

Situation Analysis of SDG 4 with a Gender Lens



Target 4.1

By 2030, ensure that all girls and boys complete free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education leading to relevant and effective learning outcomes.

Target 4.1 addresses universal primary and secondary education completion as necessary milestones on the road to sustainable development. Moreover, it places a sharp focus on ensuring that learners acquire relevant knowledge, skills and competencies necessary for lifelong learning. Target 4.1 explicitly calls for both girls and boys from all socio-economic backgrounds to receive a quality education to achieve learning outcomes (E2030 FFA, 2016). For countries to fulfil the target, they will need to analyse persistent and emerging barriers to participation and completion in primary and secondary education through a gender equality lens, and develop relevant policies and plans to ensure equitable learning outcomes for both girls and boys.

1 Analysis and Overview

Girls are likely to be excluded from primary education, whereas boys are missing from secondary education (Access)

East Asia and the Pacific made significant progress in sending more children to school, with the number of out-of-school children, adolescents and youth decreasing by 43 million since 2000 (UIS Data Centre). However, as of 2016, 32 million children, adolescents and youth of primary and secondary school age in the sub-region were still not in school. Boys represent 57% (E2030 FFA, 2016).

In primary education, girls are more likely to face barriers to schooling. In 2016, 53% of out-of-school children of primary school age in East Asia and the Pacific were girls. In countries such as Lao PDR, Mongolia, and Papua New Guinea, more than 55% of out-of-school children were girls (UIS Data Centre). In contrast, adolescent boys are more likely to be excluded at the secondary level. In 2016, 55% of out-of-school adolescents of lower secondary school age in the sub-region were boys. In Tonga, boys accounted for 87% of the out-of-school population. The most significant disparities, at the expense of boys, are observed at the upper secondary level, where boys accounted for 62% of out-of-school youth of upper secondary education age in the region (ibid).

Sub-regional and national averages can mask disparities within the country. **Figure 1** identifies the most marginalized girls and boys using the disaggregated profiles of out-of-school children in Lao PDR and Timor-Leste. In Lao PDR, girls from the most impoverished households in urban areas were most likely to be excluded among girls of primary school age, with an out-of-school rate of 32%. Similarly, the poorest boys in rural areas had the highest out-of-school rate, at 22%, among boys of the same age group. In Timor-Leste, the highest out-of-school rate of 43% are among urban poorest boys. Among the poorest urban girls, 41% were out of school, the highest rate among primary school age girls. As the two country cases illustrate, even when the rates of gender disparity among out-of-school children at the national level is small, girls and boys from the poorest households, whether they live in rural or urban areas, are the most excluded children.

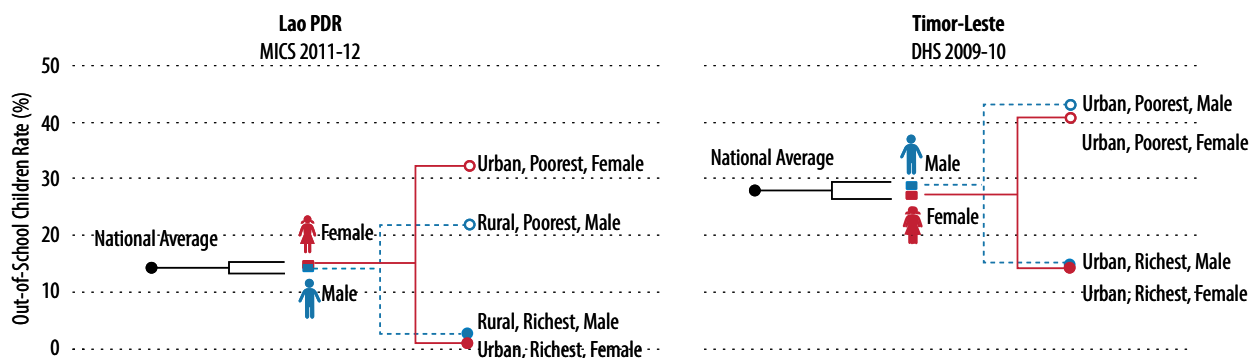
The poorest boys and girls have difficulty completing school (Completion)

