

INSIGHTS-IN-BRIEF

# The next step: Helping children successfully transition from alternative education to school

Practical steps for education system leaders and implementers based on evidence from 68 countries



## Securing a successful transition to school—increasing both enrolment and, crucially, retention—is a weak link in a non-formal education model that has otherwise proven successful.

An estimated 272 million children and youth are currently out-of-school (UNESCO, 2025). Millions of these young people are accessing learning through non-formal catch-up, bridging or alternative learning programmes. Some of these are Accelerated Education Programmes (AEPs), which provide learners with equivalent, certified competencies for basic education, enabling them to either return to formal schooling at an appropriate grade level or transition into work or further training (AEWG, 2020).

However, for a transition to be successful, learners should not only enrol in formal school, they must also thrive within it. This means finishing at least their first year and completing up to the level desired. Yet this is not always the case; few AEPs track successful transitions, and of those that do, the rate varies significantly. Longitudinal tracking data was available for less than one-fifth (18%) of the 188 active AEPs analysed to develop this guidance. For the 40 programmes (active and closed) with available data, the rate of successful transitions ranged from three to

Only **5 in 10** learners entering AEPs are expected to transition to formal school.



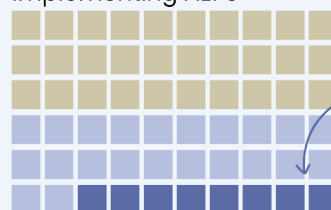
In contexts affected by crisis and fragility, this declines to **4 in 10** learners.

90%. We estimate that around 50% of learners entering AEPs successfully transition, defined by completing the first year of formal school; in crisis-affected settings that drops to just 40%.

## The challenges to a successful transition from an Accelerated Education Programme to school are predictable and preventable.

Transition pathways are hampered by a myriad of factors, including poverty, limited school infrastructure, rigid school schedules and curricula, inadequate funding and capacity, or fragmented coordination across non-formal and formal systems. Most national education strategies – often known as education sector plans (ESPs) – ignore transitions: only 8 of 60 ESPs in countries with AEPs include strategies to support learners after completion and half make no mention of AEPs. This highlights the limited policy attention given to AEPs and other non-formal

Of the **60 Education Sector Plans** from countries implementing AEPs



almost **half** did not mention AEPs;

and **only 8** included strategies to support AEP learners after they graduate.

education programmes. Without increased attention, enhanced cohesion between formal and non-formal education, and clear pathways and actions to facilitate transitions between the two, AEP graduates face significant challenges entering, and staying in, formal schools.

New insights, based on quality-appraised evidence from 68 countries and policies from 50 countries, using [a pioneering synthesis method, LIFTED](#), reveal that transition challenges are specific, predictable and preventable.

## A new STEP Framework for Supporting Transitions through Evidence-based Planning (STEP) breaks a learner's transition journey into a clear, five-step process and reveals actions to support progress.

Based on the most comprehensive AEP evidence analysis to date, this is the first time the learner's transition journey has been mapped out in a clear, five-step process. Each step includes recommended actions for governments, implementers, and donors – with a framework that can also be adapted to transitions into alternative pathways, such as skills and vocational training or employment. This Framework and corresponding toolkit were developed in response to an urgent need identified by education leaders for stronger evidence-based solutions for facilitating transitions to formal school. Furthermore, this work builds on Education.org's (2023) [High Level Guidance](#) and [synthesis on Accelerated Education Programmes](#), which outlined what policy makers can do to ensure the programmes' success.

The companion synthesis to this brief, 'Transitions to formal education: Evidence-based strategies to ensure all learners thrive in school', sets out these actions in more detail, offering practical steps that can be tailored not only for transitions from non-formal to formal education, but also for other key points in the learning journey faced by marginalised children and youth – such as starting

school or moving from primary to secondary. It also examines how alignment across curriculum, pedagogy, assessment, and support should be reciprocal, with formal systems drawing on lessons from AEPs to strengthen transitions.

## Close collaboration between AEPs, schools and the community is foundational to a successful transition.

The five steps are underpinned by one foundational 'must have', which directly shapes whether learners' transition successfully and thrive long-term: AEP, school, and community collaboration. An example of the impact of close collaboration is that learners are twice as likely to transition successfully when an AEP is either formally linked to a school or based within it.

### The 10 key characteristics of effective AEPs



This close collaboration is so critical, regardless of the AEP model or transition pathway, that we have added 'AEP, school and community collaboration' as a tenth characteristic of effective AEPs, building on the nine outlined in our [2023 synthesis](#).

