4th International Conference on Equitable Education

"Designing Tomorrow's Equity: Equitable Solutions for Out-of-School Children and Youth by 2030 and Beyond"

Equitable Education Conference 2026

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The Equitable Education Fund (EEF) Thailand, together with the UNESCO Regional Office in Bangkok and Office for UN Coordination for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCO Bangkok) and partner organizations under the Equitable Education Alliance (EEA), convened the 4th International Conference on Equitable Education on 23–24 October 2026 at IMPACT Forum, Nonthaburi, Thailand. Held under the theme "Designing Tomorrow's Equity: Equitable Solutions for Out-of-School Children and Youth by 2030 and Beyond," the conference aims to advance collaborative, evidence-based solutions to address the challenges faced by out-of-school children and youth, while fostering education systems that are equitable, inclusive, and resilient for the future.

Designing Tomorrow's Equity in the Final Stretch Toward SDG 4



Dr Kraiyos Patrawart, Managing Director, Equitable Education Fund (EEF) Thailand

As the international community enters the final stretch toward the 2030 Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4) target, education leaders confront an urgent challenge: ensuring that every child and young person possesses not merely physical access to schooling, but meaningful and credible opportunities to learn, progress, and thrive.

According to UNESCO's 2026 Global Education Monitoring (GEM) Report, an estimated 273 million children, adolescents, and youth worldwide remain out of school. While global educational access has expanded substantially in recent decades, enrollment gains have not consistently translated into equitable outcomes. Globally, one in three young people fails to complete secondary education, while across Eastern and South-Eastern Asia, approximately 77 million adolescents remain excluded at the upper secondary level.

Against this backdrop, more than 40 leading education organizations from 21 countries—comprising policymakers, educators, researchers, civil society leaders, and youth representatives—convened at the IMPACT Forum in Nonthaburi, Thailand, for **the 4th International Conference on Equitable Education (All for Education / AFE 2026).** Convened jointly by the Equitable Education Fund (EEF) Thailand and UNESCO Bangkok within the framework of the Equitable Education Alliance (EEA), the conference serves as an action-oriented platform to accelerate systemic solutions to educational exclusion.

Held under the theme **"Designing Tomorrow's Equity: Equitable Solutions for Out-of-School Children and Youth by 2030 and Beyond,"** the convening seeks to translate practice-based evidence into policy action while shaping the international education discourse beyond 2030.

The conference commenced with welcome remarks from co-hosting leaders, **Ms. Soohyun Kim, Regional Director of the UNESCO Regional Office in Bangkok and Office for UN Coordination for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCO Bangkok),** and **Dr. Kraiyos Patrawart, Managing Director of EEF (Thailand),** followed by opening remarks from **Associate Professor Dr. Prawit Erawan, Permanent Secretary for the Ministry of Education, Thailand.** Reaffirming that equitable education remains a paramount national priority, Dr. Prawit emphasized Thailand's commitment to ensuring every learner reaches their full potential. He spotlighted the government's flagship Thailand Zero Dropout Plus policy, an inter-ministerial initiative deploying linked administrative databases to identify out-of-school children and re-engage them through customized learning and vocational routes. Dr. Prawit also highlighted structural reforms, including cutting redundant reporting by over 70% to restore teaching time across 30,000 schools, and establishing the Credit Bank alongside stackable micro-credentials to bridge education with employment. Amid rapid technological and demographic changes, he stressed the necessity of designing learning systems that are inclusive, resilient, and responsive to diverse learner realities.

Deliberations across the conference are structured around 4 interconnected thematic pillars

1. Flexible Learning Pathways

Scaling alternative, modular, and blended learning models across formal, non-formal, and informal settings to accommodate learners' livelihoods and support certified qualification completion.

2. Data and Early Warning Systems

Leveraging linked administrative data and predictive AI tools to identify at-risk learners early, enabling timely intervention before dropout occurs.

3. Equitable and Sustainable Financing Policies

Reforming public budgeting toward needs-based allocation formulas. With only one in five countries maintaining explicit equity-targeted financing, progressive funding models are vital to channel resources to the most disadvantaged schools and learners.

4. Strengthening Multisectoral Collaboration

Mobilizing cross-sector ecosystems across education, social development, public health, local government, and the private sector to dismantle the complex socioeconomic barriers surrounding out-of-school youth.

Together, these pillars embody the collective recognition that educational equity must be systematically embedded across governance, finance, data architectures, and community delivery to realize SDG 4.

