



United Nations
Educational, Scientific and
Cultural Organization

Education
2030

Asia-Pacific Overview: Sustainable Development Goal 4

TARGET

4.2



1. Defining Target 4.2

Target 4.2: By 2030, ensure that all girls and boys have access to quality early childhood development, care and pre-primary education so that they are ready for primary education.

The target 4.2 builds on the efforts made towards achieving Education for All (EFA) Goal 1 and to ensure that the new target on early childhood care and education (ECCE) will bring about concrete outcomes and can be monitored with measurable indicators. Three key words/phrases in the target language – access, quality and ready for primary education - are elaborated below:

- **Access** refers to providing at least one year of free and compulsory quality pre-primary education, paying special attention to reaching the poorest and most disadvantaged children¹ through ECCE services.
- **Quality** reflects components of the environment that are related to positive child outcomes in the academic and social domains.² Quality ECCE strives to have both 'structural quality' and 'process quality' which includes 1) quality goals and minimum standards; 2) curriculum and learning standards; 3) workforce quality; 4) family and community engagement; and 5) data, research and monitoring.
- **Ready for primary education** refers to the achievement of developmental milestones across a range of domains, including 1) health and physical development; 2) social and emotional development; 3) approaches to learning; 4) age-appropriate language and communicative skills; and 5) cognitive development and general knowledge, which lay the foundation for lifelong learning and supports children's well-being and progressive preparation for primary school entry.

1 Children from ethnic/language groups; orphans and other vulnerable children; children from poor households; girls, especially from vulnerable groups; children with disability; children affected by violence; children affected by conflicts; children affected by natural or human-made emergencies; children living in urban slums or street children; children living in extreme rural/remote areas; and children living in pastoralist/nomadic communities. (UNESCO, 2016)

2 UNESCO and UNICEF. (2012). *Asia-Pacific End of Decade Notes on Education for All: EFA Goal 1-Early Childhood Care and Education*. p. 27.

2. Regional and Sub-regional Overview: Target 4.2

Pre-primary Enrolment Growth and Gender Parity Index:

The global gross enrolment ratio (GER) average for pre-primary education increased from 30 per cent in 2000 to 44 per cent in 2014. In the Asia-Pacific region, although significant progress can be seen among all the sub-regions, East Asia and the Pacific observed the highest improvement (34 percentage points) from 2000 to 2014. South and West Asia saw the smallest improvement (8 percentage points) during the same period reaching a pre-primary GER of 18 per cent in 2014, which is also the lowest in the region.

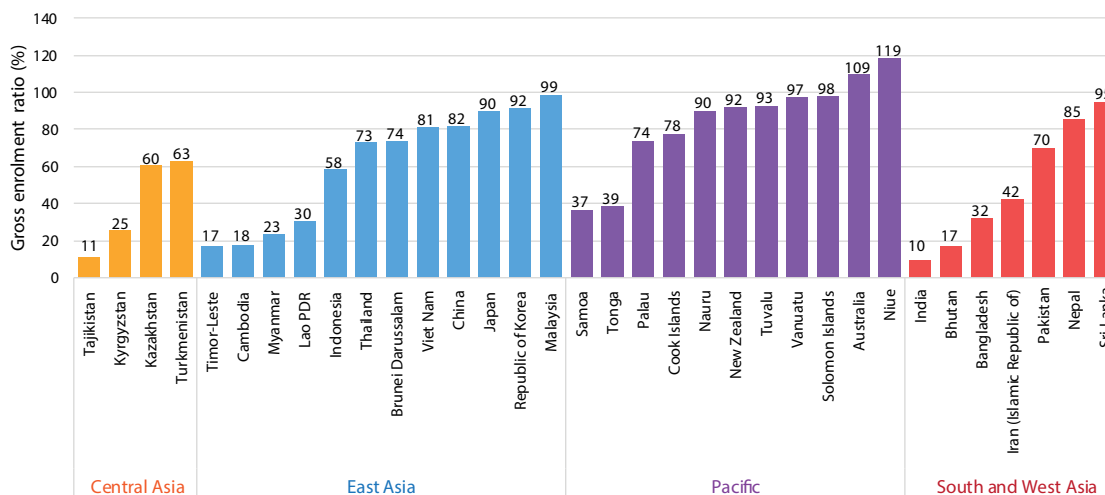
TABLE 1: Gross enrolment ratio, Gender Parity Index, Pre-Primary (% of GER)

	2000		2014	
	GER	GPI	GER	GPI
World	30	0.97	44	0.99
Central Asia	24	0.97	35	1.01
East Asia and the Pacific	42	0.98	76	1.00
South and West Asia	10	0.84	18	0.94

Source: Created by UIS-AIMS, UNESCO Bangkok, UIS Data Centre, accessed in September 2016

FIGURE 1: Participation in ECCE: Asia and the Pacific
Gross enrolment ratio of pre-primary education, by country, 2014 or latest

There are great differences in ECCE participation among Asia-Pacific countries.



