

¹⁵ United Nations. Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples : adopted by the UN General Assembly on September 13, 2007. – URL: https://www.justice.gc.ca/eng/declaration/decl_doc.html.

CHAPTER 2. REGIONAL FEATURES OF THE GLOBAL SOUTH IN EDUCATION

2.1 The level of education among Global South

The United Nations Development Program (UNDP) regularly publishes a Human Development Index (HDI) that includes an Education Index. The purpose of the Education Index is to lend insight into the comparative educational development of countries around the world.

According to the index for 2022¹⁶, the countries of the Global South can be divided into several groups in compliance with their level of education:

1. Regions with an index above 0.6: Most countries in East Asia, Southeast Asia, Central Asia, and Latin America belong to this category. In these countries, the political and social situation is relatively stable, and military conflicts do not occur so often. This allows for more even development of the education sector, as there have been fewer social upheavals that could disrupt the learning process in the past 10-15 years. Additionally, these countries are largely considered developing, which contributes to their higher levels of education;

2. Transition regions: countries of Southwest Asia and South Asia. There is a fairly large difference in indexes in these regions - there are countries with fairly high scores from 0.5-0.6 units, such as India, Saudi Arabia, Iran, Oman, Iraq, and there are also countries with scores below 0.4 - Afghanistan, Pakistan, Yemen, and Syria. There are a sufficient number of developing countries in this category, as well as oil-rich countries, which allows it to allocate more funds to the development of education. Countries with indicators below 0.4 have characteristic features: some of them have protracted military conflicts that hinder development, and some have weak economies. This prevents us from allocating more funds for the development of social sectors, including education;

3. Regions with an index below 0.4: this category mainly includes countries in Tropical Africa, where the index is approximately 0.2-0.3. There are a large number of different ethnic groups and problems with access to basic needs resources. In countries closer to South Africa, the index rises again to 0.5, which indicates a greater development of the education system and its infrastructure.

¹⁶ World Population Review. Education Index by Country 2022. – URL: <https://worldpopulationreview.com/country-rankings/education-index-by-country>

Based on the data, it can be noted that the most difficult situation with education occurs in African countries. It is also a region whose development is considered one of the SDG4 priorities. According to the UN, today, despite the fact that the number of children enrolled in primary school reaches 91%, there are still about 57 million children who cannot access this education. More than half of this number live in sub-Saharan Africa.¹⁷

2.2 Assessment of the state of the educational system in the countries of the Global South

The state of the educational infrastructure in the countries of the global south is determined by many factors:

1. **The shortage of teachers and low qualifications:** The Global report on teachers: addressing teacher shortages and transforming the profession reports that there are fewer and fewer teachers in the world. 58% of countries face a teacher shortage to achieve universal primary education (the situation in Sub-Saharan Africa is the most dire).¹⁸ By 2030, the problem may become acute in many countries. So, by 2030, about 15 million teachers may be missing in Africa.¹⁹ Also, their qualifications are insufficient to use IT technologies, and the teachers' metacognitive skills are below average;²⁰

2. **Lack of developed infrastructure:** there is a lack of mobility equipment for people with disabilities, buildings were improperly designed, and there were no specialized textbooks or curriculum adaptations. In some countries, this figure reaches more than 35%.²¹ Also, in African countries such as Malawi and Niger, more than 60% of school buildings require major repairs²²;

¹⁷ United Nations. United Nations Sustainable Development. - URL: <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/>

¹⁸ UNESCO. UNESCO study shows Africa and Arab States are worst hit by teacher shortage. – 2023. – Oct. 3. – URL: <https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/unesco-study-shows-africa-and-arab-states-are-worst-hit-teacher-shortage>.

¹⁹ Global report on teachers: addressing teacher shortages and transforming the profession. - URL: <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000388832>

²⁰ Access to education in Central Africa, S.V. Murafa, M.P. Nghetobay, 2024. – URL: <https://cyberleninka.ru/article/n/dostupnost-obrazovaniya-v-stranah-tsentralnoy-afriki-kamerun-tsentralkoafrikanskaya-respublika-kongo-gabon-i-chad/viewer>

²¹ United Nations. United Nations Sustainable Development. - URL: <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/>

²² World Bank. "World Development Report 2018: Learning to Realize Education's Promise". – URL: <https://www.worldbank.org/en/publication/wdr2018>

3. Lack of basic facilities: many schools do not have basic facilities such as access to drinking water, electricity, and sanitary conditions for schools. For example, in sub-Saharan Africa, less than 50% of schools have access to drinking water²³.

