**[A Roadmap to Better Data on Education Financing](https://norrag.wordpress.com/2015/10/08/a-roadmap-to-better-data-on-education-financing/)**

Posted on [October 8,](https://norrag.wordpress.com/2015/10/08/a-roadmap-to-better-data-on-education-financing/%22%20%5Co%20%229%3A15%20am)

By Silvia Montoya, Director of the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS), and Elise Legault,  Programme Specialist at UIS.

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Leaders have pledged to provide every child with [12 years of education by 2030](http://en.unesco.org/world-education-forum-2015/incheon-declaration). Yet today, about 124 million children and youth are denied a basic education, according to the [UNESCO Institute for Statistics](http://www.uis.unesco.org/) (UIS) and it will take considerable funding to reach them. To fill the gap, a [new high-level commission](http://educationenvoy.org/commission/) will be finding ways to raise more funds and make better use of existing resources. But to do this, they need accurate data on the financing of education. On the one hand, governments need detailed and disaggregated data to ensure that their resources are allocated equitably and effectively within their education systems. At the same time, donors need the data to better evaluate whether the aid they provide is an incentive for governments to increase spending commitments or if they are crowding-out domestic resources.

For the moment, the availability and completeness of education finance data is unfit for these purposes, with less than one-half of countries able to regularly report key information, such as total government expenditure on education, to the UIS. The UIS works closely with countries to help them collect the data from different sources, applying international standards and frameworks. This support is essential to produce the cross-nationally comparable indicators needed by governments and donors alike.

To address these issues, the UIS has released a new [study](http://www.uis.unesco.org/Education/Documents/a-roadmap-to-better-data-on-education-financing.pdf) comparing five initiatives involving the collection and compilation of education finance data:

* National Education Accounts (NEAs)—a comprehensive framework to compile data on education expenditure from all sources (government, international and private);
* Public Expenditure Reviews (PERs)—a tool to assess the effectiveness of government expenditure on all sectors;
* BOOST—[a more recent initiative](http://wbi.worldbank.org/boost/boost-initiative) where a detailed and comprehensive Excel database on government expenditure is put together;
* Education Country Status Reports (CSRs or RESEN)—in-depth analysis of the education sector covering financing but also enrolment, teachers, outcomes, policy, etc.; and
* The UIS-UOE (UNESCO-OECD-Eurostat) annual data collection on education financing, through a survey sent to all countries. The data are published internationally.

**Key findings**

The study found that, while each of the tools has a different scope and purpose and the data they produce vary greatly in terms of coverage, disaggregation, usability and regularity, there are a number of similarities and overlaps. To reduce duplication, collaboration should be fostered between the different agencies so that the tools can be better linked, for two main reasons.

First, this would improve the **effectiveness** with which education finance data are collected. Currently, the same data can be processed multiple times through various tools, sometimes in collaboration with the same (often overburdened) government units.

The second reason is that different data processing methods can yield different results in the same country for the same year, which can potentially create confusion among data users and raise concerns over **data quality**.

Based on the study, the UIS has developed a strategy to leverage the different tools in order to produce the indicators needed for evidence-based policymaking. This strategy will involve close coordination with all of the key partners, while the UIS retains its role as the main source of finance data at the international level, given its mandate and expertise to produce cross-nationally comparable data on education.

**Step 1: Coordination and collaboration**

Collaboration is often easier said than done. So as a first step, we propose that the [Global Partnership for Education](http://www.globalpartnership.org/) coordinate the complementary use of the different tools in its relevant countries and sequence the different activities and subsequent reporting of data to the UIS. At the same time, the [UNESCO International Institute for Educational Planning](http://www.iiep.unesco.org/en) (IIEP) and the [IIEP/Pôle de Dakar](https://www.iipe-poledakar.org/en) should continue to lead initiatives on sector planning at the country level. All of this work should build on the experience and on-going activities of the World Bank in public expenditure tracking and management.

**Step 2: Adapt the strategy to country context**

Any viable strategy should build on what already exists. Most countries have a number of existing data sources on education expenditure, with various degrees of consolidation into a ‘data system’. In some cases, these systems are relatively well-functioning and able to produce at least some data which can be used for national policy planning and international reporting.

Governments and international partners could choose the right tool by conducting an appraisal that maps existing systems, financing flow, as well as the policy and planning context for potential data sources. For example, the best strategy for a country may be to focus on a new data collection or the strengthening of an existing data collection system, rather than doing an NEA.

**Step 3: Find a balance between data coverage, quality and regularity**

In any data collection and consolidation exercise, there is a tension between producing regular and quickly available data versus data that are more comprehensive and of greater quality. For example, data on government expenditure can be obtained more easily than data on private expenditure or external assistance. Similarly, each level of disaggregation implies either a more sophisticated data tracking system or the use of complementary data and estimations.

Balancing those two realities calls for a strategy which can both provide quick and regular basic data, while gradually improving their quality and coverage. So it is advisable to take a step-by-step approach, where each phase updates existing data, adds new data and improves the overall quality. This could follow an annual dissemination schedule that starts, for example, with government expenditure data. Every few years a country could do a more in-depth sectoral review (i.e. through a CSR or other sector planning tools) using financing data from that system instead of starting from scratch each time.

**Step 4: Align methodologies**

Clearly, a comprehensive strategy is needed to align the methodologies of the different initiatives. To be sustainable, we propose a step-by-step approach to data collection and processing, based on a methodology that can serve multiple purposes (i.e. national policymaking and international reporting and comparisons) and anticipate the next steps.

The NEA methodology—which is still being developed—could serve as a foundation since it considers the whole system from the onset and is based on international classifications, while providing flexibility for national contexts.

**Conclusion**

As the source of internationally comparable data on education, the UIS is in a unique position to convene all of the stakeholders – from the country to international level. Together, we can strengthen coordination and significantly improve the situation for all parties, especially the national statisticians struggling to provide the data.

*Silvia Montoya (@montoya\_sil) is the Director of the*[*UNESCO Institute for Statistics*](http://www.uis.unesco.org/)*(@UNESCOstat).*

*Elise Legault is a Programme Specialist on Education Finance Data at the UNESCO Institute for Statistics.*

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