Gender Equality in Education

East Asia and Pacific

Snapshot
Gender Equality in Education
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The Six EFA Goals

- Estimated earned income
The Education for All movement, launched at the World Conference on Education for All in Jomtien, Thailand in 1990, is a global commitment to provide quality basic education for all children, youth and adults. Representatives of the international community met again in Dakar, Senegal, a decade later and affirmed their commitment to achieving Education for All (EFA) by the year 2015 with six key education goals outlined in the Dakar Framework for Action.

These goals and targets are regularly monitored through the EFA Global Monitoring Report. In addition, countries in the Asia-Pacific region recently undertook a mid-decade assessment (MDA) to assess national progress towards achieving the Education for All goals. The aim was to allow countries to collect data on and analyse what has been achieved at the national and sub-national levels, identify and address challenges, reset targets, and make plans for achievement of their goals by 2015. In particular, countries focused their MDA reports on their efforts to reach those children who remain ‘unreached’ by national education systems.

As a contribution to the EFA MDA, a Progress Note is being prepared reviewing progress in achieving the EFA goals in the East Asia and Pacific region from a gender perspective. The note is based on the EFA MDA country and sub-regional reports, as well as other data sources, and will provide in-depth analysis on the status of achievement of EFA goals using a gender lens, identify key gaps, and make recommendations for accelerating progress towards achieving EFA goals in 2015.

This Snapshot presents some of the key regional and national trends and findings to be highlighted and elaborated on in the forthcoming Progress Note on gender.

Gender Parity Index (GPI) is the ratio of female to male values of a given indicator. A GPI of 1 (or within the band of 0.97 to 1.03) indicates parity between the sexes. A GPI of above 1 indicates a disparity to the disadvantage of boys, while a GPI of below 1 indicates a disparity to the disadvantage of girls.
Gender parity in gross enrolment ratio in primary education, East Asia

2005 marked the first target for achieving gender equality in education. Based on the Dakar Framework for Action, Education for All and the Millennium Development Goals, countries committed to eliminating gender disparities in primary and secondary education by this time.

At the primary education level, notable progress was made in closing gender gaps, and many countries in the region met or were very close to meeting this target of ensuring that equal proportions of girls and boys enroll in school at the national level. However, significant gaps remain in some countries such as Cambodia, Lao PDR, Timor-Leste and Viet Nam, which need to continue efforts to raise the enrolment of girls to match that of boys. Even greater numbers of countries still face disparities at the sub-national level.
In the East Asia sub-region, the gender parity target for secondary education was also met by a number of countries. In countries where gender disparities remain, these are not only to the disadvantage of girls but also of boys in some cases as well. For example, in Mongolia, the Philippines, and Malaysia, the proportion of boys enrolled in secondary school is lower than that of girls. On the other hand, enrolment in secondary education is significantly lower for girls in Cambodia, Lao PDR and Viet Nam, as it is at the primary education level in these countries.
Combined gross enrolment ratio for primary, secondary and tertiary education, selected countries

The gross enrolment ratio for all levels of education from primary to tertiary education reveals a mixed picture across countries in the region. In 13 out of the 22 countries with data shown here, male enrolment ratios are higher than those of females, while in 9 countries, a higher proportion of females are enrolled. The situation in the region underlines the fact that promoting gender equality has to do with men and women, boys and girls, with disparities affecting both sexes.

While these aggregate figures provide an overview, further disaggregation by level of education and also sub-nationally would allow for a better understanding of the nature of disparities and where to target efforts to address them. For example, in Thailand, although the graph here indicates that lower proportions of girls are enrolled than boys overall, disaggregation by level of education shows that higher proportions of boys are enrolled than girls at the primary education level, while higher proportions of girls are enrolled than boys at the secondary and tertiary levels. At these higher levels of education, the disparities are, in fact, to the disadvantage of boys.
Pre-primary and primary Education
In pre-primary education, gender disparities tend to be to the disadvantage of boys, with higher proportions of girls enrolled. Several countries, such as Niue, Tonga, Malaysia, Cambodia and Fiji, saw disparities against boys worsen from 1999 to 2005. In the Cook Islands, the enrolment ratio of girls to boys was within the gender parity band, but there has been a shift over time, and far lower proportions of boys are enrolling than girls. In a few countries, such as Papua New Guinea, Viet Nam and China, the trend has been in the opposite direction, with lower proportions of girls enrolling than boys and gaps widening since 1999. For the East Asia sub-region overall, this has also been the trend.

Some countries have made strides towards closing the gender gap in pre-primary enrolment, including Lao PDR, the Philippines, Marshall Islands and Brunei Darussalam. Lao PDR and the Philippines are close to achieving gender parity, and the latter two countries are now within the gender parity band.

