



United Nations  
Educational, Scientific and  
Cultural Organization

Education  
2030

# Asia-Pacific Overview: Sustainable Development Goal 4

TARGET

4.5



## 1. Defining Target 4.5

**By 2030, eliminate gender disparities in education and ensure equal access to all levels of education and vocational training for the vulnerable, including persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples and children in vulnerable situations.**

The renewed and strengthened focus on 'equity and inclusion' is at the heart of the SDG 4 – Education 2030 agenda. With the Incheon Declaration and its Framework for Action (2016), the world leaders and stakeholders have committed to giving everyone an equal opportunity and leaving no one behind. This commitment requires accelerated, targeted efforts to address all forms of exclusion and marginalization, and to reduce disparities and inequalities to ensure that all children and young people have access to inclusive, equitable quality education and lifelong learning. The target 4.5 specifically aims at reaching 'ALL' children and people, irrespective of their sex, age, race, colour, ethnicity, language, religion, opinion, national or social origin, property or birth, as well as persons with disabilities, migrants, indigenous peoples, especially those in vulnerable situations. Moreover, gender equality is another key feature of Education 2030, and target 4.5 clearly recognizes the critical importance of gender dimensions – disparities, inequities and inequalities – in achieving the right to education for all girls and boys, and women and men, throughout their journeys of lifelong learning.

## 2. Regional and Sub-regional Overview: Target 4.5<sup>1</sup>

*Many children from poorest households and rural areas are still denied their right to education*

Over the past decade, countries in Asia-Pacific have improved access to primary and lower secondary education, and were able to reduce disparities in education, especially the gender gap at the national level (UNESCO, 2015). However, disparities still exist between different social and economic groups (see Figure 1). In particular, children living in rural areas and from the poorest families are still struggling to access education. Indeed, for primary education, the wealth parity index has only been achieved in two countries out of nine (with available data). For all countries presented in Figure 1, household wealth is the strongest factor linked to inequitable education participation at primary and lower secondary levels and in early childhood (see UNICEF 2012), followed by location (urban-rural). While this analysis is not intended to under-estimate the importance of addressing gender related

<sup>1</sup> There are five indicators in Target 4.5 of which one is global indicator and four are thematic indicators. Based on data availability, one global (parity indices) and one thematic (4.5.20) indicators are selected in this factsheet.

inequities and barriers, it does underline the need to have targeted actions that address poverty related issues. Besides gender, location and wealth, children with disabilities, and those from minority communities, informal settlements, or children engaged in work or affected by humanitarian situations (conflict, natural disasters etc.) are also excluded from education opportunities (UIS, 2015; UNICEF 2015).

FIGURE 1: Parity index, adjust net attendance rate, 2014 or latest



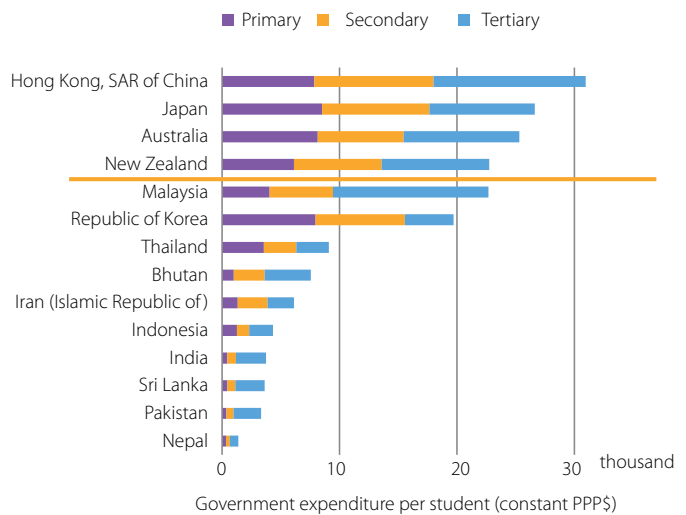
**Note:** Data for Kyrgyzstan refer to 2006. Data for Bhutan refer to 2010. Data for Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, and Viet Nam refer to 2011. Data for Lao PDR and Pakistan refer to 2012. Data for Cambodia refer to 2014

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

**Government expenditure per student differs and is unbalanced in middle and low income countries.**

Increased public spending in education can lead to improvements in the quality of education, including learning environment, materials and teachers (UNESCO, 2015). However, the amount of government expenditure per student differs widely by level of education, often leading to widening, rather than closing, gaps and disparities between children. As Figure 2 demonstrates, difference in unit cost across different levels is not very significant in high income countries, while for some of the middle or low income countries, the unit cost for tertiary education is three times higher than the unit cost for primary level, indicating that poor and marginalized students who tend to drop out before secondary and tertiary education, do not benefit public spending which disproportionately goes to the education of the wealthiest students thereby increasing education inequity.

