



United Nations
Educational, Scientific and
Cultural Organization

Education
2030

Asia-Pacific Overview: Sustainable Development Goal 4

TARGET

4.1



1. Defining Target 4.1

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 advances the understanding of basic education from the Education for All (EFA) period to cover at least the first nine years of formal education, consisting of primary and lower secondary education, and to make this free and compulsory. In addition, while the achievement of universal “access” is still an important element of the target, there is an explicit emphasis placed on equity and quality of learning outcomes upon completion of each cycle of education. The target reminds us of the criticality of ensuring that both quantity and quality must be achieved at the same time without having to promote one at the cost of the other.

Hence, there are two key expected achievements under Target 4.1:

- **Access:** The provision of 12 years of free, publicly funded, inclusive, equitable, quality primary and secondary education of which at least nine years are compulsory.
- **Learning:** Upon completion of the full cycle of primary and secondary education, all children should have established the building blocks of basic literacy and numeracy skills, as well as subject knowledge and cognitive and non-cognitive skills that enable children to develop to their full potential, as defined by and measured against established curricula and official standards.

2. Regional and Sub-regional Overview: Target 4.1

More than 51% of the global out-of-school children and youth live in Asia and the Pacific.

Over the last 15 years, Asia and the Pacific has seen significant progress in access to and participation in school, especially for primary education. The net enrolment rate of primary education in the region reached more than 90 per cent in 2014. Despite these significant achievements, the region was home to 136 million (or 52 per cent) of the 263 million global out-of-school children at the primary and secondary school age in 2014. Among the 136 million out-of-school children in the region, 13 per cent are of the primary school age, while the figures are 21 per cent and 66 per cent for lower secondary

TABLE 1: Rate of Out-of-school Children (%), 2014

Sub-Region	Primary	Lower Secondary	Upper Secondary
World	9	16	37
Central Asia	6	4	18
East Asia and the Pacific	4	9	23
South and West Asia	6	20	50

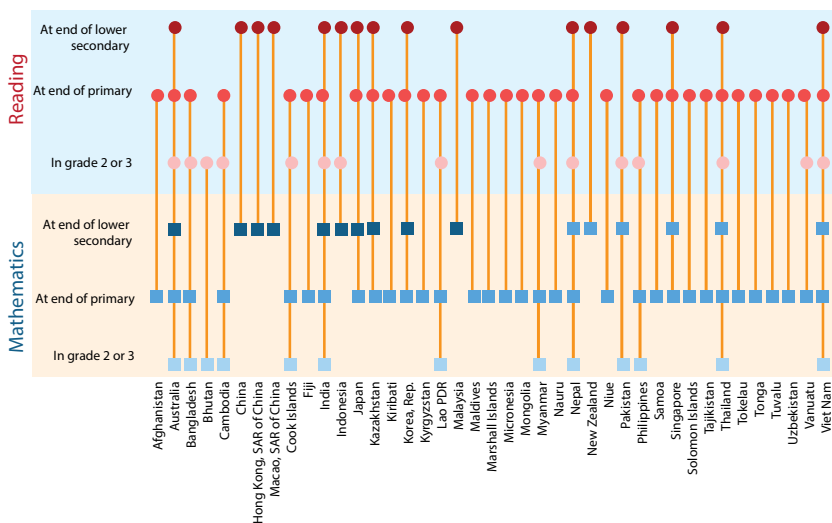
Source: UIS Data Centre, accessed in September 2016

and upper secondary school age children. Although South and West Asia have reduced the out-of-school children rate significantly in the last 15 years, 74 per cent of the out-of-school children in the region still live in that sub-region.

While most of the countries in the region have national learning assessments at various points, internationally comparable data are scarce.