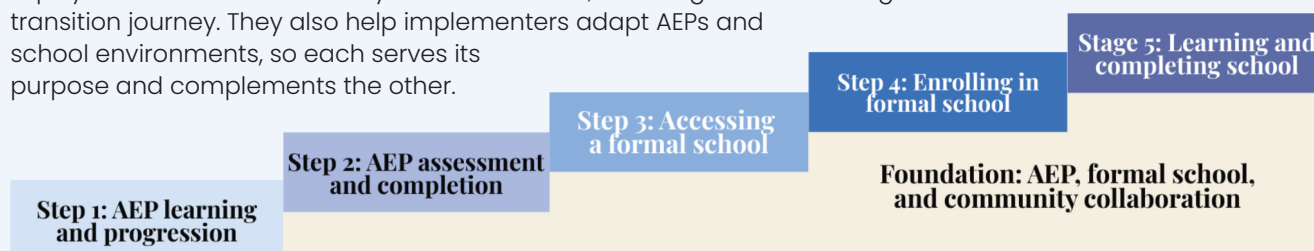
### Grounded in global evidence, designed for local impact

This guidance is based on Education.org's evidence synthesis '[Transitions to formal education: Evidence-based strategies to ensure all learners thrive in school](#)'. The underlying analysis is grounded in Education.org's [LIFTED](#) approach and draws on rigorously appraised sources from 2016–2024, including:

- Over **6000** sources of evidence screened
- **387** academic and field-based sources appraised – from **68** countries
- Evidence from **188** active Accelerated Education Programmes
- Analysis of **60** education sector plans, or equivalent documents, from **50** countries

## The STEP Framework provides evidence-based actions to address predictable challenges as learners transition from alternative education to school.

By defining five transition steps and one cross-cutting foundation for success, the Framework helps governments and programme leaders target funding and interventions, prioritise high-risk stages<sup>1</sup> based on context, and deliver sustained support, especially for marginalised learners: girls and boys from low-income and rural households, refugees, those affected by conflict or disaster, working adolescents and young parents, or children and youth with disabilities. These actions do more than open doors to school or other pathways, they help secure lasting learning outcomes and lay the foundation for young people to thrive. They ensure equity and inclusion extend beyond the AEP itself, following learners through their transition journey. They also help implementers adapt AEPs and school environments, so each serves its purpose and complements the other.



<sup>1</sup>A high-risk stage is any period in the journey where learners' exposure to risk factors peaks, either from the individual profile (who the learner is/what they face) or the system environment (how schools, services, governance, and accountability operate), such that the likelihood of harm, exclusion, or dropout materially increases.

# The STEP Framework: Actions to take across a learners journey

After reviewing the STEP Framework, turn to Table 1 and Table 2, which help identify high-risk stages and provide more detailed step-specific actions, along with additional policy and programme examples.



## Foundation: AEP, school and community collaboration

**Embed opportunities for ongoing collaboration, shared planning and decision-making.**

Meaningful engagement with communities, local and cultural leaders, and civil society sustains a focus on equity and addresses learners' educational and broader needs in health and protection, especially for girls, refugees, and learners with disabilities. Mutual accountability is vital, with government leadership, active local authorities, and stronger coordination across formal and non-formal education. Existing governance structures, such as school management committees or local education groups, can be leveraged to create an AEP technical working group, and appoint diverse stakeholders to monitor and oversee transitions. When actors collaborate, transitions are smoother, expectations clearer, and learners better supported through shared resources, accountability, and continuity.

In [Sierra Leone](#), each AEP centre has a ten-member Committee, including village chiefs, women leaders, male and female AEP learners, non-AEP youth, a Koranic teacher, and the formal school head teacher, who facilitates transitions to formal school.



## Step 1. AEP learning and progression

**Align AEPs to formal school curriculum competencies and include life skills.**

Effective AEPs engage national curriculum developers to identify and map essential knowledge and skills learners need to achieve proficiency in an accelerated timeframe. Delivering foundational learning through learner-centred pedagogy, home language of instruction, quality age-appropriate curricula and materials, and formative assessment is essential. But without integrating broader curricular subjects or the formal school language of instruction, learners may face academic or linguistic barriers. Life skills, such as social-emotional learning, can enhance transitions, when culturally relevant and backed by teacher training. Learners who can regulate their emotions, communicate, or resolve conflict, are more likely to thrive after they transition. These skills are particularly relevant for girls, young women, and displaced learners, who face adversity, violence, or trauma.

In [Senegal](#), learners who transitioned to formal schools, were more likely to have higher self-efficacy scores—a belief in their own ability to succeed—even when accounting for academic achievement.



## Step 2. AEP assessment and completion

**Ensure AEP completion guarantees eligibility to enrol in formal school.**

While more AEPs are now government-accredited, our analysis found only one in five ESPs reviewed address accreditation, certification, or assessment, and one in five donors didn't know if the AEP they fund is accredited. Government recognition of AEP learning is essential but not enough. Guidance must be provided on completion exams, with multiple exit points, and exam schedules aligned to school enrolment periods to prevent learners from falling behind. Stakeholders must also ensure exams and certification processes are accessible to all learners. This may involve providing academic and logistical support in the form of tutoring, transportation, or flexible testing regulations, particularly for low-income or refugee students who often face challenges. Biases towards non-formal education should also be addressed. When completion or certification doesn't lead to school access, learners are unfairly excluded despite completing their programme.

In [Kenya's](#) Dadaab refugee camp, RET International helped register AEP centres as private testing sites, reducing access barriers.