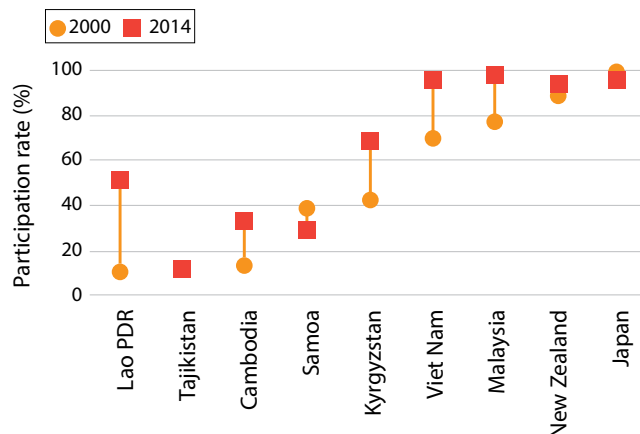
Note: Data for Kazakhstan, Nepal and Tajikistan refer to 2015. Data for Australia, Bangladesh, India, Japan, Republic of Korea, Sri Lanka and Vanuatu refer to 2013.

Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics, Data Center (accessed in July 2016)

Gender disparities were reduced in all sub-regions of Asia-Pacific and gender parity was achieved in 2014, except for in South and West Asia (GPI of 0.94) (UIS, 2016).

The data for selected countries in the Asia-Pacific region for which data is available (see Figure 1), show that there was significant improvement on the participation rate for children, one year before the official primary entry age in organized learning in 2000 and 2014. Four out of nine countries for which data are available have reached participation rates of over 90 per cent. However, there are still several countries that need to improve their participation rate in organized learning by creating opportunities for children in the early years.

FIGURE 2: Participation rate in organized learning (%) (one year before the official primary entry age)



Note: Data for Tajikistan refer to 2015, for Japan and Viet Nam to 2013.

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

Issues and Challenges

There are a number of important challenges related to Target 4.2, such as:

» **Disparities in ECCE service provision both across and within countries:** Despite the rapid growth of ECCE, there are still wide disparities in access and limited attention to marginalized and disadvantaged groups (remote areas, minorities, indigenous communities) both across and within countries. In rural areas of Andhra Pradesh, in India, about 30% of children from the wealthiest families (top 20%) are enrolled in private pre-schools, compared to less than 5% of children from the poorest quintile (UNESCO, 2016b, p. 44).

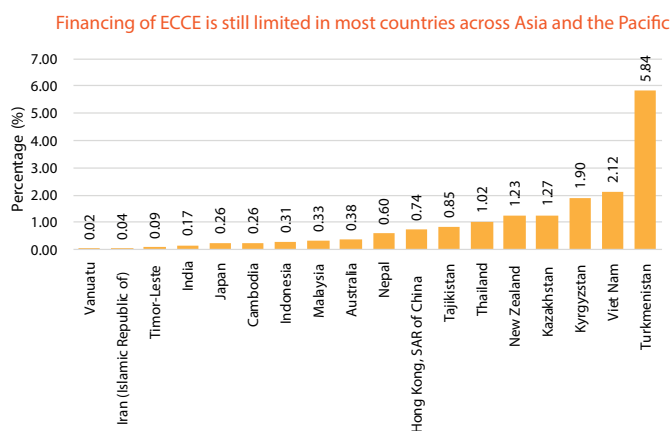
» **Professionalization of ECCE personnel:** For many countries in the region, there are prevalent challenges in supplying high quality trained staff in ECCE centres. Less than 50% of the countries in the region have policies, strategies and action plans toward the professionalization of ECCE personnel. In Central Asia, the share of trained teachers ranges from 46% in Kyrgyzstan to 100% in Uzbekistan. Many countries have yet to establish specific national standards or regulations on ECCE teacher training nor identify required competencies for ECCE pedagogical staff – such as specific coursework on ECCE development, leadership skills or specific support on how to include children from marginalized groups (UNESCO, 2016b, pp. 45-46).