Crucially, insights and recommendations emerging from the proceedings will directly inform the Outcome Document on Equitable Education by 2030 and Beyond. This strategic document will feed into UNESCO-led regional and global policy processes, including preparations for the 7th Asia-Pacific Meeting on Education (APMED7) in 2027 and consultations on the post-2030 global education agenda. Furthermore, the evidence will support regional efforts toward an ASEAN Zero Dropout Declaration as Thailand prepares for its 2028 ASEAN Chairmanship.

As delegates underscored throughout the opening proceedings, achieving genuine equity requires far more than expanding school access. It demands redesigning systems to fit learners' lived realities—ensuring every child has the support to learn, succeed, and reach their full potential.



Assoc. Prof. Dr. Prawit Erawan
Permanent Secretary for the Ministry of Education

Across Asia and the Pacific, we need to turn data into action, expand flexible learning pathways linked to skills and the world of work, and advance equitable and sustainable financing. As we look towards education beyond 2030, accelerating progress today is essential. Children and young people who are out of school cannot wait.



Ms Soohyun Kim

Regional Director of the UNESCO Regional Office in Bangkok and Office for UN Coordination for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCO Bangkok)

When children cannot fit into our education systems, we should not simply ask how to bring them back. We must ask how our systems can change to meet their needs. EEF (Thailand) stands ready to leverage lessons from Thailand Zero Dropout Plus, joining forces with UNESCO and regional partners to elevate this agenda across the region, paving the way toward the adoption of a joint ASEAN Zero Dropout Declaration during Thailand's ASEAN Chairmanship in 2028. The evidence, insights, and recommendations emerging from AFE 2026 will serve as vital catalysts in shaping this declaration—ensuring that no child or young person in our region is ever left behind.



Dr Kraiyos Patrawart

Managing Director of the Equitable Education Fund (EEF) Thailand

Introductory Remarks

Mobilizing All Sectors for Equitable Education and Lifelong Learning

Speaker: Khunying Kasama Varavarn, Vice Chair of the Governing Board of the Equitable Education Fund and Former Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Education Thailand

Educational attainment in Thailand has expanded significantly across generations. In 2025, average years of schooling reached 11.18 years among people aged 15–39, compared to 9.47 years among those aged 40–59 and 6.13 years among individuals aged 60 and above. While this generational progress demonstrates what sustained public investment and long-term policy commitments can achieve, it prompts an essential policy question: "Who is still being left behind, and why?"

In her introductory remarks on mobilizing all sectors, **Khunying Kasama Varavarn** underscored that equitable lifelong learning rests on 5 interconnected dimensions

1. **Access** - ensuring every learner can enter education.
2. **Inclusion** - cultivating a deep sense of belonging and meaningful participation.
3. **Equity** - providing differentiated support according to specific needs.
4. **Relevance** - connecting learning directly to learners' lived realities and livelihoods.
5. **Quality** - fostering deep and empowering competencies.

Together, these 5 foundational pillars construct a caring, supportive ecosystem in which learning flourishes across every stage of life.

Initiatives expanding inclusive education have been profoundly strengthened through the self-advocacy and active leadership of persons with disabilities themselves. Furthermore, ethnic minority educators are serving not only as teachers but as vital cultural bridges





Khunying Kasama Varavarn,
Vice Chair of the Governing Board of the Equitable Education Fund and Former Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Education Thailand

and community role models, while Local Administrative Organizations (LAOs) play an indispensable role in financing supplementary learning, broadening localized educational access, and providing schools with adaptive technologies tailored to area-based needs.

These grassroots practices underscore a fundamental truth: no single sector can achieve educational equity alone. Different sectors connect with different facets of learners' lives and contribute distinct, complementary strengths. Governments, communities, educators, civil society, faith networks, and local authorities must align as a unified ecosystem.

As disparities in educational quality persist, building a truly equitable education system demands sustained cross-sectoral solidarity, continuous innovation, and an unwavering commitment to ensuring that every learner—regardless of socioeconomic background—can participate, belong, and thrive throughout life.

Youth Voices Bring Learner Perspectives to the Forefront

Placing youth at the core of transformative change, the Youth Voices segment brought together youth leaders from Viet Nam, Thailand, and Indonesia. Their lived experiences highlighted a pivotal principle of AFE 2026: future education systems must be intentionally co-designed with and responsive to the learners they serve.