The 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda calls for universal completion of primary and secondary education for both girls and boys by 2030 (E2030 FFA, 2016). This implies that gender parity in school completion is still a distant goal for the many countries in East Asia and the Pacific. As shown in **Figure 2**, girls stand a better chance than boys of completing primary school, although gender parity in participation has been achieved in many countries (UIS Data Centre). Even in countries such as Lao PDR and Myanmar where participation in primary education is in favour of boys (ibid), girls are more likely to complete primary education. In upper secondary education, participation and completion rates generally favour girls in selected countries. There are exceptions. In Cambodia, Timor-Leste and Vanuatu, boys are more likely to complete upper secondary education. Figure 2 also demonstrates considerable disparities in school completion rates among both girls and boys from the poorest households. In Lao PDR, for example, only about 1% of the most impoverished girls and boys complete upper secondary education, whereas nearly 65% of the wealthiest girls and boys complete the same level of education. It is worth noting that boys from the poorest families are the least likely to complete their education in many countries shown in Figure 2.

Girls are outperforming boys in Cambodia and Viet Nam (Learning Outcomes)

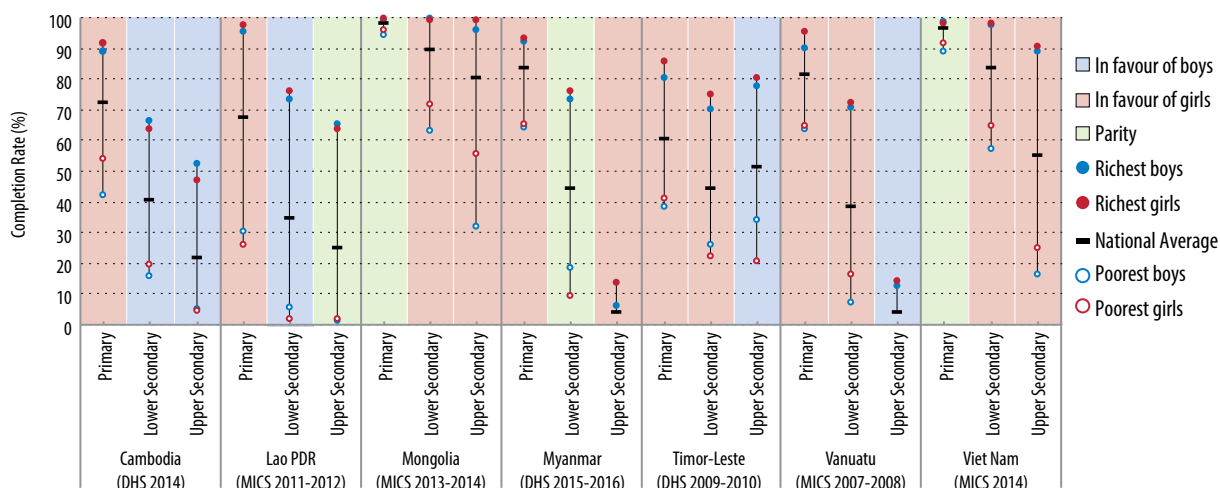
The 2030 agenda places learning outcomes at the center of educational progress. However, data are too limited to provide a clear picture of gender

Figure 1: Out-of-school rates for children of primary school age in Lao PDR and Timor-Leste, disaggregated by gender, wealth and location, latest year available



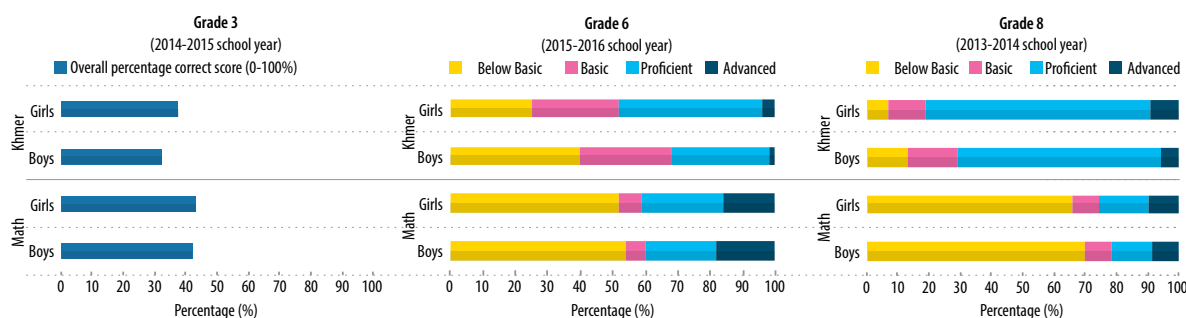
Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS) database, <http://data.uis.unesco.org>, [March 2018].