### Step 3. Accessing formal school

#### Create concrete linkages to schools and offer alternative transition pathways.

When AEPs are either based in schools or schools are explicitly designated to receive AEP graduates, learners are twice as likely to transition successfully. But in remote, rural, and fragile contexts, with limited school infrastructure, these connections are difficult to foster. And for older learners (boys and girls both) who work or have young children, transitions to skills and vocational training or employment may be a more viable option. Yet few AEPs offer these transition pathways. AEPs should provide multiple flexible pathways for learners to transition to, mapping local opportunities and creating clear guidance for learners to reach their next step. Designing transition pathways with communities is essential, as a one-size fits all approach risks leaving behind those for whom formal school is not accessible or appropriate.

A final evaluation of the TEAM Girl [Malawi](#) project, funded by the Girls' Education Challenge (GEC), found that the learner's age, programme design, and COVID-19 pandemic impacted girls' transition decisions, with only 17% of adolescent girls choosing to transition to primary school, 24% moving into vocational training or work, and 55% preferring self-employment.



### Step 4. Enrolling in formal school

#### Provide enrolment and post-enrolment support to AEP graduates.

Not all learners with access to a school choose to enrol in it. Enrolment is best facilitated when communities are mobilised, learners and their families are engaged in decision-making processes, and they have the knowledge, resources, or documentation to enrol. This may require providing administrative support, covering school fees, or negotiating access for marginalised girls, learners with disabilities, and undocumented learners. Yet only one in 60 ESPs reviewed articulate plans to support the re-enrolment of AEP graduates. Additionally, screening and placement processes are most effective when they inform transition packages that address the unique academic, social, and material needs of learners. Without this targeted assistance, learners may struggle to adapt and are at greater risk of dropping out shortly after enrolment.

In [Lebanon](#), the Norwegian Refugee Council provided a package of academic support, psychosocial services, and life skills training to learners who transitioned; those learners receiving remedial support were more likely to stay in school and progress to the next grade.



### Step 5. Learning and completing school

#### Create inclusive, flexible school environments to sustain support for learners.

Many AEP graduates disengage when faced with rigid teaching styles, inflexible curricula, and limited individual attention, increasing dropout risks. Yet, only two of 60 ESPs identify post-enrolment support. To improve retention, investments should include follow-up for AEP graduates, training teachers, and establishing academic, social-emotional, and remedial support programmes, including peer-to-peer initiatives that build positive relationships. Poverty and the opportunity costs of schooling are also a major cause of dropout for learners post-transition. Participation can be encouraged through school meals, financial support, and meeting learners' basic needs. Community engagement further strengthens governance and creates supportive environments for all learners.

In [Afghanistan](#) and [Uganda](#), GEC-funded projects tackled multiple barriers. Learning Support Teachers trained in gender-responsive methods were placed in schools; peer groups supported social integration; school monitoring tools guided improvement plans; and Village Savings and Loans Associations helped families invest in girls' education.

## Insights-in-action: Lessons on supporting successful transitions from countries around the world

### Kenya: Supporting refugee learners' social-emotional learning and integration into formal schools

When learners are confident, know how to communicate, think critically, and resolve conflicts, they are more likely to thrive in formal school after transitioning. Several AEPs in Kenyan refugee camps recognise the importance of social-emotional learning, especially for learners who have experienced trauma and adversity. To address this, NGOs, governments, and other stakeholders are embedding SEL into everyday classroom practices in AEPs and formal schools, training teachers, and ensuring refugee learners feel a sense of belonging in their new schools.

See [how this is happening up-close](#) by Save the Children and Norwegian Refugee Council.

### Colombia's FEMs: How teacher wellbeing can support students with successful transitions

Colombia's flexible education models (FEM) re-engage learners affected by conflict or displacement using accelerated learning and the development of social-emotional skills. National policies back this holistic approach, but local capacity varies, and NGOs often enhance implementation. Recognising that motivated teachers drive effective SEL, AEP implementers support educators with training, psychosocial care, and mentoring. These efforts improve student resilience and academic outcomes, especially among marginalised children and youth. Colombia's experience highlights that investing in teacher wellbeing isn't optional—it's central to

creating inclusive, responsive classrooms where learners thrive.

[Learn more](#) about Plan International, Norwegian Refugee Council, and Fundación Carvajal's support for teachers.

