

The Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) and the World Declaration of Education for All (EFA) (adopted in 1990 in Jomtien, Thailand) reaffirmed education as a human right and heralded a new era of international cooperation. However, progress in education in the 1990s was seen as insufficient (UNESCO, 2015), which is why the international community gathered again in Dakar, Senegal in April 2000 to set goals for education to be achieved by 2015. At the 2000 World Education Forum in Dakar, the Dakar Framework, a plan of action to deliver on the EFA goals, was established. In May 2015, the education community met again to discuss achievements and shortfalls in the implementation of the EFA goals and education-related MDGs, and to agree on a joint position for the education goals and targets for the post-2015 development agenda, which should be adopted by UN Member States in September 2015. With the deadline for the EFA goals having passed, this fact sheet assesses the EFA achievements in the region, its major contributions, bottlenecks and barriers and discusses issues and challenges of monitoring the education post-2015 agenda.

I. Commitment to the EFA goals

How much did we achieve?

Figure 1 illustrates the proportion of countries in the Asia and the Pacific region based on their degree of progress towards the EFA targets. The latest available data from the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS) show that by 2015, more than half of the countries in the region will achieve or be close to achieving the target gender parity index (GPI) for the gross enrolment ratio (GER) in primary education (Goal 5), whereas almost half will achieve gender parity in lower secondary GER. Goal 5 saw the greatest progress in the region. Also by 2015, it is expected that 45 per cent of countries in the region will reach or be close to achieving Goal 2, primary adjusted net enrolment rate (ANER); 43% will show similar progress toward Goal 6, primary pupil-teacher ratio (PTR); and 33 per cent will reach or be close to reaching Goal, pre-primary GER.

2. Contribution of EFA

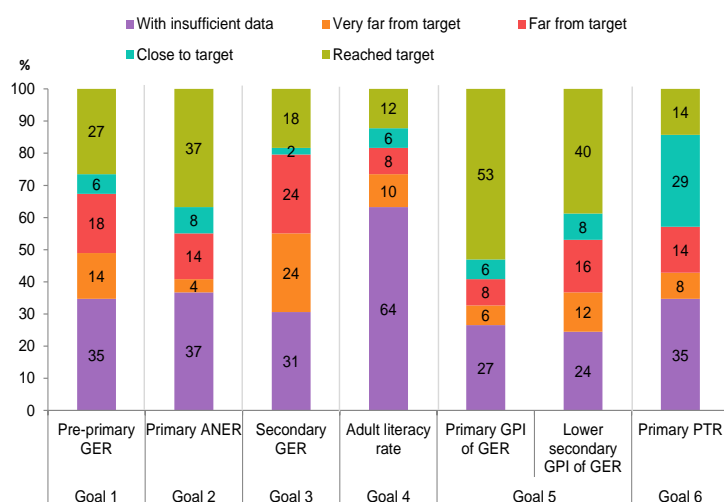
Expanding up the education system to lifelong learning

2.1 Countries raised the number of years of compulsory education

It has been widely acknowledged in various international declarations and national constitutions that it is the fundamental responsibility of governments to ensure a minimum amount of education for their citizens. As such, during the Asia-Pacific Regional Education Conference (APREC) organized by UNESCO Bangkok office in August 2014, governments in the region pledged to enforce 12 years of free and compulsory education for all by 2030 (UNESCO, 2014).

Figure 2 illustrates the minimum levels of compulsory education currently required in Asia and the Pacific countries. Most countries in the region provide compulsory education until the end of lower secondary education, with six providing it only until the end of primary education. Notable progress was found in Viet Nam which increased its compulsory education from five years in 2000 to 10 years in 2014 as well as in the Islamic Republic of Iran, which went five years in 2000 to eight in 2013.

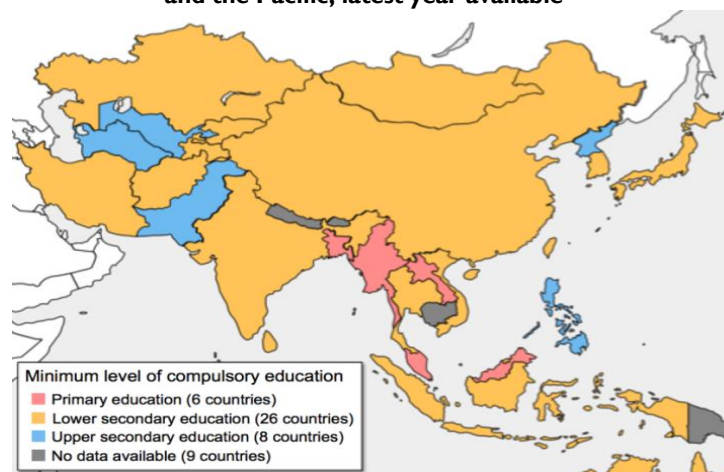
Figure 1: Percentage of countries that achieved a defined benchmark for each of the six EFA goals by 2015, latest year available