Figure 2: Completion rates at primary, lower secondary and upper secondary levels, disaggregated by sex, location and wealth in selected countries, latest year available



Note: Data for the poorest girls and boys in upper secondary education in Myanmar and Vanuatu are not available.
Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS) database, <http://data.uis.unesco.org>, [March 2018].

Figure 3: National student achievement in Grade 3, 6, and 8 in Cambodia by sex, latest year available



Note: For more information about level classification, refer to MoEYS, 2016a; MoEYS, 2016b; MoEYS, 2016c.
Source: MoEYS, 2016a; MoEYS, 2016b; MoEYS, 2016c.

issues in learning achievement. In East Asia and the Pacific, a few countries have data. Cambodia conducts national learning assessments in Grade 3, 6, and 8 (UIS database of learning assessments). As shown in **Figure 3**, Grade 3 girls scored higher (37.8%) than boys (32.3%) in the Khmer language assessment. In higher grades, girls also outperformed boys in Khmer language. In the Grade 8 assessment, 81% of girls ranked as either proficient or advanced, compared to 71% of boys. This trend is also observed in Viet Nam, where 91% of girls achieved at least a minimum proficiency level¹ in reading at the end of lower secondary education in 2015, while the figure was 81% for boys (UIS Data Centre). In the assessment of mathematics, Cambodian girls performed only slightly better (43.4%) than boys (42.3%) in Grade 3. In upper grades, about 50% of girls and boys fell in the

below-basic proficiency level in Grade 6, and 70% in Grade 8. Although girls performed better than boys in mathematics, the gender gap was smaller than in the assessment of Khmer language (UIS Data Centre). This trend is also true for Viet Nam: 83% of girls and 79% of boys attained a minimum proficiency level in mathematics at the end of lower secondary education (ibid).

2 Issues and Challenges

The data presented above show that girls are at a relative disadvantage in access to primary education, where they make up a more significant share of out-of-school children. However, once enrolled, they are more likely than boys to progress and complete primary education and higher levels of education. In many countries shown in this factsheet, boys are at risk of failing to make the transition to, and complete, secondary education.

¹ The minimum proficiency level follows the standard defined by each learning assessment (UIS, 2017a).

Some research indicates that boys may fall behind in education due to poverty and the desire or need to work (UNESCO, 2010; UNESCO, 2018). However, girls are also vulnerable to pressure to leave school early, especially girls from poor households, where families may not have the means or see the benefit of educating girls. It is important to note that the interaction of gender and other characteristics such as poverty increases the chance of exclusion for both girls and boys. Research shows that persistent gender inequality can slow economic growth and socio-cultural development (UNDP, 2013). In other words, there are societal costs to continued gender inequality.

Furthermore, country cases from Cambodia and Viet Nam show that boys perform less well in assessments of reading skills. This fact is consistent with the global trend where a significant gap appears to favour girls in cross-national assessments of reading skills (UIS, 2017b; UNESCO, 2015; UNESCO, 2018). Moreover, East Asia and the Pacific faces a significant shortage of comparable learning assessment data. As of 2015, the majority of countries in East Asia and the Pacific with data conducted learning assessments in mathematics and reading at the end of primary education. Only a few countries conduct early grade assessments in mathematics and reading (UIS Data Centre). In fact, countries do conduct various national learning assessments, but they do not necessarily produce/report data disaggregated by sex that would provide a clearer picture of gender disparities by location, ethnicity, wealth and other characteristics.

References

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These data sheets are a first step in strengthening the gender lens in analyses of data. More disaggregated and nested analyses can result in more specific and nuanced recommendations.

3 Recommendations

Linkage between assessments and policies

To better understand the needs of learners in East Asia and the Pacific, countries should invest in and increase their efforts to establish and/or strengthen their national assessment systems, not only to measure learner outcomes. Perhaps more importantly, these assessments can inform policies and teaching practices. In doing so, countries must be conscious of how gender issues such as stereotypical expectations, gender norms pertaining to teachers' biases and intersecting disadvantages could influence in the design and outcomes of such assessments.

Towards an improved EMIS through individual data collection

An individual student tracking system can help countries to track both boys and girls progress and difficulties in learning and provide necessary support to prevent early dropouts and facilitate successful transition, completion and learning.

Gender-responsive learning environments

Develop innovative participatory teaching and learning strategies that motivate both girls and boys to participate in learning activities that can help students to stay and complete school successfully.