### Community-driven programmes improve learning and transitions for girls and other marginalised children

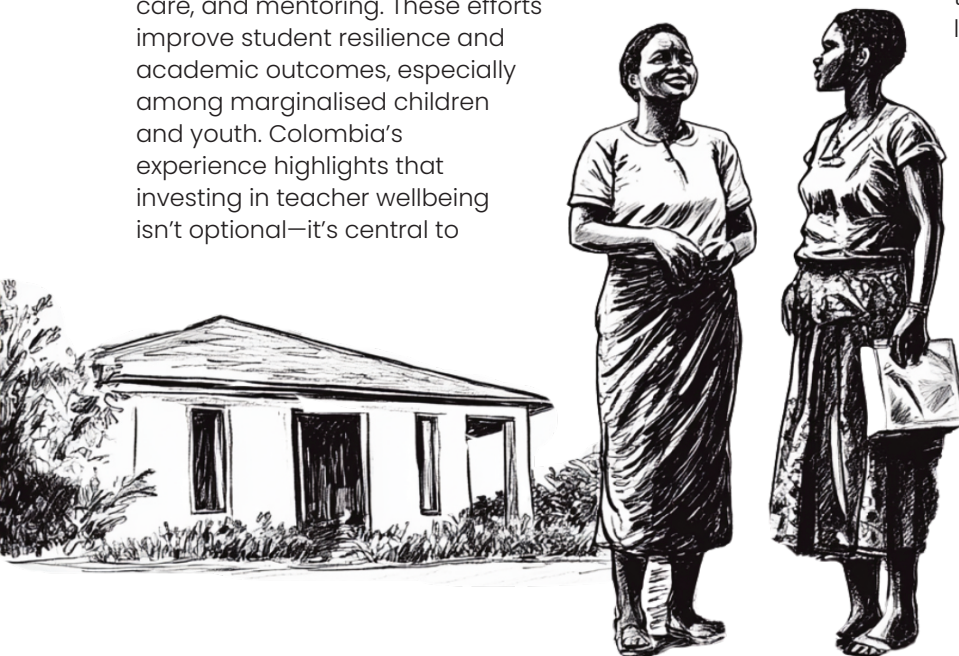
In Ghana and Sierra Leone, Complementary Basic Education (CBE) and other accelerated education programmes have helped thousands of out-of-school children—particularly girls and marginalised learners—develop foundational skills and transition successfully into formal schools. Government leadership has been central, with programmes aligned to policy frameworks and national curricula. Strong community participation ensures teaching reflects learners' contexts, including home languages. These efforts not only improve enrolment and transition but also shift social norms, reducing child labour, early marriage, rural-urban migration, and resistance to girls' education, creating more inclusive and sustainable pathways.

[Explore this research](#) conducted by Associates for Change and Dalan Development Consultants.

### Nigeria's ABEP and the importance of providing young people with transition options

Nigeria's Accelerated Basic Education Programme (ABEP) offers flexible learning and diverse transition options—formal schooling, vocational training, or livelihoods. Tailored to learners' ages and aspirations, ABEP recognises that one pathway doesn't fit all. With community involvement and supportive policies, the programme meets learners where they are. Early results show strong academic progress, though challenges persist, including inconsistent funding and limited infrastructure. ABEP demonstrates that under strong government leadership, multiple pathways can promote transitions and lasting success for out-of-school youth.

[Discover more](#) about creating multiple pathways to support transitions.



## Ethiopia and Uganda: how the Speed School programme improves teaching beyond non-formal education

Speed Schools in Ethiopia and Uganda help out-of-school children catch up through accelerated learning, while transforming how effective teaching happens at scale. In Ethiopia alone, Speed School classrooms have reached 2.5 million children, with 90% successfully integrating into conventional classrooms, and transitioners demonstrating higher learning and retention rates than their peers. By focusing on teacher practice and agency, the Speed School model empowers facilitators to innovate and grow professionally. These changes ripple outward through peer support and school-based collaboration, allowing

effective practices to spread into conventional classrooms. Critically, mid-level actors play a central role in implementation, spreading these practices within existing systems. The result is a model that starts with individual teacher

change but scales through systemic alignment, offering valuable lessons for sustainable education reform in low-resource settings.



Read more to find out how Geneva Global has contributed to improving teaching practices through the Speed School model.

## Liberia: Using data to drive better learning in an accelerated education programme

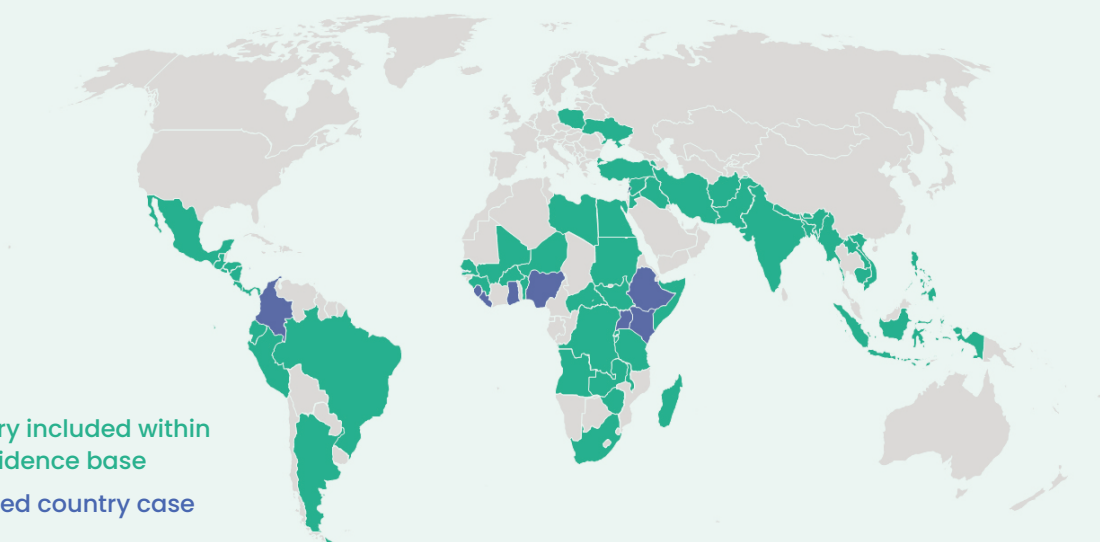
In Liberia, the Luminos Fund has enabled out-of-school learners to surpass peers in foundational skills, with 90% transitioning to formal schools. Treating learning as the “north star,” Luminos uses culturally relevant assessments and classroom tools to track progress, adapt teaching, and strengthen instruction. Data informs programme design and is shared with teachers, while government partners are engaged directly through school visits, building support and ownership.