FIGURE 2: Government expenditure per student, 2014 or latest



**Note:** Data for India refer to 2012. Data for Sri Lanka, Thailand, Malaysia, Republic of Korea, Australia, and Japan refer to 2013. Data for other countries refer to 2014.

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

## Issues and Challenges

- » **Persistent Disparities and Inequities:** There are significant disparities in participation and completion in basic education across the region. Many children from the poorest household, particularly in remote rural areas but also often in informal urban settlements, have been denied their rights to quality education, as have children with disabilities and other vulnerable groups.
- » **Varying and Complex Gender Factor:** While its significance varies across countries, gender is still a significant aspect. Thus, there is a strong need to further support gender-sensitive policies, planning/analysis and learning environments; mainstreaming gender issues in teacher training and curricula; and eliminating gender-based discrimination and violence in and around schools.
- » **Imbalanced Investment and Resource Allocations:** There is a lack of equity-based resource allocation formulations/budgeting based on specific data on different population groups at national, sub-national and school/community levels. Also, the difference in spending per student and/or by levels of education can be seen in many of the low and middle income countries in the region. A well-balanced, and often prioritized, investment in basic education is required to further promote pro-poor, equitable spending to reach the unreached.
- » **Insufficient Availability and Usage of Data and Evidence:** Disaggregated data is not always available at the country level, and even when they exist, such data and information is neither properly analyzed nor used for evidence-based education planning, budgeting, monitoring and evaluation. In other words, there is an urgent need to better understand the following: who are out-of-school children, why they are excluded, what are key barriers and bottlenecks, what education policies and practices exist, how we can include them etc. In particular, data on children with disabilities (by type and impact on their ability to learn etc.) is simply not available in many countries which hinders targeted interventions and appropriate educational planning and investment in terms of inclusive as well as specialized education for those children who have a diverse needs for quality learning.

## 3. Lessons Learned and the Way Forward

There are two important lessons that we have learned from previous efforts towards Education for All – the unfinished agenda which we commit to achieving by 2030 now. First, concentrating on education access is not enough and even counter-productive. We also need to pay attention to education quality and students' learning and skills. Second, 'business as usual' will not bring quality education to all. If current rates of progress continue, many of the countries will not reach the new targets by 2030. This means that it is of utmost importance to change current practices and mobilize efforts and resources at an unprecedented pace.

Inclusive education for all should be ensured by designing and implementing transformative public policies to respond to learners' diversity and needs, and address the multiple forms of discrimination and vulnerable situations and other factors, which impede the fulfilment of the right to education. All investments – current and new – should be screened against a key criterion: Do they help ensure that all people, including the most marginalized and vulnerable, acquire the knowledge, attitudes and skills they need for their lives and livelihoods and for the full realization of their right to education (UNICEF 2015)? Are we finally ready to make real, substantive changes for our children in Asia and the Pacific?

## 4. Global and Regional Documents Linked to Target 4.5

- 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 Forms 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)

### *References*

- Education 2030 Steering Committee. (2016). Education 2030: Towards Inclusive and Equitable Quality Education and Lifelong Learning for All (Incheon Declaration and Framework for Action).
- UNESCO. (2015). Asia-Pacific Regional Education for All Report.
- UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS) Data Centre (website). (Accessed in September 2016)
- UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS). (2015). Fixing the Broken Promises for Education for All
- UNICEF. (2012). Inequities in Early Childhood Development What the data say Evidence from the Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys.
- UNICEF. (2015). The Investment Case for Education and Equity.
- UNICEF/UNESCO Institute for Statistics (website). Global Initiative on Out-of-School Children (country and regional reports)