The state of the educational infrastructure in the countries of the Global South still remains a critical challenge for ensuring universal and high-quality education. Despite improvements in recent years, systemic issues require large-scale and sustained measures to address these issues.

2.3 Causes of inequality in access to education

There are many reasons that lead to unequal access to education. In his report, Sustainable Development Goals 4 Education 2030²⁴ UNESCO considers issues in the field of education, including those related to the countries of the Global South.

Having strong economic, political, cultural and social differences from the countries of the Global North, the causes of inequality in access to education are highlighted in the countries of the Global South:

- Economic factors: The income level of the population directly affects access to education. Vulnerable groups of the population often do not have a high income and cannot afford the additional costs of their children's education, which leads to their exclusion from the educational process. This is the reason why the rate of out-of-school children in the Global South is significantly higher (for example, 31% in sub-Saharan Africa and 21% in Central Asia, compared with 3% in Europe and North America);²⁵
- Social and cultural reasons: historical and patriarchal trends in the countries of the global south lead to restrictions in educational opportunities for the female part of the population, not only from the standpoint of traditions, but also in the legislative environment of these countries.

²³ World Bank / UNICEF. "Progress on drinking water, sanitation and hygiene in schools: 2000-2021: Special focus on COVID-19". – URL : <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789240054943>

²⁴ Education 2030. Incheon Declaration and Framework for Action for the implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 4. Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all. – URL: https://uis.unesco.org/sites/default/files/documents/education-2030-incheon-framework-for-action-implementation-of-sdg4-2016-en_2.pdf

²⁵ Recognizing and Overcoming Inequity in Education. – URL: <https://www.un.org/en/un-chronicle/recognizing-and-overcoming-inequity-education>

²⁶ Girls' Education Overview. World Bank Group. – URL: <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/girlseducation>

Often, the female part of the population has fewer opportunities related to education, since they may not have the right to do so at the legislative level, as in Afghanistan²⁷, for example, or, due to established traditions, they are engaged in household chores from an early age. So, gender norms (80% of school-aged Afghan girls and young women - 2.5 million people are out of school)²⁸, caste systems (although the caste system was abolished in India in the mid-XXth century, high-quality education is still not available), ethnic and racial prejudices (a University of Cape Town report by an independent commission found “systematic suppression of Black excellence in recent years”)²⁹, and stigma against disabilities (children with disabilities in West Africa are often hidden at home or sent to beg in the streets by parents who deem them cursed, worthless and incapable of succeeding at school)³⁰ can prevent children from marginalized groups from enrolling or staying in school. Moreover, when education is delivered in a non-native official language, it creates a significant barrier to learning for children from linguistic minorities (monolingual education in Turkish negatively affects Kurdish children). Undoubtedly, the interests and rights of minorities shouldn't be set aside;

- **Military and political conflicts:** the backwardness of the countries of the global south is becoming the cause of internal instability of states. In such circumstances, the population is in extreme conditions and has no opportunity to receive education. This also leads to forced migration of a part of the population and obtaining refugee status. People have to leave the country, or else wait for the end of conflicts, which complicates the educational process.³¹ The destruction of schools and mass displacement, as tragically illustrated by the 45,000 first graders unable to attend school in Gaza in 2024, renders education a secondary concern amidst survival;³²

²⁷ Let girls and women in Afghanistan learn! – URL: <https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/let-girls-and-women-afghanistan-learn>

²⁸ UNESCO. Let girls and women in Afghanistan learn! -2023. – Apr. 20. – URL: <https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/let-girls-and-women-afghanistan-learn>.

²⁹ Nordling L. Racism rife at top South African university, says report / Linda Nordling. – Nature. – 2019. – Apr.9. – URL: <https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-019-01129-2>.