[Find out more](#) on how to enhance learning through robust data and monitoring systems.

This guidance is underpinned by evidence from 68 countries

Country included within  
our evidence base

Featured country case  
study



# The STEP Planning Toolkit

## 1. How to use the Step Framework to prioritise action:

### *Prioritisation questionnaire*

The STEP Framework is a flexible tool that supports countries in defining their own priorities and actions, rather than a one-size-fits-all plan. Even within the same country, AEPs may have different operating models, or varying levels of access to resources and capacity. These realities may make some actions of the STEP Framework more relevant or urgent than others. Table 1 provides a list of questions to enable prioritisation. A higher concentration of negative responses ('no') signifies a higher risk of transition failure, and therefore, may require prioritisation. Each question should be answered with the local context in mind.

**Table 1. Questions to enable prioritisation**

| <b>Foundation. AEP, formal school, and community collaboration:<br/>Embed opportunities for ongoing collaboration, shared planning and decision-making.</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Are there policies, frameworks, or standards in place to govern collaboration between AEPs, formal schools, and communities?</li> <li>• Is there a clear articulation of responsibilities and roles of key actors within the government (national/subnational), AEPs, formal schools, and communities?</li> <li>• Do these actors meet regularly to engage in shared planning and decision-making? Note that this is especially important at high-risk periods and where accountability shifts from the AEP provider to the school.</li> <li>• Do community members participate meaningfully in the design, implementation, and monitoring of AEPs, including supporting learners' transitions to and retention in formal schools?</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Are key civil society actors, including gender and inclusion champions, consulted and engaged for technical support? Are there clear mechanisms for working with other sectors, such as health, nutrition, sanitation, or protection?</li> <li>• Is there a person or group of people who are explicitly assigned the role of monitoring and supporting transitions to formal schools and attendance/learning in formal school?</li> <li>• Do existing transition plan(s) include contingency measures for conflict, climate shocks, or displacement, and clear articulation of roles and coordination between humanitarian, development, and peace-keeping actors?</li> </ul> |
| <b>Step 1. AEP learning and progression:<br/>Align AEPs to formal school curriculum competencies and include life skills.</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is the AEP curriculum aligned with national curriculum competencies or standards in foundational literacy and numeracy?</li> <li>• Is the AEP curriculum aligned with national life skills programmes? Do the curriculum and teacher training include culturally-relevant life skills (including SEL)?</li> <li>• Is the curriculum age-appropriate, delivered through learner-centred instruction, home language, and the use of quality materials?</li> <li>• Are teachers closely supported, provided with feedback and training that aligns with their needs?</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Are AEP learners exposed to broader curricular subjects and the formal school language of instruction before transitioning?</li> <li>• Is learning and progression in foundational literacy, numeracy, and SEL regularly monitored, including through formative assessment?</li> <li>• Are low-performing learners provided extra support? Is the curriculum flexible enough to adapt to the needs of marginalised learners including girls, learners with disabilities, rural or displaced learners, pregnant adolescents, or young parents?</li> </ul>                                                                                                                       |

### Step 2. AEP assessment and completion: Ensure AEP completion guarantees eligibility to enrol in formal school.

- Is the programme accredited by the government so that AEP learners' skills and competencies are formally recognised?
- Do transition pathways offer multiple exit points? If so, are learners tested regularly, so that they can progress or transition at their own pace?
- Do AEP completion exams occur near school enrolment periods, so that learners are not left out of school or unattended for prolonged periods?
- Does AEP completion ensure learners' eligibility to enrol in formal school? If students need to pass additional entry or placement exams, is there clear guidance or processes in place to facilitate this?
- If needed, are students provided academic and logistical support (e.g. tutoring, transportation or identification) to access any required exams?
- Have school leaders and administrators been sensitised to completion, certification and re-enrolment processes?