Note: Countries are assessed as having reached the target if they have achieved a pre-primary education GER of 80 per cent (goal 1); a primary education ANER of 97 per cent (goal 2); a secondary GER of 97 per cent (goal 3); an adult literacy rate of 97 per cent (goal 4); a GPI of GER between 0.97 and 1.03 at primary and lower secondary education respectively (goal 5); a PTR of 15:1 for primary education (goal 6). Selected indicators were selected from the UNESCO GMR, 2013/14.

Source: Calculated based on available data from UNESCO Institute for Statistics Data Centre, accessed in April 2015a.

Figure 2: Minimum levels of compulsory education in Asia and the Pacific, latest year available



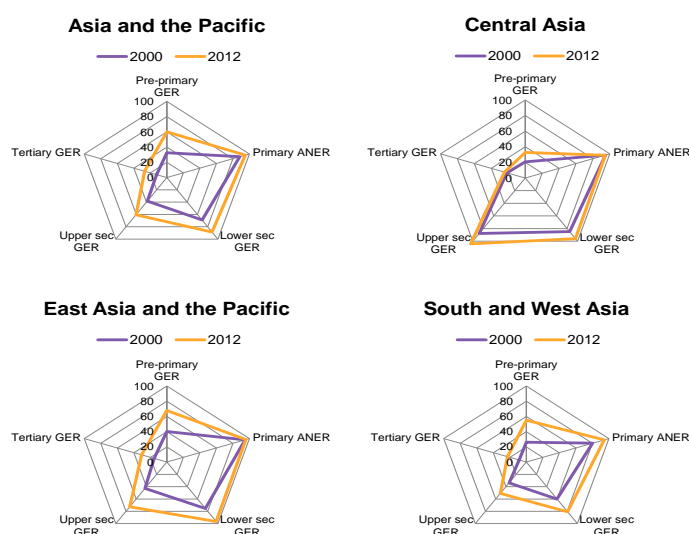
Note: Not all data in the Pacific are indicated on the map, but all the Pacific countries are counted in the number of countries in the box on the left.

Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics Data Centre, accessed in April 2015a.

2.2 Student participation improved at all levels of education

During the past decade, the Asia and the Pacific region has made significant progress in increasing participation at different levels of education. Major progress was made in pre-primary education enrolment in the region, with the GER going from 33 per cent to 60 per cent (see figure 3). The biggest achievement to come out of the Dakar EFA goals was the commitment and follow-through on universal primary education. Since 2000, the Asia and the Pacific region's ANER has risen dramatically, from 88 to 95 per cent. Considering that lower secondary education is now becoming compulsory in many Asia and the Pacific countries, participation rates have also risen from 69 to 89 per cent.

Figure 3: Progress of participation in different education levels, 2000 and 2012

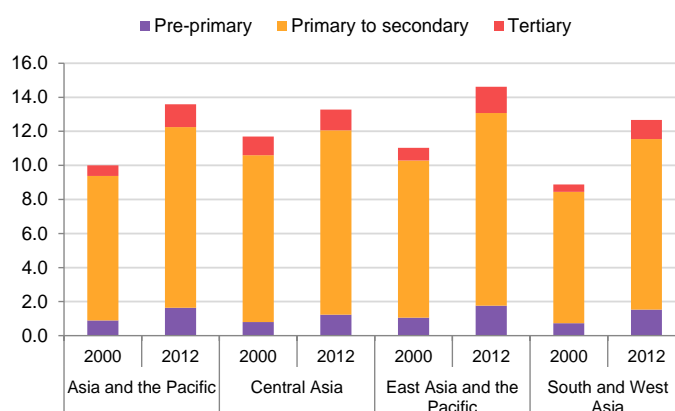


Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics Data Centre, accessed in April 2015a.