³⁰ Guilbert K. From curse to catfish: West Africa schools tackle stigma of disability / Kieran Guilbert. – Reuters. – 2015. – Dec.2. – URL: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-westafrica-education/from-curse-to-catfish-west-africa-schools-tackle-stigma-of-disability-idUSKBN0TLOB220151202/>.

³¹ United Nations. Children affected by conflict cannot wait for their education. – URL : <https://news.un.org/en/story/2022/08/1124422>

³² UNICEF. 45,000 first graders unable to start the new school year in the Gaza Strip: UNICEF. – 2024. – Sep. 9. – URL: <https://www.unicef.org.uk/press-releases/45000-first-graders-unable-to-start-the-new-school-year-in-the-gaza-strip-unicef/>.

- Technological backwardness: many innovations in education are directly related to information technologies, but not all countries of the global south have them fully in order to provide the largest part of the population with access to education, which was especially evident during the pandemic;³³
- Language barrier: education is often conducted in an official language, such as English, French, and Portuguese, which may not be native to students in the global south, especially in remote regions with large numbers of ethnic minorities. Learning in a language other than your native language may lead to a lower level of cognitive skills.³⁴

Inequality in access to education in the Global South is the result of the intersection of many interrelated factors: poverty exacerbates gender inequality, economic barriers and conflicts make it difficult to get out of poverty, as well as the development of the education system.

³³ Education for all? The role of new technologies in overcoming global inequality. T.V. Kruglikova. – URL: <https://cyberleninka.ru/article/n/obrazovanie-dlya-vseh-rol-novyh-tehnologiy-v-preodolenii-globalnogo-neravenstva-po-materialam-mezhdunarodnyh-organizatsiy/viewer>

³⁴ UNICEF. Why Mother Tongue Education holds the key to unlocking every child's potential. The transformative role of learning in children's native language. – URL : <https://www.unicef.org/india/stories/why-mother-tongue-education-holds-key-unlocking-every-childs-potential>

CHAPTER 3. REGULATORY LEGAL DOCUMENTS THAT ENSURE EDUCATIONAL RIGHTS

Since the development of the six Education for All (EFA) Goals and the Millennium Development Goals in 2000 Significant progress has been made in the field of education. Nevertheless, it was not possible to achieve these goals in full by the deadline set for 2015, therefore, the Incheon Declaration was adopted in order to complete these tasks.

The Incheon Declaration: a declaration on education adopted during the World Education Forum in Incheon, Republic of Korea. It formulates a transformative concept of education for the next 15 years until 2030.³⁵

The overarching goal is: "Ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and encouraging lifelong learning opportunities for all."

Also, SDG 4 includes tasks that should be implemented by 2030, namely:

- Ensure that all girls and boys complete free, equal, and high-quality primary and secondary education, enabling them to achieve sought-after and effective learning outcomes;
- Ensure that all girls and boys have access to quality early childhood development, care and preschool education systems so that they are ready for primary education;
- Significantly increase the number of young and adult people with in-demand skills, including vocational and technical skills, for employment, decent work and entrepreneurship;
- Ensure equal access for all to affordable and high-quality vocational and higher education, including university education;
- Eliminate gender inequality in education and ensure equal access to education for vulnerable groups, including people with disabilities, indigenous peoples and children, those in vulnerable situations;
- Ensure that all young people and a significant proportion of the adult population can read, write and count;
- Ensure that all students acquire the knowledge and skills necessary to promote sustainable development;

³⁵ Incheon declaration : education 2030 - towards inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning for all (English). – URL: <https://documents.worldbank.org/en/publication/documents-reports/documentdetail/167341467987876458/incheon-declaration-education-2030-towards-inclusive-and-equitable-quality-education-and-lifelong-learning-for-all>

- Create and improve educational institutions that take into account the interests of children, the special needs of people with disabilities and gender aspects, and ensure a safe, violence-free and socially barrier-free environment for education;
- Significantly increase the number of scholarships provided to developing countries worldwide;
- Significantly increase the number of qualified teachers.