» **Lack of coordination and multi-sectoral ECCE policies and strategies:** Most countries are organized in a fragmented sector-based approach to provide services to families and children, usually according to women (alternatively also under family and youth), health or education sectors. In many countries, ministries have different goals and targeted outcomes, resulting in the dispersion of services for children and gaps in provision. Innovative, integrated strategies that address multiple factors of disadvantage would better address the complex needs of vulnerable children and their families (UNESCO, 2016b, p. 25). Only 47.8% of the countries in the region have policies and strategies to ensure integration of multi-sectors for holistic ECCE through coordination among different ministries (UNESCO, 2016a).

» **Lack of sustainable ECCE financing mechanism:** The lack of political commitment to or investment in ECCE can act as an impediment in some Asia-Pacific countries. Despite decades of international advocacy efforts to include ECCE as an essential part of the development agenda, ECCE is still not a political priority for all countries seeking to improve socio-economic conditions and developmental opportunities for children, even though an overwhelming amount of evidence supports investment in ECCE with long-term benefits to children and society (UNESCO, 2016b, p. 43).

» **Lack of data and monitoring mechanism:** The lack of adequate monitoring system for ECCE and pre-primary education hinders tracking the progress in many countries in the region. In most of the countries, ECCE and pre-primary education are not part of compulsory education and do not have a regular data collection mechanism. Collecting data on ECCE programmes is also often complicated by involvement of different ministries and agencies and the existence of the different types of ECCE programmes such as home-based, community-based and centre-based programmes. Moreover, available data from other sectors (health, nutrition, child welfare and child protection) are not integrated with data from the education sector (UNESCO, 2016b, p. 47).

FIGURE 2: Financing ECCE: Asia and the Pacific expenditure of pre-primary education, as % of total government expenditure 2014 or latest



Note: Data for Australia, Cambodia, Kyrgyzstan Malaysia and Thailand refer to 2013. Data for India, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Viet Nam refer to 2014.

Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics, Data Center (accessed in July 2016)

3. Lessons Learned and the Way Forward

» Increase equitable access and service delivery

- Develop intersectoral early childhood interventions to identify children with vulnerable conditions, including developmental delays and disabilities, reduce the impact and provide developmental support.
- Provide at least one year of free pre-primary education for all children using a play-based, child-centred approach.

» Increase the quality of services

- Develop national standards, qualifications and accreditation systems to define and increase the quality of the workforce, and attract better candidates to the sector. Provide monitoring mechanisms to monitor and reinforce the objectives.
- Ensure sustained public investment in in-service ECCE workforce development (continual professional development) and access to CPD for ECCE staff living in disadvantaged areas or working with vulnerable populations.

» Implement integrated, multi-sectoral ECCE policies and strategies

- Assign a lead agency or create a strong agency with decision-making powers to lead inter-sectoral efforts. Develop strategic guidelines to implement ECCE plans.
- Build and strengthen holistic networks for the delivery of integrated services, especially for vulnerable and marginalized children, and during emergencies, with the participation of relevant providers and agencies.

» Increase government investment in ECCE and promote partnership

- Earmark a minimum of 2% of total government expenditure for public investment in ECCE.
- Initially target children from most vulnerable families if the provision of universal services is unaffordable.
- Generate financial resources at the local level for the sustainability of the programme.

» Strengthen the collection, analysis and use of data

- Develop strong national system housed in EMIS or in another systematic information system to monitor holistic ECCE provision in all types of ECCE settings, whether public or private.
- Create a comprehensive data base at all units of the government (central, regional, district and local) for the projection and monitoring of ECCE programmes.
- Strengthen monitoring of child outcomes, quality, process and structural characteristics of both public and non-public ECCE programmes.

4. Global and Regional Documents Linked to Target 4.2

- UN Convention on the Rights of the Child
- Education 2030 - Incheon Declaration and Framework for Action, UNESCO, 2016
- New Horizons: A Review of Early Childhood Care and Education in Asia and the Pacific, UNESCO, 2016
- Putrajaya Declaration, UNESCO, 2016
- Asia-Pacific End of Decade Notes on Education for All: EFA Goal 1-Early Childhood Care and Education, UNESCO and UNICEF, 2012
- ECDs in the SDGs: A Briefing Note, Asia-Pacific Network for Early Childhood (ARNEC), 2016

References

- UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS). UNESCO eAtlas for Education 2030 (website).
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- UNESCO (2016a). *Asia-Pacific Regional Policy Forum on ECCE*.
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