2.3 Students stayed in the education system for a longer period

Apart from the tremendous progress made towards ensuring equitable access to primary education for every child, the Asia and the Pacific region has also extended school life expectancy at all levels of education over during the past decade. Time spent in pre-primary education went from 0.89 years in 2000 to 1.63 in 2012. The number of years spent in basic education (primary and secondary) increased by around 2 years, from 8.49 to 10.62 years over the same period (see figure 4). Even though tertiary school life expectancy increased in the region from 0.61 years in 2000 to 1.33 years in 2012, there is still room for greater growth at this level of education in the region, especially with regards to the post-2015 education agenda.

Figure 4: School life expectancy, pre-primary to tertiary education, 2000 and 2012



Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics Data Centre, accessed in April 2015a.

Box 1: Remaining issues and challenges in achieving EFA

As discussed, data clearly show that the Asia and the Pacific region has made great efforts to achieve its EFA commitments. However, challenges remain that the region needs to consider:

- For all sub-regions, ensuring pre-primary education for all children is a big challenge. On average, in Asia-Pacific, two out of three children received pre-primary education in 2012. This is a particular challenge in Central Asia where the pre-primary education GER in 2012 is only 33 per cent, compared to 68 per cent in East Asia and the Pacific and 55 per cent in South and West Asia.
- In Asia and the Pacific, there are still 17 million out-of-school children in 2012, of whom 9.8 million are from South and West Asia and 6.9 million are from East Asia and the Pacific.
- More must be done to increase secondary education enrolments as only 73 per cent of adolescents are enrolled in secondary in 2012 in Asia-Pacific (the rate is almost 100 per cent in Central Asia, 84 per cent in East Asia and the Pacific, and 64 per cent in South and West Asia).
- Only 18 per cent of Asia and the Pacific countries will reach an adult literacy rate of 97 per cent by 2015. While the average stood at 95 per cent in East Asia and the Pacific in 2012 and 100 per cent in Central Asia, South and West Asia's literacy rate was only 63 per cent.
- The proportion of female teachers is still low in many countries, especially in South and West Asia (45 per cent of female teachers in primary in 2008, and 39 per cent in secondary in 2012).

3. Major bottlenecks and barriers in expanding the education system

Understanding why bottlenecks occur in the expansion of the education system in the region and identifying barriers is essential to evaluating the needs for the post-2015 education agenda. In the Global Education Digest 2012 (UIS, 2012), the UIS identified bottlenecks to successful learning by looking at major patterns in students' progress at different levels of education. Patterns include key points in school progression, including school entry, grade progression, completion of a cycle and transition to the next level of education. Three patterns emerged from the analysis.

The first pattern is composed by countries with high access to grade 1 of primary education. These education systems are characterized by large numbers of late entrants (children who are older than regular school entry age) and high rates of early school leaving, especially in the lower grades. For instance, in Nepal (see figure 5), the gross intake ratio to primary education was 154 per cent in 2013, indicating high access to primary education. However, of those who started school, only 85 per cent were expected to reach the last grade of primary education, while 74 per cent were expected to enter lower secondary schools. Similarly, in Cambodia, current intake to primary stood at 149 per cent in 2013; 96 per cent of them will stay until the last grade of primary and 77 per cent are expected to enrol in lower secondary education. For these countries, reducing the number of children who drop out of school is a more important issue than the transition to lower secondary.

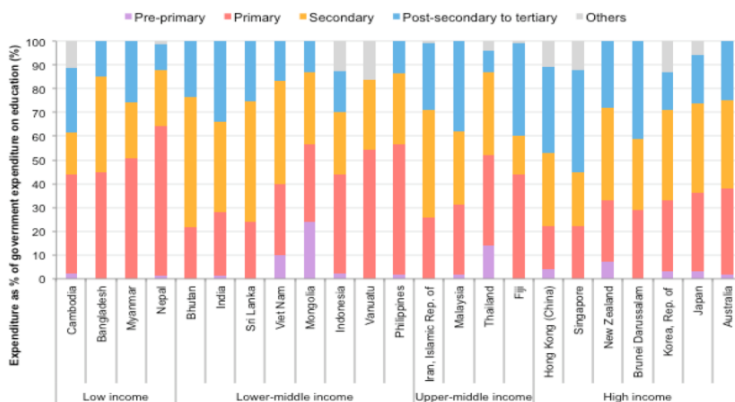
The second pattern includes countries that have a high gross intake ratio in the first grade of primary education (although not as high as the first pattern), followed by a more moderate decline in access and transition rates to lower secondary. Myanmar and Viet Nam are examples (see figure 5) of this. In 2010, Myanmar's gross intake ratio to primary was 137 per cent, with 102 per cent of students were expected to study until the last grade of primary, while 79 per cent were expected to enter lower secondary. Likewise, Viet Nam's access to primary stood at 106 per cent in 2013, while 100 per cent of students were expected to reach the last grade of primary and 93 per cent were expected to enter lower secondary. For these countries, reducing the number of primary school dropouts as well as ensuring access to lower secondary education are both limiting factors.

