

Gender and Education for All THE LEAP TO EQUALITY



Regional Overview

East Asia and the Pacific¹

This region is a composite of two very different groups of countries in East Asia and the Pacific. The former has two of the world's most populous states, China and Indonesia, the latter includes a number of the world's smallest nation states. This makes for considerable difficulty in interpreting regional data. However, overall the region made significant progress at almost all levels of education during the 1990s. But while East Asia and the Pacific almost achieved universal primary education early in the decade, it is moving away from this goal. Commitments to international treaties and declarations² by a significant number of countries will have to be fulfilled³ to achieve EFA.

Early childhood care and education (ECCE): important progress

Many countries in the region have understood the positive influence of ECCE in preparing children for school and have made it a priority. Gross enrolment ratios (GER) steadily increased between 1990 and 2000 in most countries with data. GER was below 33% in half the countries in 1990 but the median level had risen to 47% by 2000. Pre-primary education is well developed in Australia, the Cook Islands, Japan, Macao (China), Niue, Korea, Thailand and Vanuatu. But few children have access to it in Cambodia, Indonesia, the Lao PDR, Myanmar, and Papua New Guinea, where GERs are below 20%. In Brunei Darussalam and New Zealand, the GER has declined.

Parity has been achieved in Australia, Brunei Darussalam, Cook Islands, Japan, Korea, New Zealand and Thailand. Most disparities in ECCE are in favour of girls, as in Cambodia, Indonesia, the Lao PDR, Malaysia, Palau, Philippines, Samoa, Tonga and Vanuatu. In Tonga, 77 boys are enrolled for every 100 girls. Disparities in favour of boys are found in China, Macao (China), Niue, Papua New Guinea and Viet Nam but are less pronounced than the bias in favour of girls.

Universal primary education: slipping away from the goal

East Asia and the Pacific is the only region that has seen a drop in the net enrolment ratio, from 96% in 1990 to 93% in 2000. China, the world's most populous country, accounts for most of this disappointing trend. There, primary education was almost universal in 1990, with an NER of 97%, but by 2000 the figure had fallen to 93% – doubling the number of out-of-school children in the region, from 7.1 to 14 million, of whom 57% are in China. The number of out-of-school boys more than tripled while the share of girls in the total out-of-school children fell sharply from 71% to 49% over the ten-year period.

1. This is the EFA classification of regions. The countries of East Asia and the Pacific are listed in the Table.

2. The first was the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which acknowledged the right of all to education and stated that elementary education would be free and compulsory and higher levels of education accessible to all on the basis of merit.

3. Primary school fees continue to be charged in Cambodia, China, Philippines and Viet Nam despite legally-guaranteed free education, according to a World Bank survey (2002). Even if no fees are charged, some direct costs have been reported in Japan, New Zealand and the Republic of Korea, it said.

Nearly all countries with data (18 out of 24) have reached gender parity in primary education or are very close to it. But significant disparities at the expense of girls remain in Cambodia and the Lao PDR where fewer than 9 girls for every 10 boys are enrolled in primary school.

Gender disparities concern not only access to school but also participation in the learning process. In almost all countries in the region with data available, boys repeat more than girls. Gender gaps in this respect are especially large in Cambodia, the Lao PDR, Macao (China) and Vanuatu.

Participation in secondary and tertiary education: substantial growth in the last decade

Demand for **secondary education** has increased as more pupils graduate from primary school. In half the countries, the gross enrolment ratio in secondary was more than 77% in 2000 compared with the median GER of less than 49% a decade earlier. But enrolment is still less than 40% in Cambodia, the Lao PDR, Myanmar, Papua New Guinea and Vanuatu.

Far more girls than boys are enrolled in most countries. Disparity in favour of girls is quite significant in the Cook Islands, Fiji, Macao (China), Malaysia, New Zealand, Niue, Philippines, Samoa and Tonga. Fewer girls than boys are enrolled in Cambodia, China, the Lao PDR, Papua New Guinea and Vanuatu and these disparities are greater than those to the detriment of boys.

In all countries with data, participation in **tertiary education** increased over the decade. Substantial progress was made in Cambodia, China, Macao (China), Malaysia, Myanmar and Viet Nam. Differences are striking: the GER is above 45% in Japan, Macao (China), Australia, New Zealand and Korea – all of them OECD countries except Macao – while being less than 15% in Cambodia, the Lao PDR, Tonga, China, Viet Nam, Samoa, Indonesia and Myanmar.

As in secondary education, female students significantly outnumber males in most countries. But fewer than six to every 10 men are enrolled in Cambodia, China, Korea and the Lao PDR. Whether they are over- or under- represented, women are often enrolled in so-called “feminine” fields, such as education, social sciences, humanities, services and health-related courses, that do not boost their chances of equal job opportunities with men.

Gender parity does not always translate into greater equality. In this region, as elsewhere, girls are still unable to convert their academic edge over boys into greater equality in other spheres of life and may need higher qualifications to compete successfully for jobs, equal pay and managerial positions.