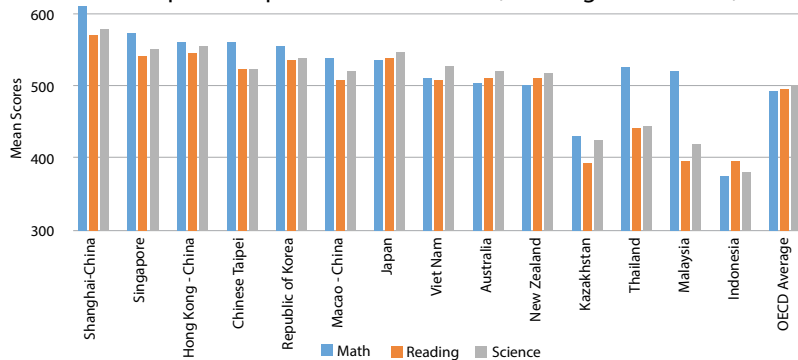
Improving quality learning for all children and youth is one of the central pillars of policy for the Education 2030 agenda (UIS, 2016). The Education 2030 Framework for Action calls for strengthening quality and nationally, credible and representative learning assessment in mathematics and reading in early and end of primary education and at the end of lower secondary education. In 2015, where data are available, 33 Asia-Pacific countries had a national learning assessment in mathematics and reading at the end of primary education. However, assessments for mathematics and reading in the early grades of primary education were carried out in 13 and 15 countries respectively. Overall, only four countries in the region covered the three points of measurement and two subjects. It is important to note that while some countries conduct national learning assessments, not all of them correspond with the grades proposed in the Education 2030 agenda (UIS AP SDG4 Report).

FIGURE 1: Availability of National Learning Assessments, 2015



Source: Created by UIS-AIMS, UNESCO Bangkok, UNESCO eAtlas for Education 2030, accessed in September 2016

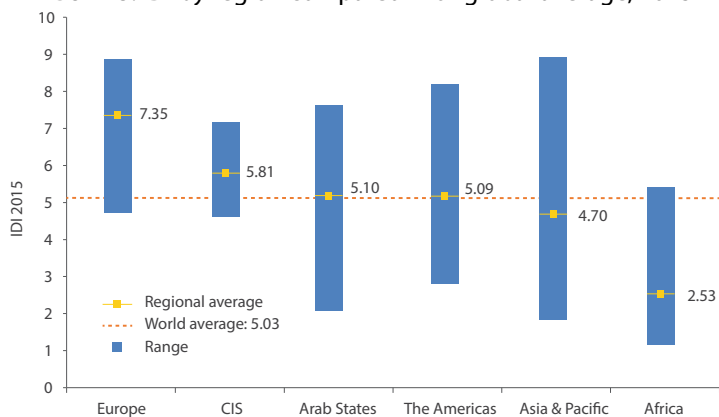
FIGURE 2: Snapshot of performance in math, reading and science, 2012



Source: OECD, PISA 2012, accessed in October 2016.

PISA 2012 results revealed that of all the 34 OECD member countries and 31 partner countries and economies that participated, China, Japan, Republic of Korea and Singapore had the top performing education systems, where 15 year-old students achieved the highest levels in math, reading and science. As assessed by PISA 2012, these countries combine high levels of performance with equity in education opportunities. What's interesting to note is that across OECD countries, a more socio-economically advantaged student scores 39 points higher in mathematics than a less-advantaged student.

FIGURE 3: IDI by region compared with global average, 2015



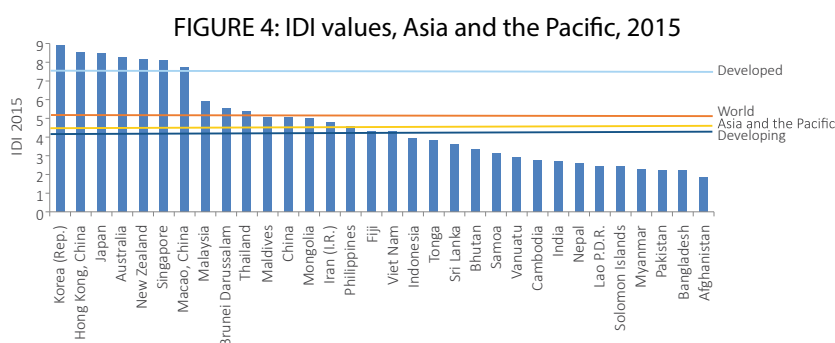
Source: International Telecommunications Union (ITU), 2015.

This is the equivalent of nearly one year of schooling. Another aspect to note is that over 13% of students in Hong Kong-China, Macao-China, Shanghai-China and Viet Nam are resilient – beating the socio-economic odds against them and exceeding expectations - and perform among the top 25% of students across all participating countries and economies (OECD, 2014).