The drafting group on the Education 2030 agenda developed a framework for action, which was subsequently adopted in Paris on November 4, 2015 during a meeting. The Action Framework contains plans for the implementation of the commitments made in Incheon. It includes ways to solve problems and ensure the fulfillment of tasks that were set within the framework of the SDG 4 Education 2030 agenda. It also provides examples of strategies that can be used by countries to implement SDG 4 targets, taking into account national, cultural and legislative differences between countries.³⁶

The Convention against Discrimination in Education³⁷ is a key UNESCO international document, adopted on December 14, 1960, and is the first legally binding international agreement fully devoted to human rights in the field of education.

The main objectives of the Convention: the Convention establishes education as a fundamental human right aimed at the full development of the human personality and greater respect for human rights, and establishes obligations for States to ensure free education, discourages all forms of discrimination and promotes equality of access to education among all countries and segments of the population.

The main principles include:

- Free and compulsory primary education for all children;
- Public secondary and higher education, equally accessible to all based on individual abilities;
- Education standards for public educational institutions located at the same level;
- Non-discrimination in the field of education on any grounds;
- Opportunities for professional retraining of teachers without discrimination;

³⁶ Education 2030: Incheon Declaration and Framework for Action for the implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 4: Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all; 2016. – URL: <https://gcedclearinghouse.org/sites/default/files/resources/245656r.pdf>

³⁷ United Nations. Convention against Discrimination in Education : adopted by UNESCO on December 14, 1960. – URL: <https://www.un.org/ru/documents/treaty/UNESCO-1960>

The Convention is recognized as the cornerstone of the Education 2030 Agenda and provides powerful tools to overcome educational inequality in developing countries. It contains the legal basis for anti-discrimination measures, takes into account the specifics and calls for protecting vulnerable groups of the population, as well as providing them with education, ensures equal educational opportunities for all social and ethnic groups, and supports cultural diversity.³⁸

The Convention remains an important tool for ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education for all, especially in the context of overcoming systemic inequality and underdevelopment in the Global South.

Safe Schools Declaration and Guidelines on Military Use³⁹ was adopted in 2015 in Oslo after the presentation of the final version of the Guidelines for Protecting Schools and Universities from Military Use during Armed Conflict.

The Declaration contains the causes and consequences of military conflicts and armed attacks on schools, as well as their impact on educational infrastructure.

The Principles of the Declaration:

- Investigate allegations of violations of applicable national and international law;
- Make every effort at the national level to collect reliable relevant data on attacks on educational institutions, the number of victims of attacks;
- Develop, apply and promote risk-based approaches to education the occurrence of conflict;
- Strive to ensure the continuity of education during armed conflict; support the rehabilitation of educational institutions;
- Support the efforts of the UN Security Council on children and armed conflict.

The Guidelines for Protecting Schools and Universities from Military Use during Armed Conflict contain the principles of action of the parties during an armed conflict in order to avoid global interruption of the educational process in the hotbeds of conflict, as well as to preserve the greatest integrity of the educational infrastructure. Parties to armed conflicts are urged not to use schools and universities, for whatever purpose, to support their war efforts, despite the fact that some uses still do not contradict the law of armed conflict.

³⁸ United Nations. Convention against Discrimination in Education : adopted by UNESCO on December 14, 1960. – URL: <https://www.unesco.org/en/right-education/convention-against-discrimination>

³⁹ United Nations. Safe Schools Declaration and Guidelines on Military Use : adopted in 2015. – URL: <https://ssd.protectingeducation.org/safe-schools-declaration-and-guidelines-on-military-use>

CHAPTER 4. ACTIVITIES OF INTERNATIONAL ACTORS TO ENSURE ACCESS TO EDUCATION AMONG VULNERABLE GROUPS

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) is known to be one of the key UN bodies responsible for education. UNESCO promotes a human rights-based approach to education and advocates for an inclusive interpretation the right to education, notably through the implementation of the 1960 UNESCO Convention and Recommendation against Discrimination in Education (CADE), which establishes an international legal framework for the protection of the right to education and prohibits all forms of discrimination. Furthermore, UNESCO is entrusted with leading and coordinating the Education 2030 Agenda which provides guidance for the implementation of SDG 4 and its associated commitments. The interests of vulnerable groups are taken into account too, and the organization carries out the work in the following areas:

- **Education in Emergencies and Crises:** UNESCO ensures the durability of education for children and young people affected by conflict, natural disasters, and migration. This work includes setting up temporary schools, training teachers to work in traumatic environments, and providing psychosocial support. UNESCO is a key partner of the “Education Cannot Wait” (ECW) initiative which is aimed at providing education for all in crisis situations. For instance, ECW's rapid COVID-19 response enabled over 31.2 million of the world's most vulnerable children to continue their education through distance learning alternatives during school closures;⁴⁰
- **Elimination of Gender Discrimination:** 2% of countries still restrict the right to education of married, pregnant and parenting girls and women in their legal framework.⁴¹ UNESCO is committed to countering this trend. “Her Education, Our Future” and “GirlForce” initiatives are designed to accelerate action to educate girls and women;⁴²

⁴⁰ Education Cannot Wait. COVID-19 Response. – URL: <https://www.educationcannotwait.org/impact-results/covid-19-response>.

⁴¹ UNESCO. Key data on girls and women’s right to education. – URL: <https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/key-data-girls-and-womens-right-education>

⁴² UNESCO. Meet the GirlForce around the world advancing girls’ and women’s education. – URL: <https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/meet-girlforce-around-world-advancing-girls-and-womens-education>.

- **Inclusive Education for People with Disabilities:** in alignment with the Buenos Aires Declaration (2022), UNESCO urges member states to transform their educational systems through the integration of innovative technologies (including assistive and digital tools and artificial intelligence) and by fostering communities of practice to share knowledge;⁴³
- **Protection of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples:** UNESCO advocates for constitutional guarantees that protect the right of indigenous peoples to education in their native language and within their cultural context. In this regard, the Constitution of Ecuador specifies the right to learn in one's own language and cultural environment as well as the State's obligation to ensure bilingual intercultural education in accordance with cultural diversity.⁴⁴
- **Digitalization in education:** UNESCO conducted research on the most successful practices using mobile phones in education. About 7 of the most successful initiatives in this area were identified. For example, **Plan Ceibal** in Uruguay is a government initiative aimed at reducing the digital divide within the country and promoting inclusion and equal opportunities for all students in the country;⁴⁵
- **Joint work with other international actors:** Huawei is collaborating with UNESCO to achieve the goals of SDG 4 (the project "Technologically supported open schools for all"⁴⁶). The initiative helps countries in the Global South design, test, and scale technology systems in schools. In Ethiopia, the project supports the national Digital Textbook Initiative, which aims to create an extensive digital library for secondary school students. The International Institute of Online Education (IIOE)⁴⁷, launched by UNESCO in collaboration with ICHEI, hosts courses and educational content in the 6 official languages of the United Nations, covering a variety of topics, including innovative digital technologies.

⁴³ UNESCO. 2022 Declaration of Buenos Aires : adopted by the Third Regional Meeting of Ministers of Education of Latin America and the Caribbean on May 26-27, 2022. – URL: https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000381755_eng.

⁴⁴ UNESCO. Indigenous peoples' right to education : published by UNESCO in 2019. – URL: https://unesdoc.unesco.org/in/documentViewer.xhtml?v=2.1.196&id=p::usmarcdef_0000369698&file=/in/rest/annotationSVC/DownloadWatermarkedAttachment/attach_import_18bfa757-9690-4e2a-9d0f-f2fcae865069%3F_%3D369698eng.pdf&locale=ru&multi=true&ark=/ark:/48223/pf0000369698/PDF/369698eng.pdf#%5B%7B%22num%22%3A28%2C%22gen%22%3A0%7D%2C%7B%22name%22%3A%22XYZ%22%7D%2C54%2C800%2C0%5D.

⁴⁵ Best practices in mobile learning: 7 innovative case studies. – URL: <https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/best-practices-mobile-learning-7-innovative-case-studies>

⁴⁶ Collaborating for acceleration: UNESCO Global Education Coalition's journey towards SDG 4. – URL: https://e.huawei.com/id/ict-insights/global/ict_insights/ict34-intelligent-education/view/unesco-accelerates-the-digital-transformation

⁴⁷ Co-constructing a global ecosystem for higher education digital transformation——International Institute of Online Education Developmental Report. – URL: <https://en.ichei.org/Uploads/Download/2023-04-10/6433e2356aa2a.pdf>

IIOE promotes the creation of public education and promotes the level of digital competencies in developing countries.