### Step 3. Accessing a formal school: Create concrete linkages to schools and offer alternative transition pathways

- If the AEP is delivered in formal schools, will learners still be of age to transition into a conventional classroom?
- If the AEP is delivered outside of a formal school, are clear linkages established, so that learners know where to enrol in a school or other learning or training opportunity?
- Are the school's conditions adequate enough to absorb AEP students (e.g. enough classroom space, desks, teachers, etc.)? Note: In fragile contexts, schools may not be operating.
- Does the learner have a safe accessible route or transportation to the school they will transition to?
- Are alternative transition pathways offered, such as continuing in non-formal education or pursuing TVET or work? If so, are these pathways aligned with national qualifications frameworks?

### Step 4. Enrolling in formal school: Provide enrolment and post-enrolment support to AEP graduates

- Is there a policy or strategy in place that clearly describes enrolment and placement processes and the roles and responsibilities of key actors?
- Do learners and their families actively participate in determining the most appropriate transition pathways? Are they fully informed about the available pathways?
- Do learners and their families know where and how to enrol in formal school? Are re-enrolment campaigns or other efforts in place to raise awareness?
- Do learners have access to the documentation necessary to enrol in formal school (e.g. identification documents, etc.)?
- Do AEP providers work together with school stakeholders and local authorities to determine the best placement and post-enrolment support for AEP graduates? (Financial, academic, or social support in the first year is particularly crucial to mitigate dropout.)
- Do screening and placement processes consider learners' needs comprehensively (e.g. academic learning, SEL, age, household context, financial needs, etc.)?

### Step 5. Learning and completing school: Create inclusive, flexible school environments to sustain support for learners

- Are learners incentivised to attend school (e.g. through school feeding, nutrition or WASH)? Are costs of uniforms, transportation, or learning materials subsidised? Do girls have access to gender-specific WASH facilities and menstrual health hygiene in schools?
- Do formal school teachers use differentiated instruction, i.e. adapt / tailor their teaching strategies so that they are adequate for each learner's level/needs? Do AEP graduates have access to remedial or language support if needed?
- Is SEL integrated into formal school curricula or extra-curricular activities? Are activities in place to support the social integration of AEP graduates with their formal school peers?
- Are school and classroom environments physically and emotionally safe (free of corporal punishment, bullying, or harassment)?
- Are AEP graduates followed-up on once in formal school? Is their attendance and learning monitored to mitigate dropout?

## 2. How to implement priority actions at each STEP

### *Menu of evidence-based strategies*

Based on answers to the questions in Table 1, education leaders are encouraged to use Table 2 to select the most appropriate transition support strategies for their context and needs. The strategies are organised along the STEP Framework, and at times, by type of stakeholder. All strategies come from the evidence reviewed. Country examples are provided with links to the original sources for more information. Strategies suggested for **implementers** and **donors** are backed by qualitative and

quantitative evidence of positive impact, either on educational outcomes for learners, programme reach or sustainability. Some **government** examples are also backed by evidence, but others include links to AEP guidelines and curricula or policy documents such as sector plans. This is to illustrate recent system-level efforts, many of which are also aligned with the evidence base. In the few cases where there is not a country or source included, promising examples are lacking, but the strategy continues to be important. While the strategies are presented for specific stakeholders, in some contexts, these stakeholders play multiple roles (e.g. where the government is also the main implementer), and so multiple strategies may be relevant.

**Table 2. Evidence-based support strategies and examples to implement the STEP Framework**

### Foundation. AEP, formal school, and community collaboration: Embed opportunities for ongoing collaboration, shared planning and decision-making



As foundational to the STEP Framework, the following strategies are the responsibility of all actors, with the government leading by embedding them into education plans, policies, and budgets.

- Articulate clear roles and responsibilities, with the government playing an oversight role and working closely with implementing partners, both ensuring mutual and reciprocal accountability ([Ethiopia](#))
- Build on existing governance structures to establish a technical working group or task team to oversee AEPs and transitions to formal school ([Ethiopia](#), [Nigeria](#), [Uganda](#), [Malawi](#), [Sierra Leone](#), [Lebanon](#))
- Enhance coordination and collaboration, holding regular meetings to align on objectives, and engage in shared planning and decision-making ([Sierra Leone](#), [Zimbabwe](#), [Pakistan](#), [Myanmar](#))
- Support and meaningfully engage communities to build trust and ownership ([Burkina Faso](#), [Ethiopia](#), [Kenya](#), [Malawi](#), [Mali](#), [Myanmar](#), [Bangladesh](#), [Zimbabwe](#))
- Mobilise local leaders as education 'champions' especially for marginalised groups such as girls and learners with disabilities ([Afghanistan](#), [Sierra Leone](#), [Ghana](#), [Uganda](#))
- Engage civil society and private sector actors for technical support and service delivery (e.g. disability specialists or disability and women's rights organisations, etc.) ([Uganda](#), [Nepal](#))
- Foster cross-sectoral collaboration and livelihood support to meet learners' basic needs in health, sanitation, shelter, and protection ([Somalia](#), [DRC](#), [Guinea](#), [Uganda](#), [Malawi](#), [Afghanistan](#), [Nepal](#))
- Commission, support, or advocate for more research that focuses on longer-term impacts of AEPs, and enhance knowledge mobilisation and sharing across actors/contexts ([Ghana](#), [Ethiopia](#))
- Increase funding to non-formal and formal education, earmarking budgets and pooled donor funds for transition support strategies ([Afghanistan](#), [Ghana](#), [Madagascar](#)); use gender-responsive and equitable financing mechanisms ([Nepal](#)).
- Harmonise formal and non-formal data systems, tracking AEP learners into formal schooling, and ensuring EMIS captures enrolment, learning, and retention.