SPEAKER:
Ms. Thai Quynh Phuong
Vice Chair, Hanoi Deaf Association | VAEFA (Viet Nam)



True equitable education goes far beyond simply getting children into school. Without sign-language support and accessible teaching, special-need students face major barriers that hold back their studies and future careers. Every learner with a disability deserves access to quality education that helps them overcome obstacles, reach their full potential, and pursue their dreams with dignity.

SPEAKER:
Mr Palathip Pimsuwan (Thailand)
Young People's Advisory Board Member, UNICEF Thailand.



Coming from a low-income family, I see educational equity in two key areas, opportunity and quality. Students from financially disadvantaged backgrounds usually receive far less of both. While scholarships help keep students in school, financial support alone cannot make things fair. We must fix both unequal opportunities and unequal learning environments so every child has a genuine chance to succeed.

SPEAKER:
Ms Dhia Armidha Zumarina (Indonesia)
Youth leader and activist with the Network for Education Watch (NEW).



We cannot solve educational inequality simply by opening school doors. Poverty, gender, disability, and geography affect young people in very different ways. The biggest barriers often exist outside the classroom and cannot be solved by education policies alone. If we want true equity, our policies must adapt to the real-life circumstances of learners, rather than expecting learners to fit into rigid systems.

PLENARY SESSION 1

High-Level Panel Discussion on Flexible Learning Pathways for Out-of-School Children and Youth

Moderator: Dr Rika Yorozu, Team Leader, Equitable Education and Lifelong Learning, UNESCO Regional Office in Bangkok and Office for UN Coordination for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCO Bangkok)

Speakers:
1. Mr Siripong Angkasakulkiat, Chairman of Thailand Zero Dropout Sub-committee on Flexible and Integrated Learning Systems for Out-of-school Children and Youth (Thailand)
2. Ms Sehar Taimoor, Education Advisor, Save the Children
3. Ms Severine Leonardi, Deputy Representative, UNICEF Thailand
4. Mr Uwe Gartenschlaeger, Regional Director, DVV International Regional office (Lao PDR)

The conference's first plenary session explored how education systems can transform to better respond to the multifaceted challenges that lead children and young people to disengage from, drop out of, or never enter formal schooling. Moderated by **Dr. Rika Yorozu of UNESCO Bangkok,** the high-level panel brought together leading perspectives from government, international development organizations, and lifelong learning practitioners to examine how flexible learning pathways can support diverse learners both inside and outside conventional education systems.

A central focus of the session was Thailand's flagship Thailand Zero Dropout Plus initiative. **Mr. Siripong Angkasakulkiat** detailed how the government integrated cross-ministerial Big Data to locate and support an initial cohort of over one million out-of-school children and youth. Driven by 4 key operational measures—proactive identification, individual case tracking and welfare support, flexible high-quality learning, and private-sector partnership—the initiative has successfully reduced the verified caseload to approximately 600,000. He emphasized that no single sector can tackle exclusion alone, noting that many vulnerable youth require flexible modalities that allow them to earn a living while completing their studies.

Focusing on systemic prevention, **Ms. Severine Leonardi** highlighted that dropping out is rarely an abrupt event, but rather a gradual, observable process of school disengagement. Effective prevention requires robust early warning mechanism, nurturing classroom environments, and professional development that equips teachers to meet varied learning paces. Crucially, she emphasized that alternative, accelerated, and community-based models must provide certified, stackable qualifications—reaffirming that flexibility must never be equated with second-rate educational quality.

Addressing crisis and migration contexts, **Ms. Sehar Taimoor** shared lessons from supporting Rohingya learners in Bangladesh, stressing that flexible education for displaced children must blend foundational academic learning with practical life skills, language competencies, and livelihood preparation to facilitate future reintegration into formal systems. Expanding to a broader lifelong learning vision, **Mr. Uwe Gartenschlaeger** argued that rapid technological, environmental, and economic shifts mean schooling during childhood alone is no longer adequate. Education systems must institutionalize second-chance education, establish robust mechanisms for the recognition of prior learning (RPL), and foster adaptive curiosity across all stages of life.

In their closing consensus, the panelists affirmed that valuable learning occurs far beyond traditional classrooms—in homes, community centres, and workplaces. The pressing challenge for educational leaders is designing responsive frameworks that formally connect, recognize, and finance these diverse experiences, ensuring that every learner can convert their learning into sustainable life opportunities.