All in all, UNESCO employs a comprehensive approach in the realm of inclusive education covering various spheres of human well-being. At the same time there are numerous international bodies focusing on specific vulnerable groups such as the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF), the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

When it comes to children's rights, UNICEF plays a pivotal role emphasizing that over 600 million children worldwide lack minimum proficiency levels in reading and mathematics.⁴⁸ UNICEF highlights that education is a basic human right. Therefore, the organization coordinates different programmes in order to provide access to education for children:

- **“Inclusive Education”**: this initiative concerns children with disabilities (240 million) aiming to create real learning opportunities for these groups. UNICEF promotes inclusive education in discussions and events outreach geared towards policymakers and the general public. Moreover, the UN body builds the capacity of national education systems by training teachers, and providing government with technical assistance;⁴⁹
- **“Girls’ Education”**: with 129 million girls out of school globally, UNICEF works to dismantle discriminatory gender norms. Its strategies include promoting social protection measures like cash transfers to improve girls' enrollment and retention in secondary school, implementing gender-responsive teacher training, and eliminating gender stereotypes from learning materials;⁵⁰
- **“Education in Emergencies”**: over 470 million children live in conflict zones. UNICEF helps children develop skills to cope with the trauma of a crisis, and supplies them with safe, child-friendly and equipped learning spaces with water and sanitation facilities. The agency strengthens education systems by training teachers, supplying learning materials and supporting governments to reduce the risk of disaster;⁵¹
- **Pioneers of Learning program**⁵²: an initiative covering Egypt, Ghana, Malaysia, Rwanda, Uzbekistan, and Zimbabwe. The program uses the "Mapping, Mapping and Implementation" approach;

⁴⁸ UNICEF. Education. – URL: <https://www.unicef.org/education>.

⁴⁹ UNICEF. Inclusive education. – URL: <https://www.unicef.org/education/inclusive-education>.

⁵⁰ UNICEF. Girls' education. – URL: <https://www.unicef.org/education/girls-education>.

⁵¹ UNICEF. Education in emergencies. – URL: <https://www.unicef.org/education/emergencies>.

⁵² UNICEF's Learning Pioneers Programme: Shaping the Future of Learning. – URL: <https://www.unicef.org/digitaleducation/stories/unicefs-learning-pioneers-programme-shaping-future-learning>

- **Learning Passport⁵³**: a digital platform that provides access to quality education not only for children, but also for teachers. It is also used in emergency situations.

Additionally, UNHCR works to ensure refugee children and young people can access quality education as it offers a stable and safe environment for displaced children, helps people to rebuild their communities, and enables them to pursue productive, meaningful lives. Of the 31.6 million refugees under UNHCR's mandate, approximately 14.8 million are refugee children of school age. Their access to education is limited, with almost half of them unable to attend school at all. As a result, three strategic objectives of Refugee Education 2030 are to promote equitable and sustainable inclusion in national education systems for refugees, asylum-seekers; to foster a safe environment that supports learning for all students, regardless of their legal status, gender or disability and to enable learners to use their education toward a sustainable future. The UNHCR cooperates with various funds and non-commercial organizations to promote refugee education. In 2010, LifeWorks partnered with UNHCR to fund the Community Technology Access Centre in Kenya's Kakuma Refugee camp so that refugees could advance their resettlement and employment opportunities. LifeWorks has also funded the Morneau Shepell Secondary School for Girls in Kakuma which now has more than 340 girls enrolled.⁵⁴

Summarizing, the international community is fretting about access to education and is developing strategies to solve the problem, drawing attention to each vulnerable group.

⁵³ Learning Passport.Transforming Societies through Education. – URL: <https://www.learningpassport.org>

⁵⁴ UNHCR. Education for Refugees. – URL: <https://www.unhcr.ca/our-work/ongoing-support/education/>.