One consideration in looking at GPI at the pre-primary education level is that overall enrolment ratios for girls and boys may be quite low for many of the countries. Therefore, the trend in one direction or another may be in relation to a relatively small segment of the population, and disparities may reverse – from the advantage of girls to the disadvantage of girls – at the primary education level.

Source: UNESCO EFA GMR 2008
Gender Parity Index for net enrolment ratio in primary education, selected countries, 1999 and 2005

Most countries in the region achieved gender parity in primary education enrolment even prior to the target date of 2005, as per the Dakar Framework for Action, EFA Goal 5, and Millennium Development Goal 3. Some countries made remarkable progress from 1999 to 2005 towards gender parity, including Mongolia, in which disparities to the disadvantage of boys decreased to near-parity, and Cambodia, where gender parity was achieved by 2005, closing a wide gender gap to the disadvantage of girls that existed in 1999. In some cases, however, achievements in attaining gender parity are in danger of being undone with the proportion of boys enrolling in comparison to girls dropping, such as in Myanmar and the Philippines.

Source: UNESCO EFA GMR 2008
Sub-national disparities in Gender Parity Index for net enrolment ratio in primary education, selected countries

Further disaggregation of data reveals the range in the levels of disparity that exists within countries which may not fully be reflected in national, aggregate figures. In Cambodia, Myanmar and Mongolia, for example, national level data indicate that gender parity has been achieved in primary education enrolment. However, a closer look at the sub-national level shows that there are significant disparities in parts of these countries – to the disadvantage of girls in Cambodia, and to the disadvantage of boys in Myanmar and Mongolia. The case of Indonesia illustrates how wide the range in disparity levels can be, from a very low enrolment ratio for girls compared with boys in one part of the country (GPI 0.56) to parity (1.01) in another.

Source: National EFA MDA Reports
Gender parity in net enrolment ratio in primary education, Indonesia, 2005

This map of gender parity levels in Indonesia further pinpoints the regions of the country with the widest gaps and can be useful in identifying areas which may need targeted interventions. As can be seen for example in parts of Java and Kalimantan, the situation in neighbouring provinces may differ considerably based on the local context.

Source: National EFA MDA Dataset
Regional figures show that the percentage of girls out-of-primary-school is slightly higher than that of boys at 52 per cent and 55 per cent in East Asia and the Pacific, respectively. But national data suggests that percentages of out-of-school children also vary widely by sex by country, with girls accounting for over 80 per cent of all out-of-primary-school children in the Republic of Korea (82 per cent) and Cambodia (85 per cent). Brunei Darussalam reported the largest disparity against boys, where 63 per cent of the total out-of-primary-school population was male.
Gender disparities in survival rates to the last grade of primary education, 1999 and 2004

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Higher survival for boys (1 country)</th>
<th>Gender Parity achieved in Survival Rate to Grade 5 by 2004 (8 countries)</th>
<th>Higher survival for girls (5 country)</th>
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<td>Cambodia 0.93 1.05</td>
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<td>Fiji</td>
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<td>Kiribati ... 1.16</td>
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<td>Lao PDR</td>
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<td>Myanmar ... 1.06</td>
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<td>Macao, China</td>
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<td>Philippines ... 1.13</td>
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<td>Malaysia</td>
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<td>Tonga ... 1.07</td>
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<td>Papua New Guinea</td>
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<td>Viet Nam</td>
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Source: UNESCO EFA GMR 2008