ICT development is widely diverse across the Asia-Pacific region

The Education 2030 Framework for Action and the ensuing Qingdao Declaration recognize the immense potential of ICT in expanding access to lifelong learning opportunities and enhancing the quality of learning.

The Asia-Pacific region has been enjoying rapid growth in ICT penetration and use. Despite these advancements, Asia and the Pacific has been ranked as the region with the largest disparity in the ICT Development Index (IDI). In 2015, six of the top 20 countries and four of the least ICT-developed countries were from the region. This digital divide in the region significantly limits the provision of responsive ICT-supported learning environments, especially in countries with learning gaps, thereby contributing to the widening knowledge gap across the region.



Source: ITU, 2015.

Issues and Challenges

» Lack of targeted interventions and policies to address retention issues:

In 2014, only 66 per cent of students in primary school in South and West Asia survived to the last grade of primary education, while the rate was 76 per cent for East Asia and the Pacific. Targeted interventions and policies are necessary, not only to bring all children to school, but also to ensure that they stay until the end of secondary education.

» Lack of a common scale for comparability of learning outcomes:

Countries might have their own national learning assessments, but they are often based on different approaches and methodologies. Developing a common scale of measurement for comparability will be an important challenge for the education community.

» Huge disparity in ICT development across the region:

Despite the rapid increase of ICT penetration in the region, a huge disparity in ICT development exists in the region. For middle- and low-income countries, ICT infrastructure for pedagogical purposes remain inadequate. Allocation of ICT for a number of schools is improbable since these schools do not even have electrical power to support their usage. In addition, while more developed countries integrate ICT into their curricula and systematically train their teachers in the use of ICT for teaching, this is not true for the rest of the region (UIS, 2014).

3. Lessons Learned and the Way Forward

» Political will and accountability form the foundation for achieving target 4.1

- Bridging policy and implementation of the global goals through localization is crucial to guide the work of local actors such as schools, communities, teachers, families and learners.
- A strong accountability framework should be in place, defining how the internationally set education development goals will be accounted for at the national and local levels, and what actions will be needed to turn the global and national commitments into results.
- Education policies and interventions must be holistic and comprehensive. For instance, ICT in education policies should consider different aspects including infrastructure, connectivity, capability building, (local) content and applications, with a Total Cost of Ownership (TCO) perspective.

» Strategically mobilize resources and partnerships

- Encouraging strategic partnerships, improving participatory processes in education and in ICT development, and ensuring wider coordination at all levels across different authorities and agencies involved in the provision of education including non-state stakeholders in the planning, implementation and monitoring of education programmes to achieve national education objectives are important and allow for the prioritization and streamlining of programmes.

- Teachers play a large part in determining the quality of education, and thus more investment in teachers and their relevant, continuous professional development are needed along with the improvement of school conditions and infrastructure.

» **Develop robust data systems and indicators for evidence-based policy making**

- Sound policies are evidence-based, thus the need for robust indicators and systematic research.
- The lack of data and data collection and management that go beyond the indicator framework for SDG 4 serve as a major constraint for evaluating the impact of SDG 4 - Target 4.1 strategies and monitoring progress.
- Well-planned, coordinated, implemented, and monitored ICT in education initiatives bring about efficiency in the delivery of educational services.

» **Understand the socio-economic contexts and address specific barriers to education**

- Access to education and participation is highly affected by economic circumstances and poverty, and thus, the priorities of Education 2030 must take into account these barriers.

» **Encourage knowledge sharing and learning between countries**

- Documentation and sharing of experiences and resources among countries – good practices, addressing challenges, success factors, and mitigating risks – are beneficial for the region.

4. Global and Regional Documents Linked to Target 4.1

- Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Article 26)
- International Covenant on Economic and Social Cultural Rights (Article 13)
- UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (Article 28)
- Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (Article 10)
- International Convention on the Elimination of All Forums of Racial Discrimination (Articles 1, 2 and 5)
- UNESCO Convention Against Discrimination in Education (Articles 1 and 4)
- Qingdao Declaration (on ICT and Post-2015 Education)
- ASEAN Declaration on Strengthening Education for Out-of-School Children and Youth (OOSCY)
- Asia-Pacific Statement on Education Beyond 2015 (Bangkok Statement, 2015)

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