

Highlights of the EFA Report 2007

Time is running out to meet the EFA goals set in 2000. Despite continued overall global progress at the primary level, including for girls, too many children are not in school, drop out early or do not reach minimal learning standards. By neglecting the connections among early childhood, primary and secondary education and adult literacy, countries are missing opportunities to improve basic education across the board – and, in the process, the prospects of children, youth and adults everywhere.

Progress towards the goals

Primary education continues to expand

Primary school enrolments increased fastest between 1999 and 2004 in two of the three regions furthest from universal primary education: they grew by 27% in sub-Saharan Africa and by 19% in South and West Asia, but by only 6% in the Arab States (see Figure A). The world net enrolment ratio stands at 86%. While grade 1 enrolments rose sharply, too many children who start school still do not reach the last primary grade: fewer than 83% in half the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean with data available, fewer than two-thirds in half the countries of sub-Saharan Africa.

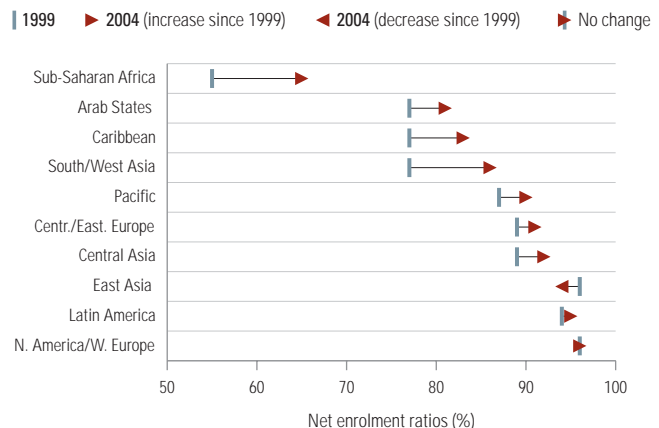
Out-of-school children: how many and who are they?

Progress is being made in reducing the number of primary school-age children who are not enrolled in school. Between 1999 and 2004 the number fell by around 21 million to 77 million. This is still very high, unacceptably so. Sub-Saharan Africa and South and West Asia are home to more than

three-quarters of these children, although the latter region halved its number between 1999 and 2004, mainly due to reductions in India. The global estimate, high though it is, understates the problem: data from household surveys show that many children enrolled in school do not attend regularly.

The children most likely to be out of school and to drop out live in rural areas and come from the poorest households. On average, a child whose mother has no education is twice as likely to be out of school as one whose mother has some education.

Figure A: Net enrolment ratios in primary education, 1999-2004



Government policies to tackle exclusion

Governments urgently need to identify the groups of children most likely never to enrol in school, in addition to those who drop out. This is the first step in implementing policies that reach out to the excluded and improve the quality, flexibility and relevance of education.

Among measures to foster inclusion: abolishing school fees, providing income support to poor and rural households to reduce reliance on child labour, teaching in children’s mother tongue, offering education opportunities for disabled children and those affected by HIV/AIDS, and ensuring that youth and adults get a second chance at education.

Improving teacher recruitment, training and working conditions

There are not enough qualified and motivated teachers to reach the EFA goals. Sub-Saharan Africa needs to recruit between 2.4 million and 4 million teachers. In this region and in South and West Asia, there are too few women teachers to attract girls to school and retain them. Teacher absenteeism is also a serious problem in many developing countries.

Shorter pre-service training with more on-the-job practice and professional development, and incentives for teachers to work in remote and rural areas, are effective strategies for recruiting and retaining teachers, particularly in difficult contexts.

Secondary education: growing demand and not enough places

The pressure to expand secondary education is rising dramatically. Gross enrolment ratios rose in all developing regions but remain low in sub-Saharan Africa (30%), South and West Asia (51%) and the Arab States (66%).

Low numbers of secondary places slow the achievement of universal primary education because they reduce the incentive to complete

primary school. At the same time, increasing demand for secondary education results in competition with other levels for public expenditure.

Gender parity: still not a reality

There are now 94 girls in primary school for every 100 boys, up from 92 in 1999. Of the 181 countries with 2004 data available, about two-thirds have achieved gender parity in primary education. The primary education gender gap in favour of boys has closed in only four of the twenty-six countries that had gross enrolment ratios below 90% in 2000.

Only one-third of the 177 countries with data available on secondary education have achieved parity. At this level disparities are in favour of girls as often as boys. At tertiary level, gender parity exists in only five countries out of 148 with data in 2004. Gender equality also remains an issue, with stereotypes persisting in learning materials and, too often, teachers’ expectations of girls and boys differing.

Literacy: an elusive target

Some 781 million adults (one in five worldwide) lack minimum literacy skills. Two-thirds are women. Literacy rates remain low in South and West Asia (59%), sub-Saharan Africa (61%), the Arab States (66%) and the Caribbean (70%). Without concerted efforts to expand adult literacy programmes, by 2015 the global number of adult illiterates will have dropped by only 100 million. Governments must also focus on building literate environments.

Countries in conflict: often missing from the analysis

Data are unavailable for several countries, mostly in conflict or post-conflict situations, and therefore are not fully reflected in the Report’s analyses. Their EFA situations remain serious and need to be remembered when considering the global EFA picture. Children living in such circumstances require custom-tailored education opportunities to restore some stability to their lives.

