

HIGH-LEVEL GUIDANCE

The next step: Supporting marginalised learners to transition to school

Eight evidence-based strategies for policy and programme leaders.



This is a draft version currently undergoing peer review.

Why the transition gap is predictable and preventable

Millions of out-of-school children and youth (OOSCY) are returning to learning through Accelerated Education Programmes (AEPs) – flexible, age-appropriate pathways designed for those who missed out on school due to conflict, poverty, or displacement. But too many are lost in the transition to formal school. The transition point – when learners exit AEPs and attempt to enter formal education – is a weak link in the system. Most national education strategies ignore transitions entirely: only 6 of the 60 education sector plans (ESPs) analysed from countries implementing AEPs include strategies to support graduates after they graduate. But without clear pathways and actions to support transition, AEP graduates face significant challenges entering, and staying in, formal education.

New insights, based on published and quality-appraised unpublished evidence from 72 countries, reveal that transition challenges are specific, predictable and preventable. The following guidance is designed for policy and programme leaders and funders and includes a diagnostic tool to help decision makers adapt support by context. Concrete, evidence-based strategies to maximise transition success include aligning curriculum and certification across non-formal and formal systems; providing enrolment and post-enrolment support; creating inclusive and flexible school environments; and strengthening coordination and accountability mechanisms.

Eight actions to improve transitions to school

Drawing on the most comprehensive global evidence base to date, anchored in a pioneering synthesis method, Education.org has developed the ‘STEP Framework’ for Supporting Transitions through Evidence-Based Planning (STEP). The STEP Framework defines five transition stages, pinpoints the risks and opportunities at each stage, providing both cross-cutting and stage-specific strategies to optimise impact.

Below are eight actions (three cross-cutting and five step-specific) for education systems fully described in our companion synthesis *Transitions*. If embedded into policies and programmes – these can significantly improve the rate at which OOSCY successfully transition from AEPs to formal primary or secondary schools. Moreover, these strategies are applicable to alternative transition pathways, including transitions to further nonformal education, technical and vocational education and training (TVET), livelihoods, and more.

This guidance is part of a set of tools emerging from the evidence synthesis, and should be used along side the STEP Planning Tool.

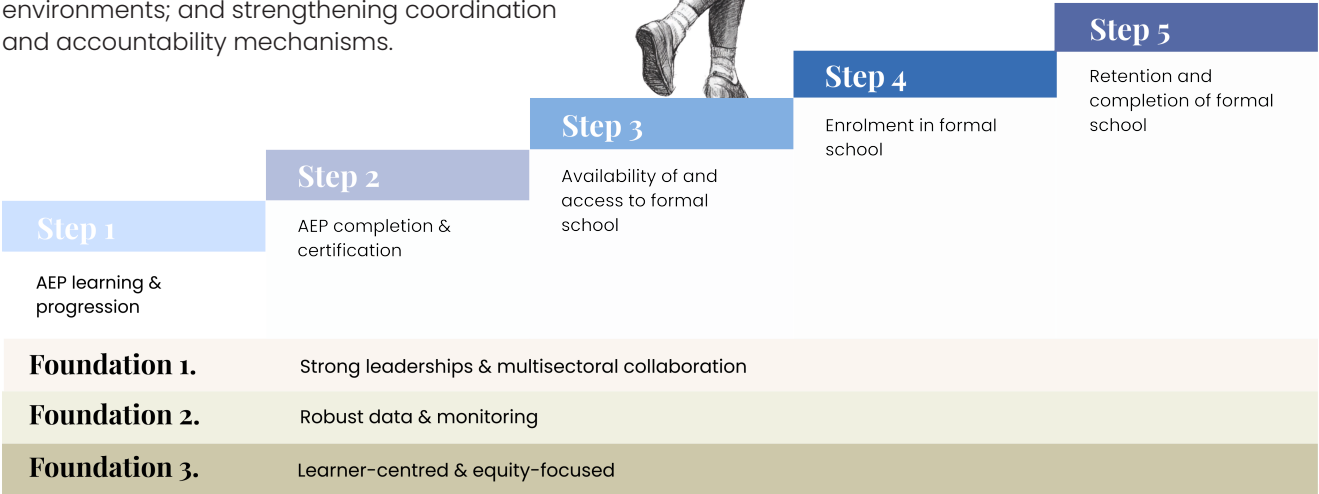


Figure 1: The STEP Framework can support effective transitions

The Supporting Transitions through Evidence-based Planning (STEP) Framework enables governments and programme leaders to target interventions, prioritise high-risk stages dependant on context, and deliver sustained support—especially for the most

marginalised learners: girls, boys, and youth from low-income and rural households, refugees, and children or adolescents with disabilities. The result: fewer learners lost, higher return on investment, and stronger, more equitable education systems.

Three actions underpin successful transitions:

Foundation 1. Foster collaboration amongst AEP, formal school, and community stakeholders,

by embedding opportunities for shared planning and decision-making along AEP transition stages. When these actors work together, transitions are smoother, expectations clearer, and learners better supported due to better use of resources and shared accountability and continuity.

Foundation 2. Enhance data and monitoring systems

and integrate AEP data into Education Management Information System (EMIS), by tracking learner progress in AEPs, their enrolment and retention in formal schools, as well as school-level data (e.g. on teachers, facilities, or resources) that help assess school readiness to absorb AEP graduates. Without this visibility, learners risk being lost in the system, and schools remain unprepared to meet their needs.

