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

2nd Issue




*Concluding the 4th International Conference on Equitable Education (AFE 2026)—co-organized by the Equitable Education Fund (EEF) Thailand, UNESCO Bangkok, the Princess Maha Chakri Award Foundation, and the Ministry of Education Thailand—the second day translated high-level policy dialogue into practical action. Gathering over 2,270 hybrid participants under the theme "Designing Tomorrow's Equity," the day's plenary and parallel sessions explored flexible learning pathways, AI-driven early warning systems, equitable financing, and multisectoral collaboration. Driven by the youth-reinforced consensus that educational exclusion cannot be solved by schools alone, discussions focused on a shared mission: building flexible, inclusive, and resilient education systems that adapt to the diverse lived realities of out-of-school children and youth.*

## PLENARY SESSION 2

### Equitable and Sustainable Financing: Innovative Approaches to Ensure Tomorrow's Equity

**Moderator:** Dr Sahawarat Polahan, Director of the Equitable Education Research Institute (EEFI) (Thailand)
**Speakers:**
1. Mr John Brooker, General Manager, System, Connections and Early Learning Policy, Ministry of Education (New Zealand)
2. Ms Sana Kazi, Assistant Director, ImpactCollab, AVPN (Singapore)
3. Mr Peerawit Khantisuk, Advisor to the Minister of Education (Thailand)
4. Mr Dilaka Lathapipat, Human Development Economist, East Asia and Pacific, World Bank

Emphasizing that education spending is an essential investment in human capital, the session highlighted the structural shift from flat individual funding to needs-based budget allocations driven by integrated data systems and equity indices. Featuring **John Brooker, Sana Kazi, Peerawit Khantisuk,** and **Dilaka Lathapipat,** the panel examined evidence-based tools, including New Zealand's Equity Index (EQI) and Thailand's Fundamental School Quality Level (FSQL) framework—alongside innovative outcomes-based financing models mobilizing private and philanthropic capital. Crucially, panellists concluded that translating evidence into equitable policy requires sustained multi-year research commitments, multisectoral collaboration, and progressive funding formulas that guarantee resources reach the most underserved learners.



## PARALLEL SESSION 1

### Designing and Delivering Flexible Learning for Learners Across All Ages

**Moderator:** Dr Faryal Khan, Education Programme Specialist, UNESCO Regional Office in Bangkok and Office for UN Coordination for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCO Bangkok)

**Speakers:**
1. Ms Saveri Kulshreshth, Lead, Operations, Direct Elementary Programs, Pratham Education Foundation (India)
2. Mr Niwat Ngenngammeesuk, Princess Maha Chakri Award (PMCA) 2023 Thailand Recipient Teacher, Ban Mokokhi "Mae Fah Luang" Hill Area Community Learning Centre, Tak Province (Thailand)
3. Mr Cahyo Prihadi, Operation Department Manager, Gugah Nurani Indonesia (Good Neighbors Indonesia)



It explored how education systems can transcend conventional classroom boundaries by designing flexible, learner-centred models tailored to diverse life circumstances. Drawing on successful grassroots innovations across Asia, discussions highlighted that equitable education requires adapting learning pathways to the lived realities of out-of-school children and youth. The session demonstrated how alternative delivery modalities, culturally responsive community-based education, and integrated vocational skills development can successfully re-engage marginalized learners across all ages. Emphasizing localized delivery, the dialogue underscored the necessity of foundational learning interventions, area-based models for remote highland and ethnic minority communities, and pathways that directly link basic education to livelihood creation. Ultimately, flexibility must become a mainstream educational option, ensuring that learners facing the greatest systemic barriers have credible opportunities to reach their full potential.