Lastly, the third pattern shows relatively consistent access rates in primary, with fairly stable rates of transition to lower secondary education. In Samoa, the intake rate to the last grade of primary education in 2012 was expected to be 95 per cent, while almost all pupils reaching the last grade of primary are expected to enrol into lower secondary education (see figure 5). For Samoa, reducing the number of dropouts from primary school is the major bottleneck to be addressed. Bhutan and Indonesia also fit this pattern.

3.1 Huge gaps in governments' financial commitments to education

Spending on education as a share of total government expenditure varies considerably in the region, ranging from four per cent to 31 per cent. In terms of distribution of education spending by level of education, primary and secondary education remains the priority in many countries. While expenditures on primary and secondary education vary between 20 to 30 per cent, countries in Asia and the Pacific allocate less than two per cent of their expenditures to pre-primary education and 20 per cent or less to tertiary education.

Figure 6: Distribution of education expenditure by level of education in selected countries in Asia-Pacific, latest year available



Note: Income classification follows the standard set by World Bank.
Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics Data Centre, accessed in April 2015a.

3.2 Inadequate guarantees for free and compulsory education

Free and compulsory education is not guaranteed in the constitutions of some countries (Tomaševski, 2001). In Asia and the Pacific, 15 countries have not yet legalized free and compulsory education in their constitutions and in eight countries the right is restricted to citizens or residents.

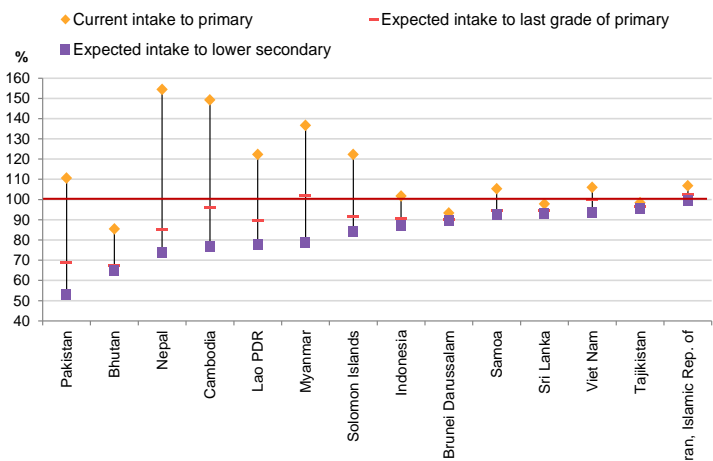
3.3 Many households are pressured to spend more on education

While basic education is legally free in the majority of countries, in reality, households face significant education expenditures, including payments for additional school supplies and private tuition fees (UNESCO, 2013). Moreover, some countries eliminate school fees only for selected groups to reduce inequalities in access to education among social groups.

3.4 Chronic teacher shortages

There are chronic teacher shortages in Asia and the Pacific. Approximately one million teaching posts have to be filled in order to achieve universal primary education by 2015 in the region (UIS, 2014a). In countries where there are a sufficient number of teachers at the national level, teachers are likely to be concentrated in urban areas, resulting in shortages at schools in rural and remote areas.

Figure 5: Expected school profiles (cumulative ratios of entry, survival and transition), latest year available



Note: Expected intake to lower secondary is calculated as gross intake to primary multiplied by the probability of survival rate to last grade of primary multiplied by probability of transition rate to lower secondary.
Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics Data Centre, accessed in April 2015a.

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4. Visions of monitoring the post-2015 education agenda

Succeeding the Millennium Development Goals and building on the outcomes of the Dakar EFA commitment, the post-2015 education agenda will serve as a framework for global development efforts for education after 2015. Before moving to this broad and inclusive process, what are the lessons we learnt from the EFA commitments and what improvements could be made in measuring educational development?