Adult literacy: need to sustain efforts

The average adult literacy rate has steadily improved, from 80% in 1990 to 87% in 2000, according to UIS estimates, substantially reducing the number of illiterates – by 20%, from 233 to 186 million – mostly thanks to efforts in China. With sustained effort, the region as a whole will probably achieve the EFA goal of a 50% improvement in adult literacy by 2015, though this may not happen in Cambodia, the Lao PDR, and Papua New Guinea where literacy rates are below 70%.

Most adult illiterates are women (71%), a share expected to increase to 73% by 2015, especially because women live longer than men and thus dominate in older age groups where illiteracy is highest. Gender disparity is particularly high where literacy is low, as in Cambodia, the Lao PDR and Papua New Guinea, but also in China and Indonesia.

Eliminating gender disparities in primary and secondary education

Achieving this goal involves understanding what holds girls and boys back so that policies can be designed to overcome these obstacles and improve access to and participation in education.

Urgent action is needed in countries where the gender gap is still large in primary and secondary education. An overriding priority is to tackle poverty constraints by reducing the direct and indirect cost of schooling to families and addressing the incidence of child labour. The school environment requires equal attention. Sexual violence and harassment within schools, particularly where HIV/AIDS is prevalent, needs to be confronted vigorously. Revising biases in teaching materials, training teachers to be gender aware and working with them and parents to break taboos are essential ingredients of an “engendered” strategy.

Eliminating gender disparity mainly concerns secondary education, where far fewer or far more girls are enrolled than boys. Some countries risk not achieving parity either by 2005 or 2015 unless appropriate policies are put in place. Prospects for countries achieving it are based on past rates of change in the gender parity index in primary and secondary enrolment.

Countries that have already achieved gender parity:

- **Primary education (15 out of 24 with data):**
Australia, China, Fiji, Indonesia, Japan, Korea, Malaysia, Myanmar, New Zealand, Niue, Palau, Philippines, Samoa, Tonga and Vanuatu.
- **Secondary education (5 out of 24 with data):**
Australia, Indonesia, Japan, Korea and Palau.

These are forecasts based on past trends. While most countries with data (12 out of 13) are likely to miss reaching gender parity at either primary or secondary level or both by 2005, policies (in the region or elsewhere) are available to many of them to achieve it within a few years.

Gender parity prospects

(13 countries with data in 1990 and 2000 for both primary and secondary education have not yet achieved it):

- **Countries likely to achieve it by 2005 (1):** Samoa.
- **Countries likely to miss it in 2005 but reach it by 2015 (1):** Brunei Darussalam.
- **Countries that may not achieve it by 2015 either at primary, secondary or both levels (11):**
Cambodia, China, the Lao PDR, Macao (China), Malaysia, Myanmar, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, Philippines, Thailand and Vanuatu.

Resources and aid

Eliminating gender disparities and inequality while achieving all the other EFA goals is costly. Countries will need to allocate more of their own resources and use them more effectively. Half the countries with data were spending less than 3.7% of national income on education in 2000 – lower than the 4.1% average for developing countries.

The least developed among them, with the lowest education indicators, will need more external aid to achieve EFA. Yet globally bilateral and multilateral aid to education fell between 1998/99 and 2000/01, though it increased for basic education. East Asia and the Pacific, along with sub-Saharan Africa and the Arab States, receives the biggest share of bilateral aid to education (22%), but current problems of turning aid commitments into reality do not augur well for international assistance to countries at risk or serious risk of not achieving the EFA goals, particularly the gender targets. ■

ACRONYMS

FTI Fast-Track Initiative. Designed primarily by the World Bank, the FTI was launched in April 2002 as a process that would provide quick and incremental, technical and financial support to countries that have policies but are not on track to attain Universal Primary Education by 2015.

GER Gross enrolment ratio. Number of pupils enrolled in a given level of education, regardless of age, expressed as a percentage of the population in the relevant official age group.

GPI Gender parity index. Ratio of female to male value of a given indicator. A gender parity index equals 1 indicates parity between sexes; a GPI that varies between 0 and 1 means a disparity in favour of boys; a GPI > 1 indicates a disparity in favour of girls.

GNP Gross national product.

NER Net enrolment ratio. Number of pupils in the official age group for a given level of education enrolled in that level expressed as a percentage of the total population in that age-group.

UIS UNESCO Institute for Statistics.

East Asia and the Pacific: Selected education indicators, 2000.