## PARALLEL SESSION 2

### Early Warning Systems and AI-Integrated Approach — Bridging Research, Evidence-Based Policy, and Implementation

**Moderator:** Mr Fuat Edi Kurniawan, Research, Evaluation and Assessment Specialist, Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organization Secretariat (SEAMEO Secretariat)

**Speakers:**
1. Dr Nik Fatihah binti Nik Abdullah, Senior Principal Assistant Director, School Management Division, Ministry of Education (Malaysia)
2. Dr Woralak Kongdenfha, Faculty of Engineering, Naresuan University (Thailand)
3. Dr Irene Psifidou, Senior Expert, VET for youth - Teachers and trainers Team Leader, Department for VET and Skills Coordinator of European Network of Ambassadors for Tackling Early Leaving from VET, European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training




The session addressed the critical operational shift from reactive intervention to proactive dropout prevention under the core principle of turning early warning into early action. Discussions examined how integrated administrative databases and school-level information systems can detect multidimensional vulnerabilities before dropout occurs. By leveraging responsible, human-centred artificial intelligence, policymakers and educators can accurately identify early indicators of disengagement, such as chronic absenteeism or sudden socioeconomic shocks. Crucially, the session stressed that predictive analytics must directly empower frontline teams. By aligning teachers, school counsellors, social workers, and communities, systems can provide timely, individualized support. Furthermore, ethical frameworks and data privacy safeguards are paramount, ensuring that early identification leads to nurturing, non-stigmatizing interventions that keep at-risk learners engaged, supported, and securely on their path to educational completion.

# PARALLEL SESSION 3

## Financing the Last Mile — Policy Pathways to Education Equity

**Moderator:** Mr Nyi Nyi Thaung, Education Programme Specialist, UNESCO Regional Office in Bangkok and Office for UN Coordination for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCO Bangkok)

**Speakers:**
1. Associate Professor Dr Sunok Jo, Graduate School of Education, Inje University (Republic of Korea)
2. Mr Rene Raya, Regional Advocacy Coordinator and Lead Policy Analyst, Asia South Pacific Association for Basic and Adult Education (ASPBAE)
3. Mr Saravoot Yoovidhya, Chief Executive Officer, T.C. Pharmaceutical Industries Company Ltd.

The session examined targeted financial mechanisms to ensure resources reach the most underserved learners. Discussions highlighted the necessity of equity-oriented budgeting and needs-based funding reforms, emphasizing that public education investment must actively prioritize marginalized communities. The session explored innovative pathways—such as targeted learning vouchers to expand flexible access—alongside fiscal policies connecting education with public finance authorities. Crucially, participants stressed that public investment must be strategically complemented by private-sector contributions and school–community collaborations, building a sustainable funding ecosystem capable of closing systemic equity gaps and successfully financing the last mile.




# PARALLEL SESSION 4

## Leveraging Education Financing through Sustainable Education Partnerships for Equity in the Age of Global Transitions

**Moderator:** Mr Uwe Gartenschlaeger, Regional Director, DVV International Regional office (Lao PDR)

**Speakers:**
1. Mr Kalidou Ousmane Coulibaly, Innovative Finance Analyst, Global Partnership for Education (GPE) (France)
2. Ms Ayesha Yaqub Vawda, Principal Social Sector Specialist, Asian Development Bank (ADB), HQ
3. Mr Kelvin Hui, Senior Specialist, Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) (China)

It explored innovative, sustainable financing partnerships to safeguard education equity amid rapid global transitions. Deliberations focused on mobilizing catalytic capital beyond conventional public budgets, examining mechanisms such as blended finance, debt-to-education conversions, results-based funding, and strategic philanthropic investments. The session emphasized that protecting vulnerable learners from external shocks requires moving toward coordinated multi-partner compacts. Crucially, panellists underscored that transparent governance, mutual accountability, and robust impact measurement are essential preconditions for establishing resilient financing partnerships that sustain quality, flexible learning pathways for marginalized and vulnerable learners across all communities.