4.1 Develop new concepts and indicators

While all of the expected post-2015 targets have some indicators that are currently available for measurement, substantial investment in new indicator development will be required to better track the proposed targets. In addition to indicators of learning and equity, it will also be necessary to develop new input and output indicators on access to early childhood education; financing for education, especially for the most vulnerable populations; education for global citizenship and sustainable development; and the extent to which teachers are motivated, paid sufficiently and trained (UIS 2014b). Moreover, common targets and indicators were necessary regarding all skills and competencies, as well as some context-specific definitions. No simple measure was found to assess acquired competencies, particularly across areas related to creativity, critical thinking and entrepreneurship. Nonetheless, a much stronger focus on competency-based assessment is needed, and to achieve this, sustained political commitment, continuous professional support for teachers and stronger capacity development are required (UNESCO, 2014).

Box 2: Thematic indicators to monitor the Post-2015 education agenda

The UNESCO Institute for Statistics presented a new proposal for indicators in the World Education Forum, in Incheon, South Korea, May 2015 that could be used to monitor the post-2015 goals identified by the international education community. The latest recommendations incorporate feedback from a public consultation about an earlier proposal developed by a technical advisory group from UNESCO, the EFA Global Monitoring Report, UNICEF, the World Bank and the OECD.

The proposal presents a set of 42 thematic indicators for seven targets in goal 4 of the Sustainable Development Goals and its implementation means, which include completion of primary and secondary education and learning outcome, access to pre-primary education as well as technical, vocational and tertiary education, skill development, education disparities, literacy and numeracy and knowledge and skills for sustainable development. The proposal particularly concerns the need for more indicators about disparities in learning opportunities and education inputs and processes to measure equity as well as how to measure learning outcomes in basic education.

Discussions and modifications will continue, notably ahead of a Ministerial-level meeting organized by UNESCO in November 2015 and 47th session of the UN Statistical Commission in March 2016 until the proposal is submitted to the UN Economic and Social Council for final adaptation in July 2016 (UIS, 2015b).

4.2 Increase access and participation in literacy programmes and measurement

In the Asia and the Pacific region, the attainment of basic competencies in literacy, particularly in developing countries, remains a concern. UIS data show enormous disparities in the literacy rates between and within countries. Indeed, international assessments such as PISA and TIMSS

show that the region is home to some of the highest educational attainments as well as some of the lowest. Literacy issues are particularly serious for marginalized groups, especially among women and girls. As such, the full cost of addressing literacy needs should be carefully assessed at the national level, and concrete plans of action to reach marginalized populations are required (UNESCO, 2014).

4.3 Improve data collection and management of information system

A major issue that continues to plague education development across the region are the significant gaps in education data, particularly the lack of accurate data on marginalized groups. Where are these gaps and how can we improve education development? (UNESCO, 2014).

- Data on the non-formal education sector and Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) are often not sufficiently collected in Education Management Information Systems (EMIS). As such, these data cannot always paint an accurate picture, and as a result, do not always support effective improvements to national education systems.
- In many cases, the privatization and decentralization of education systems have led to the loss of key data or to data fragmentation. Governments must effectively regulate and monitor the private provision of education to ensure that divisions between public and private education are not generating significant educational divides. Also, more innovative indicators to assess the efficiency of governments' inputs into education systems are required.
- To provide more of a sector-wide approach to education policy planning, further disaggregation of data and expanded data collection efforts to help reveal disparities in access and learning are needed. Such an approach will help ensure that disaggregated data are transparent and available to all relevant stakeholders.
- Strengthening the capacities of governments in monitoring & evaluation (M&E) is required to improve the collection of education data and to ensure that data are used effectively to inform education policies and strategies.

4.4 Require strong political commitment

Although it is important to develop 'revolutionary' indicators and improve a data collection process, these steps alone are not enough. Rather, the strong commitment of governments to establish mechanisms is crucial to provide basic education for all in the Asia and the Pacific region as well as remove social and economic barriers and ensure that children and adults can claim their right to education (UNESCO, 2014). At the same time, an effective partnership must be sought at national, regional and international levels among civil society, academia, development partners, governments and other stakeholders.

- All the data are available at UNESCO Institute for Statistics Data Centre: <http://www.uis.unesco.org/datacentre/pages/default.aspx>
- Should you have any inquiries, kindly contact Sun Min Lee [sm.lee@unesco.org] and Aki Osawa [a.osawa@unesco.org]