Countries	Total population (thousands)	Compulsory education (age group)	Legal guarantee for free education	Adult literacy rate (%)		Pre-primary education		Primary education		Secondary education		Tertiary education		Total public expenditure on education as % of GNP	EFA Development Index (EDI)	
				Total	GPI	GER (%) Total	GPI	NER (%) Total	GPI in GER	% of female teachers	GER (%) Total	GPI	GER (%) Total			GPI
East Asia																
Brunei Darussalam	328	...	No	91.5	0.93	45.3	1.02	0.96	...	69.3	82.3	1.05	15.1	1.99	...	
Cambodia ¹	13 104	...	Yes	68.0	0.71	6.6	1.07	0.88	85.4	39.2	18.7	0.57	2.8	0.38	1.9	
China ¹	1 275 133	6-14	Yes	85.2	0.85	26.5	0.93	1.00	92.7	52.8	68.2	0.76	9.5	0.52	...	
Democratic People's Rep. of Korea	22 268	5-16	Yes	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...
Indonesia	212 092	7-15	No	86.8	0.89	18.8	1.04	0.98	92.2	52.2	57.0	0.98	14.6	0.77	1.6	
Japan ²	127 096	6-15	Yes	...	...	83.8	1.00	1.00	100.0	...	102.5	1.01	47.7	0.85	3.5
Lao People's Democratic Republic	5 279	6-14	No	64.8	0.70	7.8	1.09	0.86	81.4	43.7	37.6	0.72	3.3	0.59	2.4	
Macao, China	444	5-14	...	93.8	0.94	90.3	0.93	0.95	84.8	88.7	84.3	1.07	52.1	0.84	3.6	
Malaysia	22 218	...	No	87.4	0.91	48.9	1.18	1.00	98.5	64.6	70.3	1.11	28.2	1.08	6.8	
Myanmar	47 749	5-9	No	84.7	0.90	1.9	...	0.99	83.2	74.0	38.6	0.95	11.5	1.75	0.6	
Philippines ¹	75 653	6-12	Yes	94.9	1.00	30.2	1.05	1.00	92.7	87.3	77.3	1.10	31.2	...	3.4	
Republic of Korea ²	46 740	6-15	Yes	97.8	0.97	79.8	1.00	1.01	99.5	70.3	94.1	1.00	77.6	0.59	3.8	
Singapore	4 018	...	No	92.3	0.92	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	3.5
Thailand	62 806	6-12	No	95.5	0.97	83.3	0.98	0.96	85.4	...	81.9	0.95	35.3	1.11	5.5	
Timor-Leste	737	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...
Viet Nam ^{1,3}	78 137	6-14	Yes	92.5	0.96	43.2	0.92	0.94	95.4	78.3	67.1	0.91	9.7	0.74	...	
The Pacific																
Australia	19 138	6-15	Yes	...	...	98.0	1.00	1.00	95.7	...	160.8	1.01	63.3	1.24	4.9
Cook Islands	20	5-15	...	...	...	85.9	0.99	0.95	84.6	86.1	60.2	1.08	...	...	...
Fiji	814	6-15	No	92.9	0.96	...	...	...	99.0	57.0	80.0	1.09	...	...	5.9
Kiribati	83	6-11	No	...	...	...	...	1.02	...	...	...	...	...	...	...
Marshall Islands	51	6-14	No	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	13.8
Micronesia (Federated States of)	118	6-13	No	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...
Nauru	12	6-15	No	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...
New Zealand ²	3 778	6-16	Yes	...	...	57.8	...	1.00	99.3	80.6	112.4	1.06	69.2	1.52	6.6
Niue	2	5-16	...	...	...	153.7	0.93	1.00	98.5	...	99.2	1.10	...	...	...
Palau	19	6-14	Yes	...	...	57.5	1.10	0.97	98.6	...	84.3	1.03	30.9	1.81	...
Papua New Guinea	4 809	...	No	63.9	0.80	18.3	0.94	0.91	83.8	...	21.1	0.77	...	...	2.4
Samoa	159	5-14	No	98.6	0.99	35.9	1.09	0.97	96.9	72.2	75.5	1.08	10.9	1.05	3.9	
Solomon Islands	447	...	No	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	3.6
Tokelau	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...
Tonga	99	6-14	No	...	...	30.6	1.30	0.99	91.5	67.2	99.6	1.07	3.8	1.28	5.3
Tuvalu	10	6-15	No	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...
Vanuatu	197	...	No	...	...	73.2	1.09	0.99	89.4	44.0	28.3	0.84	...	...	7.7
East Asia and the Pacific	2 022 240	...	...	86.6	0.87	47.1	1.10	0.99	92.7	69.3	77.3	1.10	21.6	1.24	3.7
Developing countries	4 700 496	...	...	73.6	0.82	30.9	0.99	0.92	82.1	61.5	59.9	1.01	10.4	0.73	4.1
World	6 041 386	...	...	79.7	0.87	46.7	1.01	0.93	83.8	72.3	77.5	1.06	22.9	1.04	4.5

Source: EFA GMR 2003, Statistical annex.

Data in italics are for 1999.

1. Primary school fees continue to be charged despite legally-guaranteed free education, according to a World Bank survey (2002).

2. No tuition fees are charged but some direct costs have been reported, according to a World Bank survey (2002).

3. Country invited to participate in the Fast-Track Initiative (FTI).

Note: EDI is a new composite index that incorporates indicators for the four most quantifiable EFA goals – UPE, adult literacy, gender parity and quality of education. It aims to give a broader picture of progress toward EFA and identify countries doing well on all fronts, those succeeding in only some areas and those with all-round difficulties (for further explanation, see Appendix 2 of the full Report). The EDI for a country is the arithmetical mean of the observed values of indicators selected for each of the EFA goals. Since these are percentages, the value can vary from 0 to 1. The higher it is, the closer a country is to the goal and the greater its EFA achievement.