# PLENARY SESSION 3

## Strengthening Multisectoral Collaboration for OOSCY Solutions

**Moderator:** Ms Jenelle Babb, Regional Advisor, Education for Health and Well-being, UNESCO Regional Office in Bangkokand Office for UN Coordination for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCO Bangkok)

**Speakers:**
1. Mr Mario Piacentini, Senior Analyst, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)
2. Ms YUAN Wen, Former President of the Shanghai Normal University, People's Republic of China and Governing Board Member of the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL)
3. Dr Teerapa Pirohakul, Advisor to the Minister of Education (Thailand)
4. Mr Callum Mackenzie, Co-Founder & Managing Director, Yunus Thailand

The session examined systemic strategies to dismantle the complex socioeconomic barriers confronting out-of-school children and youth, reinforcing that no child leaves education for educational reasons alone. Discussions showcased how digital platforms can transform classroom learning assessments, how lifelong learning cities mobilize urban ecosystems, and how social business models alleviate family economic hardship to sustain learning continuity. Highlighting data-integrated Zero Dropout models as an actionable blueprint for an expanded regional ASEAN Zero Dropout framework, the panel called for institutionalized, cross-sectoral coordination uniting education, healthcare, social welfare, local governments, and employers. In conclusion, bridging the gap between intention and impact hinges on genuine inter-agency synergy and enduring policy stability, ensuring collective safety nets consistently protect at-risk youth across shifting political cycles.



# AFE 2026 Outcomes: 5 Priorities for Flexible, Learner-Centred Systems

*(Synthesized policy directions from two days of deliberations and youth perspectives to shape education towards 2030 and beyond)*

1. **Flexible Learning Pathways**
   Mainstream alternative learning, Credit Banks, and the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL). Education must connect foundational learning directly with vocational skills, livelihood opportunities, and careers.
2. **Inclusive Data & Early Warning Systems**
   Operationalize the principle of "turning early warning into early support" through linked administrative databases and ethical, human-centred AI. This empowers teachers, counsellors, and communities to intervene before learners drop out.
3. **Equitable Financing**
   Transition from flat individual budgeting to progressive, needs-based funding formulas informed by equity indices and disaggregated data, while catalyzing blended investments from private and philanthropic partners.
4. **Multisectoral Collaboration**
   Anchor system delivery on the consensus that "no child leaves education for educational reasons alone". Education, healthcare, social welfare, local authorities, and employers must build integrated safety nets with long-term policy continuity.
5. **Foresight Beyond 2030**
   Build systemic resilience against climate emergencies and economic disruptions. Close the digital divide through affordable assistive technologies, and expand flexible lifelong reskilling/upskilling aligned with dynamic labour markets.




**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)**

## Regional Perspectives and Closing Commitments

***"Equity must become the guiding principle in education system design, supported by 3 pillars: early prevention, flexible learning pathways, and cross-sector collaboration. The Equitable Education Alliance (EEA) serves as a vital platform to translate evidence and shared commitments into systems that embrace every child.***



**Dr. Datuk Habibah Abdul Rahim**
Director,
SEAMEO Secretariat

***"Education is a non-negotiable fundamental right. Lao PDR is expanding non-formal education and digital qualification equivalency to reduce the financial burden on vulnerable families, drawing inspiration from Thailand Zero Dropout Plus as an example of policy courage for our entire region.***




**Mr. Souphap Khounvixay**
Deputy Director-General,
Department of Non-Formal Education,
Ministry of Education and Sports, Lao PDR

***"We cannot discuss educational equity without flexible learning pathways becoming mainstream. Rather than expecting children to adapt to a rigid system and bear the costs alone, we must design education around their lived realities. The evidence from AFE 2026 is clear: preventing children from dropping out is vastly more effective and sustainable than trying to re-engage them after they have already left.***




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

## The Path to ASEAN Zero Dropout 2028

The outcomes of AFE 2026 will immediately feed into regional and global policy platforms, including the 7th Asia-Pacific Meeting on Education (APMED7) and the UNESCO Global Education Meeting (GEM) in Bangkok in 2027. These milestones will build collective momentum toward Thailand's ASEAN Chairmanship in 2028, driving the adoption of an ASEAN Zero Dropout Declaration to ensure every child and young person in Southeast Asia has the opportunity to learn, develop, and reach their full potential.