National data highlight disparities in the completion of the primary education cycle, but perhaps with unexpected outcomes. Disparities in favour of boys were only evident in Indonesia with a GPI for survival rate to grade 5 of 0.94. In a majority of countries for which data were available, gender parity was achieved in survival rate to grade 5. However, data reveals that when girls are enrolled in school, they tend to survive at rates equal to or higher than boys. In Lao PDR for example, girls remain slightly disadvantaged in terms of enrolment, but those who enter primary education survive at rates equal to their male counterparts. In five countries, there were clear disparities resulting in higher survival rates for girls, with Kiribati (1.16 GPI) and the Philippines (1.13 GPI) reporting the greatest disparities between the sexes.
Sub-national data from the Philippines highlights the extent of the problem with boys’ participation, even in the early years of primary education. In every province, girls survive to grade 5 in higher proportions than male classmates. In absolute terms, this has led to a substantially larger percentage of under-educated males employed in the formal workforce.
Secondary Education
The status of countries in terms of achieving gender parity at the national level varies widely across the region, but this is even the case when considering the Mekong sub-region, with countries that share many similarities in history, culture and traditions. Of the five countries, only Myanmar has achieved gender parity in secondary education enrolment. Thailand is faced with a situation in which the proportion of boys enrolled in secondary education is far lower than that of girls, while in Lao PDR and Cambodia, the opposite is the case, with the gap to the disadvantage of girls. Viet Nam is close to achieving gender parity, but efforts are still needed to raise the enrolment of girls to be on par with that of boys.
Looking at the same sub-region, but with data disaggregated by province (sub-national data was not available for Thailand and Viet Nam) reveals the considerable variations within the countries as well. Interestingly, in Myanmar, national level figures indicate gender parity has been achieved, but in actuality, there are gender gaps in all of the provinces. These gaps are lost in the process of aggregation and underline the importance of disaggregating data not only by sex but also by administrative area, income levels, ethnicity, etc. to identify more accurately disparities and strategies to address them.
The case of Viet Nam also highlights the importance of digging deeper and looking at sub-national level data to gain a better understanding of where the gender disparities are. At the national level, the GPI for the net attendance ratio at the secondary and higher levels of education is 1.02 (UNICEF estimate calculated with results from the Viet Nam Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey), indicating that gender parity has been achieved (within the gender parity band of 0.97 and 1.03). However, a closer look at the sub-national level reveals a more varied picture, with significant disparities to the disadvantage of girls in the North East and to the disadvantage of boys in the South East and Central Highlands region, calling for targeted action to address the gender disparities in these areas.
Secondary school net attendance ratio by wealth quintile

Mongolia

Thailand
Poverty is often a key factor in girls’ and boys’ school attendance. Consideration of the opportunity costs of lost income or the need for help with household work and childcare may affect parents’ decisions in sending their sons or daughters to school. In Mongolia, for example, boys often drop out of school to contribute to household incomes by working with livestock. This is reflected in the gaps in boys’ school attendance compared with that of girls, particularly at the lower income quintiles. Boys’ enrolment and attendance in secondary education is also an issue of concern in Thailand. Of note are the wider gaps in the attendance of boys compared with girls from middle income families, which raises questions regarding the circumstances that create this condition. Are boys disenchanted with school and dropping out in search of job opportunities, or are they perhaps involved in technical and vocational education or pursuing service-learning opportunities? Further research may shed light on the reasons behind this trend.

In Viet Nam, where girls’ enrolment and attendance is lower proportionally than that of boys, poverty does seem to be a factor given the gap at the lowest income quintile. It seems that at the middle to higher income levels, however, however as poverty becomes less of an issue, families place relatively equal importance on both girls’ and boys’ education.
Literacy
In East Asia and the Pacific, as in most regions of the world, women's literacy rates tend to be lower than those of men, with particularly wide gaps in Cambodia, Lao PDR and Papua New Guinea. The exception is the Philippines, where women have higher literacy rates. Fiji and Hong Kong (China) have achieved gender parity, and Samoa and Mongolia are close to levelling the literacy rates of men and women.
The case of Thailand illustrates the many factors that are possibly influencing women’s literacy attainment. Language of instruction may play a key role, as the graph indicates, with far higher rates of literacy among women whose mother tongue is the national language (Thai) versus those whose first language is not Thai. The data also show the higher a mother’s level of education, the greater the chances that her child will be literate. There is also an urban/rural divide, with slightly higher rates for women living in urban areas. Furthermore, as also noted earlier, poverty is often an important factor affecting girls’ and boys’ education and literacy rates. Literacy rates are lowest among the poorest women in Thailand.
While international data on literacy rates in Lao PDR show generally low results, the findings from the 2001 functional literacy survey show even lower figures overall and further highlight distinct gender disparities amongst ethnic-minority groups.

Amongst all ethnic groups reported here, female functional literacy rates are consistently lower than those for their male counterparts. Disparity is greatest amongst the Hmong-Yao, where there is a 26 percentage point difference between males and females.

Source: Lao National Literacy Survey 2001
The Gender Parity Index for adult literacy in the region rose from 0.84 in 1985-1994 to 0.93 in 1995-2004, signaling significant progress in closing the gender gap. In absolute terms, however, adult illiterates are predominantly women in most countries in the East Asia region, with the exception of the Philippines and Tonga. The percentage of women among adult illiterates in this region remains among the highest in the world at 70 per cent, higher than South and West Asia (63 per cent) and Sub-Saharan Africa (62 per cent).
Higher Education and Education Outcomes
Gender disparities in reading scores

Despite higher rates of illiteracy among the adult population, results from the PISA reveal a consistent pattern of females out-performing males on standardized reading tests. Trends are consistent across low and high scoring countries and across those countries from the East Asia region, which have participated in the standardized test.