Foundation 3. Use a learner-centred and equity-focused approach,

tailoring policies and programmes to meet the needs of all learners throughout the transition journey. Many AEP learners face barriers linked to poverty, gender, displacement, or disability; maintaining a focus on equity and inclusion throughout the entire transition journey, and especially once learners enter formal schools, helps ensure that no learner is left behind.

Five step-specific actions:

Step 1. AEP learning and progression:

Align AEP curriculum and certification to formal school systems, covering foundational skills in literacy, numeracy, and social-emotional learning, and leveraging learners' home language, while at the same time integrating broader curricular subjects and the school language of instruction to help prepare learners for transitions to school. Without this

alignment, learners may complete a programme only to face academic or linguistic barriers that prevent successful entry and progression in school.

Step 2. AEP completion and certification:

Ensure AEP certification guarantees enrolment in formal school, by addressing stigma and discrimination related to non-formal schooling, and simplifying school enrolment policies, including entry exams. When certification doesn't lead to school access, learners are unfairly excluded despite completing their programme—undermining both their progress and the purpose of the pathway.

Step 3. Availability of and access to formal school:

Offer multiple flexible pathways after completing AEPs, considering transitions to formal school, as well as where transitions to TVET, work, or alternative pathways may be more appropriate, especially for older learners or in remote or fragile contexts where there may be limited school infrastructure. A one-size-fits-all approach risks leaving behind those for whom formal school is not accessible or appropriate.

Step 4. Enrolment in formal school:

Provide enrolment and post-enrolment support to AEP graduates, ensuring screening and placement strategies inform transition packages that address the unique academic, social, and material needs of learners once in school. Without this targeted assistance, learners may struggle to adapt and are at greater risk of dropping out shortly after enrolment.

Step 5. Retention and completion of formal school:

Create more inclusive and flexible formal school environments to ensure continued support for learners, by training teachers, offering school feeding or nutrition, removing financial barriers, and integrating remedial support, life skills, and extra-curricular activities. Many AEP graduates who enrol in formal school become disengaged once they return to traditional styles of teaching, rigid curricula, limited flexibility, or lack of individualised support.

Some actions may be more applicable or urgent than others, depending on the AEP model and/or the context in which it is operating. As a result, Education.org has developed a STEP Planning Tool, which delivers guidance on prioritisation (see accompanying document). Together, the STEP Framework and Planning Tool enable governments and partners to predict challenges and apply tailored interventions.

This guidance responds directly to government and programme leaders' calls for stronger evidence and practical examples of successful transitions following our [2023 Accelerated Education Programmes: An Evidence Synthesis for Policy Leaders](#). Our 2023 AEP synthesis identified nine key characteristics of effective AEPs that require strong government alignment. In this synthesis, we add a tenth critical characteristic, which directly shapes whether OOSCY transition successfully and thrive long-term: the relationship between AEPs, schools, and communities.

This High-Level Guidance, *The next step: Evidence-based strategies to support marginalised learners to transition to and thrive in school*, is part of a broader evidence-based toolkit, which includes an evidence synthesis and practical resources, designed to support education system leaders in making informed and impactful decisions to enhance successful transitions to school for marginalised children. Our earlier synthesis on Accelerated Education Programmes is available [here](#).

About Education.org

Education.org is an independent, non-profit initiative, dedicated to bringing the best available evidence to education leaders worldwide. Our mission is to improve the learning of every child and young person by helping leaders access and use the best evidence to guide their national policies and plans. We are distinctive in adding value both as a 'knowledge bridge' – connecting the right evidence with the right policymakers – and a 'knowledge integrator' in making this evidence useful.

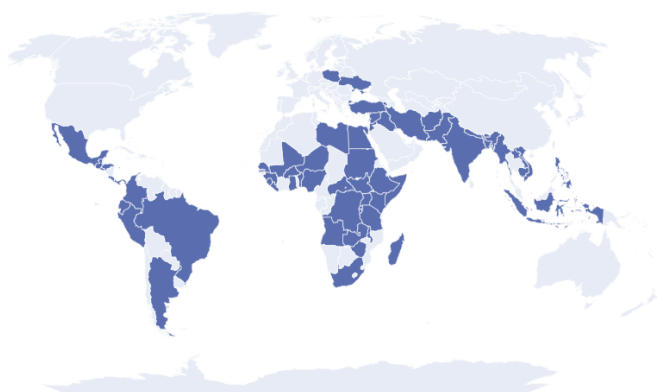
For more information about who we are and what we do, visit us at: www.Education.org.

Insights grounded in local, practice-informed evidence

- **385 academic and non-academic sources** reviewed covering 72 countries
- Programmatic evidence from **165 active AEPs**
- **60 national and subnational education sector plans** (ESPs) from 47 countries with active AEPs assessed

Each source was appraised for quality and relevance using Education.org's LIFTED approach, which widens the evidence base to ensure guidance is relevant and actionable.

Countries represented in the evidence:



Please cite as: Education.org. (2025). *The next step: Supporting marginalised learners to transition to school. Eight evidence-based strategies for policy and programme leaders* (forthcoming).



Education.org is hosted within and is an initiative of 'Insights for Education', a tax-exempt foundation registered in Switzerland (CHE-325.156.341). You can reach us either by e-mail at info@education.org or by post at: Seestrasse 156, 8810 Horgen, Switzerland.

This is a draft version currently undergoing peer review.