## Step 1. AEP learning and progression: Align AEP curriculum to formal school competencies and include life skills and SEL



### Governments

- Embed AEPs in policies, plans ([Tanzania](#), [Colombia](#), [Myanmar](#)), EMIS ([Jordan](#), [Pakistan](#)), and budgets (Ethiopia)
- Establish quality standards, implementation guidelines, and curricula aligned with formal school subjects and including SEL ([Sierra Leone](#), Nigeria<sup>1</sup>, [Uganda](#), [South Sudan](#), [Colombia](#)) and instruction in mother tongue languages ([Ghana](#))
- Create pathways to recruit and train community teachers who speak local languages, especially women who can support girls' education ([Somalia](#), [Pakistan](#)); if AEPs are taught by formal school teachers, work with teacher training institutes to integrate AEP methods into training curricula
- Track learning in foundational skills—including SEL—in monitoring and results frameworks ([Ethiopia](#), [Ghana](#))

### Implementers

- Engage communities and curriculum specialists in the design of relevant curricula and learning materials ([Sierra Leone](#), [Zimbabwe](#), [Malawi](#))
- Use ongoing professional development, coaching, and mentorship to train teachers in culturally relevant SEL curricula ([Senegal](#), [Zimbabwe](#), [Pakistan](#), [Nepal](#)) and play-based learning ([Ethiopia](#)), structured pedagogy, or teaching at the right level ([Nepal](#), [Liberia](#))
- Integrate formal school language of instruction ([West Africa](#)) and broader curricular subjects ([Colombia](#), [Nigeria](#)) into programme delivery
- Equip AEP centres with quality and accessible learning materials ([Mali](#), [Sierra Leone](#), [Zimbabwe](#))

### Funders

- Invest in the development of SEL curriculum, teacher training and wellbeing, as well as learning materials, including low-cost resources or materials from the natural environment that can be easily scaled across contexts ([Ethiopia](#))
- Design funding models that allow for integrated service delivery, for example, by embedding SEL into broader classroom-based psychosocial support services, especially for refugees (Kenya)
- Include budget for reasonable accommodations, such as Individual Education Plans (IEPs) or assistive devices for learners with disabilities ([Malawi](#))

## Step 2. AEP assessment and completion: Ensure AEP completion guarantees eligibility to enrol in formal school



### Governments

- Simplify processes for formally registering or accrediting non-state AEP providers ([Liberia](#))
- Regulate national AEP assessments to ensure quality and alignment with formal school curriculum and calendar ([Ethiopia](#), [Tanzania](#), [Pakistan](#))
- Simplify or exempt AEP graduates and certificate-holders from additional entry exams (Nigeria<sup>1</sup>)
- Remove AEP logos from certificates to avoid stigmatisation (El Salvador<sup>2</sup>)
- Track learner performance on completion exams, disaggregating by age, gender, ethnicity, and language to determine appropriate transition pathways

### Implementers

- Support learners with exam prep and tutoring ([Mali](#))
- Facilitate documentation and test access; work with local authorities to register AEP centres as official test-taking sites ([Kenya](#))
- Provide AEP graduates with learning support during 'limbo' periods (i.e. after completing an AEP and before enrolling in formal school) ([Lebanon](#)) to mitigate learning losses ([Ghana](#))

### Funders

- Fund government-accredited AEPs to ensure certification allows entry to formal school
- Earmark funds to cover exam fees and logistics, such as transportation or documentation ([Mali](#))

## Step 3. Accessing a formal school: Create concrete linkages to schools and offer alternative transition pathways



### Governments

- Build or adapt school infrastructure to absorb AEP students ([Mali](#), [Tanzania](#), [Afghanistan](#)); review school timetables to make better use of existing infrastructure ([Guinea](#))
- Introduce community-based schooling, mobile schools, or technology to reach remote or fragile areas ([Somalia](#), [South Sudan](#), [Tanzania](#), [Afghanistan](#), [Pakistan](#))
- Offer multiple transition pathways in national AEP policies, guidelines and qualification frameworks ([Guinea Bissau](#), [Liberia](#), [Nigeria](#)); map education and training centres to identify viable transition pathways ([Sierra Leone](#))

### Implementers

- Partner with communities to identify transition pathways that are feasible and desired ([Mali](#), [Ghana](#), [Sierra Leone](#), [West Africa](#))
- Address barriers to access, such as transportation or safety concerns ([West Africa](#); [Mali](#); [Ghana](#))
- Work with local authorities to register AEP facilities as formal schools or advocate for the construction of new schools ([Ghana](#), [Afghanistan](#); [Afghanistan](#))