CONCLUSION

Ensuring access to quality education for vulnerable populations in the Global South is one of the most significant challenges of modern global development. The analysis demonstrates the complex nature of educational inequality, which encompasses economic, social, cultural, and institutional aspects.⁵⁵

The complexity of the problem is reflected in the fact that vulnerable groups face multiple barriers at the same time. Regional features of the Global South, including a lack of educational infrastructure, a shortage of qualified personnel and limited financial resources, exacerbate the situation and create a vicious circle of educational exclusion.

The normative framework of international law, enshrined in the UNESCO Convention against Discrimination in Education, the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals and other international documents, provides clear legal grounds for combating educational inequality. However, the gap between the declared principles and their practical implementation remains significant, especially in the most vulnerable regions.

Innovative approaches to solving educational problems show promising results. Technological solutions such as adaptive learning platforms, mobile education, and digital literacy programs are able to overcome traditional barriers to access. Successful initiatives by UNESCO and UNICEF, including the Pioneers of Learning program, demonstrate the potential of scalable solutions to achieve educational equity.

Education is not only a fundamental human right, but also a key catalyst for socio-economic development. Investing in the education of vulnerable groups today is an investment in a more equitable and sustainable future for all of humanity. Only through ensuring equal access to quality education can the vicious cycle of poverty and inequality, which continues to hinder the development of millions of children and young people in the Global South, be broken.

⁵⁵ International Monetary Fund. The power of politics in education. – URL: <https://www.imf.org/ru/Publications/fandd/issues/2025/03/the-power-of-education-policy-amory-gethin>

GLOSSARY

1. Black excellence is a term for an extreme excellence demonstrated by Black people despite racist systems, beliefs, etc. that make it harder for them to achieve success or to be recognized for their accomplishments.

2. Disabilities are an umbrella term, covering impairments, activity limitations, and participation restrictions. An impairment is a problem in body function or structure; an activity limitation is a difficulty encountered by an individual in executing a task or action; while a participation restriction is a problem experienced by an individual in involvement in life situations.

3. Education 2030 Agenda is a part of the Sustainable Development Agenda, adopted in 2015 by the UN General Assembly. UNESCO monitors the implementation of the Education 2030 program.

4. Education Index is the combined indicator of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), which measures a country's achievements in terms of the educational attainment of its population.

5. Education for All is a global commitment to provide quality basic education for all children, youth and adults. At the World Education Forum (Dakar, 2000), 164 governments pledged to achieve EFA and identified six goals that must have been met by 2015.

6. Education World Forum (EWF) is the world's largest annual gathering of education and skills ministers, offering a unique, peer-to-peer, invitation-only platform for open and candid dialogue. It allows ministers to engage deeply, share insights and collaborate on solutions to the most pressing challenges in education.

7. High-quality education is a term for holistic education that promotes the acquisition of relevant knowledge, skills, and values. Such education provides access to learning opportunities for all people, regardless of their background, socio-economic status, or other characteristics. It also promotes active participation, critical thinking, and creativity.

8. Indigenous peoples are tribal peoples in independent countries whose social, cultural and economic conditions distinguish them from other sections of the national community, and whose status is regulated wholly or partially by their own customs or traditions or by special laws.

9. Migrant worker is a person who is to be engaged, is engaged or has been engaged in a remunerated activity in a State of which he or she is not a national (International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families in 1990).

10. Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) are eight international development goals that the UN member states and international organizations have agreed to achieve by 2015. The goals include reducing extreme poverty, reducing child mortality, combating epidemic diseases, and expanding global development cooperation.

11. Racial discrimination is any distinction, exclusion, restriction or preference based on race, colour, descent, or national or ethnic origin which has the purpose or effect of nullifying or impairing the recognition, enjoyment or exercise, on an equal footing, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural or any other field of public life (International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination in 1969).

12. Refugee is a person, who, owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it (the Convention relating to the Status of Refugees in 1951 and the Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees in 1967).

13. Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG4) is also known as one of the Global Goals, which were adopted by the United Nations in 2015 as a universal call to action to end poverty, protect the planet, and ensure that by 2030 all people enjoy peace and prosperity. SDG4 is dedicated to the development of inclusive, accessible, high-quality education.