Source: OECD PISA 2006
Gender differences in student performance on the mathematics scale

In countries with comparable data across the region, with the exception of Thailand, there exists a clear pattern of boys outperforming girls on standardized math tests. Regardless of size, development context and socio-cultural influence, boys scored between 9-20 points higher than girls.

Source: OECD PISA 2006
In most countries of the region, technical and vocational education and training (TVET) is dominated by boys, with particularly low enrolment levels of girls in Cambodia, Vanuatu, Tonga, Fiji and Papua New Guinea. Viet Nam is the exception, where more girls are enrolled in TVET than boys, and in China girls’ enrolment is on par with that of boys. This is one factor in considering the experiences in transitioning from school to work of girls and boys and possible differences in the technical skills with which they are prepared to face the job market.
While greater numbers of women are moving on to tertiary education in the region, there seems to be a continuing divide along gender lines in subject choice. Regional averages on female enrolment in fields of study show that women are in the majority in certain fields, such as health and welfare, education and humanities and arts, but are underrepresented – significantly in some cases – in others, such as engineering, manufacturing and construction, and science, which remain the realm of men. This trend holds true in both developing and developed countries of the region.

Source: UNESCO EFA GMR 2008
Percentage share of women in non-agricultural wage employment, 1990 and 2005

According to the *Millennium Development Goals Report* (2007), women remain at a disadvantage in securing paid jobs and positions of influence upon leaving the education system, and this is true in this region despite the remarkable progress made towards achieving gender parity. These gains in terms of gender parity are not necessarily translating into equality in education outcomes. While women’s share in non-agricultural wage employment has increased in the 15 years from 1990 to 2005, most significantly in the Pacific (or Oceania) region, it is still well below that of men.
Philippine women are employed in higher numbers than their male counterparts in sectors of the labour market which traditionally require higher levels of education, including service, technical and professional and para-professional positions and amongst government and interest groups.

In general terms, however, employment growth in the Philippines has been insufficient to keep pace with labour force growth, and women faced greater unemployment than men and were particularly susceptible to seasonal fluctuations in employment rates.
Despite the consistent gaps in favour of girls and women throughout the education system in the Philippines, data reveals that, with the exception of the most highly educated, in terms of absolute numbers, the male labor force is much larger than that of females at every level of educational achievement. This reveals gender inequalities in the labour market that have implications for the education system as well.
In many of the countries of the region, the teaching profession is highly feminized, particularly at the lower education levels. With the exception of Papua New Guinea, where there are mostly male teachers at all levels, all countries for which data is available have a predominantly female teaching force at the pre-primary education level. The majority of teachers at the primary education level are also female, apart from in Lao PDR, Cambodia, Papua New Guinea, Marshall Islands and Timor-Leste. These countries also have more male teachers at the secondary education level, as do China and Indonesia.
In the political arena, women remain significantly under-represented throughout the region, with no country achieving even a 30 per cent representation of women in national parliament. In Mongolia, where girls’ enrolment in secondary and tertiary education is far higher than that of boys, women’s representation in parliament is the lowest in the East Asia region, underlining the fact that higher levels of participation of girls in education is not necessarily leading to gains in terms of gender equality in other spheres once girls leave school. This also indicates the role that socio-cultural attitudes, policies promoting gender equality and women’s empowerment and other factors may also play towards achieving gender equality in and through education.
Women’s employment opportunities in the formal sector are often marred by engendered discrimination, which is evident in the disparities in women’s estimated earned income compared with that of men. Women’s income levels are far lower than those of men in every country in the region, with the widest gaps, interestingly, in the more developed countries. Again, progress in gender parity in education has not translated into equality in the workplace and income levels.

The Six EFA Goals

1 Expanding and improving comprehensive early childhood care and education, especially for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children

2 Ensuring that by 2015 all children, particularly girls, children in difficult circumstances and those belonging to ethnic minorities, have access to, and complete, free and compulsory primary education of good quality.

3 Ensuring that the learning needs of all young people and adults are met through equitable access to appropriate learning and life-skills programmes

4 Achieving a 50 per cent improvement in levels of adult literacy by 2015, especially for women, and equitable access to basic and continuing education for all adults.

5 Eliminating gender disparities in primary and secondary education by 2005, and achieving gender equality in education by 2015, with a focus on ensuring girls’ full and equal access to and achievement in basic education of good quality.

6 Improving all aspects of the quality of education and ensuring excellence for all so that recognized and measurable learning outcomes are achieved by all, especially in literacy, numeracy and essential life skills.
Gender Equality in Education

East Asia and Pacific

Snapshot