### Funders

- Fund school construction, refurbishment ([Mali](#), [Lebanon](#)), and transportation ([Ghana](#))
- Invest in safe, accessible and climate resilient school models, mandating minimum standards
- Encourage participatory approaches to programme design, so grantees engage communities when determining transition pathways

## Step 4. Enrolling in formal school: Provide enrolment and post-enrolment support to AEP graduates



### Governments

- Remove policy barriers to enrolment and create re-integration policies, especially for overage and undocumented learners, refugees ([Uganda](#)), pregnant girls, and young mothers ([Uganda](#))
- Incentivise schools and AEPs to work together to support enrolment of AEP learners ([Afghanistan](#))
- Track enrolment of AEP graduates in EMIS ([Ethiopia](#), [Jordan](#), [Myanmar](#))

### Implementers

- Run re-enrolment drives and awareness campaigns, targeting marginalised learners such as girls and those with disabilities ([Ghana](#))
- Offer enrolment support and follow-up, including access to identification documents ([Mali](#); [Nepal](#))
- Ensure placement processes consider learner's academic, social, and financial needs ([Ghana](#), [Lebanon](#))

### Funders

- Fund re-enrolment or transition kits tailored to student needs ([Ghana](#); [Lebanon](#))
- Allocate funding for uniforms, school fees, or childcare costs for young parents ([Ghana](#), [Uganda](#), [Afghanistan](#))

## Step 5. Learning and completing school: Create inclusive, flexible school environments to sustain support for learners



### Governments

- Remove financial barriers to schooling by reducing or subsidising costs, including of uniforms and learning materials ([Pakistan](#), [Guinea-Bissau](#), [Nigeria](#)<sup>1</sup>)
- Invest in livelihoods support or community savings groups ([Ethiopia](#), [Sierra Leone](#), [Somalia](#), [Uganda](#), [Zimbabwe](#))
- Incentivise school attendance with school-based feeding, nutrition, or psychosocial support
- Monitor learner attendance, progress, and dropout risks via EMIS
- Ban corporal punishment and other harmful practices
- Integrate SEL and life skills into national curriculum
- Embed AEP methods into pre-service and in-service teacher training and education ([Ethiopia](#))
- Create pathways for AEP facilitators to become formal school teachers ([Afghanistan](#), [Sierra Leone](#), [Uganda](#))
- Incentivise schools to absorb AEP graduates by providing school capitation grants ([Tanzania](#), [Guinea Bissau](#))

### Implementers

- Provide remedial and language support to learners in need ([Uganda](#), [Madagascar](#), [Pakistan](#))
- Monitor students at risk of dropping out ([Burkina Faso](#), [Mali](#), [Niger](#), [Lebanon](#))
- Support social integration of AEP learners ([Zimbabwe](#))
- Create inclusive learning environments by training teachers, addressing school violence, distributing quality and accessible learning materials, or providing extra-curricular activities, such as Girls' Clubs ([Ethiopia](#)), peer support models ([Afghanistan](#)), mentorship ([Uganda](#)) or sports ([Zambia](#))

### Funders

- Ensure country partners also invest in formal education systems and school environments ([Nepal](#))
- Require AEP budgets to allocate funds for post-transition support

1 NERDC. (2022). National Guidelines for Accelerated Basic Education Programme (ABEP). Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC).

2 Consultation with El Salvador Ministry of Education, November 2024.



## Acronyms

ABEP – Accelerated Basic Education Programme

AEP – Accelerate Education Programme

CBE – Complementary Basic Education

EMIS – Education Management Information System

ESP – Education Sector Plan

FEM – Flexible Education Models

GEC – Girls' Education Challenge

SEL – Social and Emotional Learning

STEP – Supporting Transitions through Evidence-based Planning

TVET – Technical and vocational education and training

WASH – Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene

## In their words

*"The STEP Framework provides a comprehensive and well structured roadmap that captures the critical stages of transition. The emphasis on collaboration among AEPs, formal schools, local communities, and other stakeholders is relevant and necessary for successful transitions."*

– Davis Ndambo, Assistant Director, Partnerships & Resource Mobilization, National Council for Nomadic Education in Kenya

*"This is exactly what will strengthen our AEP here in Uganda and also result in better collaboration with our partners. This will make our ministry understand this AEP better and may start allocating some funds."*

– Sarah Bugoosi Kibooli, Commissioner Special Needs and Inclusive Education, Uganda Ministry of Education and Sports

*"It is a very useful document [...]. I believe it is appropriate to contribute to the current discussion on the relevance of flexible educational models in Colombia."*

– Lorena Becerra, Multiskills Manager, Norwegian Refugee Council, Colombia

This Education.org Insights-in-Brief has been developed in support of our mission to advance evidence and improve education for every learner. It is adapted from a full synthesis that can be found on Education.org, along with a complete set of references. If you are interested in learning more or partnering, please contact us: [info@education.org](mailto:info@education.org).

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