Finance and aid

Domestic spending

on education as a share of GNP decreased between 1999 and 2004 in 41 of the 106 countries with data, though it increased in most of the others. Public spending needs to focus on key requirements for achieving EFA: teachers, adult literacy, ECCE and inclusive policies at all levels.

School fees

were reduced or abolished in several more countries but are still far too common, a major obstacle to the enrolment and continued participation of the poor in primary school.

Total aid to basic education in low-income countries almost doubled between 2000 and 2004 (from US\$1.8 billion to US\$3.4 billion at 2003 prices), having previously declined. As a share of aid to the whole education sector in low-income countries, however, it remained constant at 54%. Half of all bilateral donors allocate at least half of their education aid to middle-income developing countries, and almost half allocate less than one-quarter directly to basic education.

The Fast Track Initiative provides an important coordinating mechanism for donor agencies but has not yet led to a global compact for achieving universal primary education. Since 2002, disbursements have totalled only US\$96 million and so far have only reached eleven countries, though donors have increased their pledges significantly over the past year.

Funding gap: External funding requirements for EFA, including some provision for adult literacy and ECCE, are now estimated at US\$11 billion a year, over three times the current level and twice what recently promised increases in overall aid are likely to bring by 2010.

Early childhood care and education

What is it?

- Formal definitions of ECCE vary. This Report adopts a holistic approach: ECCE supports children's survival, growth, development and learning – including health, nutrition and hygiene, and cognitive, social, physical and emotional development – from birth to entry into primary school in formal, informal and non-formal settings.
- ECCE programmes encompass very diverse arrangements, from parenting programmes to community-based child care, centre-based provision and formal pre-primary education, often in schools.
- Programmes typically aim at two age groups: children under 3 and those from age 3 to primary school entry (usually by age 6, always by age 8).

Why does it matter?

- ECCE is a right, recognized in the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which has won near-universal ratification.
- ECCE can improve the well-being of young children, especially in the developing world, where a child has a four in ten chance of living in extreme poverty and 10.5 million children a year die from preventable diseases before age 5.
- Early childhood is a time of remarkable brain development that lays the foundation for later learning.
- ECCE contributes to the other EFA goals (e.g. it improves performance in the first years of primary school) and to the Millennium Development Goals, especially the overarching goal of reducing poverty, as well as the education and health goals.

- It is more cost-effective to institute preventive measures and support for children early on than to compensate for disadvantage as they grow older.
- Affordable, reliable child care provides essential support for working parents, particularly mothers.
- Investment in ECCE yields very high economic returns, offsetting disadvantage and inequality, especially for children from poor families.

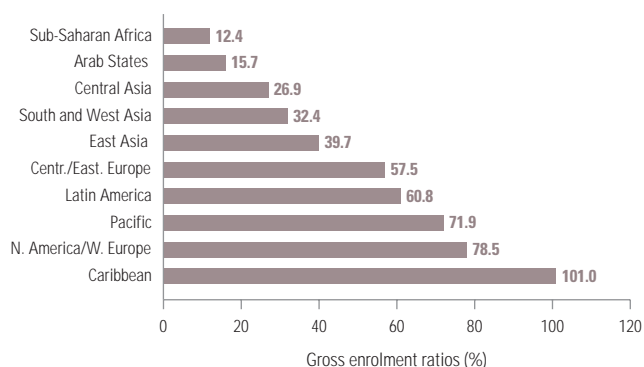
What is the situation?

- About 80% of developing countries have some sort of formally established maternity leave, although enforcement varies.
- The youngest children have been neglected. Almost half the world's countries have no formal programmes for children under 3.
- Enrolment in pre-primary education has tripled since 1970, though coverage remains very low in most of the developing world.
- Most OECD countries have at least two years of free pre-primary education.
- Among developing country regions, Latin America, the Caribbean and the Pacific have the highest pre-primary gross enrolment ratios; far behind come East Asia, South and West Asia, the Arab States and sub-Saharan Africa (See Figure B).

- After sharp declines in the 1990s, pre-primary enrolments in transition countries are slowly recovering in Central and Eastern Europe but still lag in Central Asia.
- Among developed and transition countries, and in Latin America, most ECCE provision is by the public sector.
- The private sector is prominent in sub-Saharan Africa, the Arab States, the Caribbean and East Asia.
- Most regions are near gender parity in pre-primary education.
- There are large disparities within countries. With a few notable exceptions, children from poorer and rural households and those socially excluded (e.g. lacking birth certificates) have significantly less access to ECCE than those from richer and urban households.
- The children most likely to benefit from ECCE programmes – those most exposed to malnutrition and preventable diseases – are the least likely to be enrolled.
- ECCE staff in developing countries typically have minimal education and pre-service training, and are often relatively poorly remunerated.
- Governments accord relatively low priority to pre-primary education in their spending. The broad mix of public and private providers and a lack of data make it difficult to calculate total national expenditure on ECCE. Countries can estimate the cost of reaching the goal by developing scenarios that differ in terms of coverage, quality and nature of provision.

- ECCE is not a priority for most donor agencies. Almost all allocate to pre-primary less than 10% of what they give for primary education, and over half allocate less than 2%.

Figure B: Gross enrolment ratios in pre-primary education, 2004



What programmes work?

- An approach that combines nutrition, health, care and education is more effective in improving young children's current welfare and their development than limiting interventions to one aspect.
- Inclusive programmes build on traditional child care practices, respect children's linguistic and cultural diversity, and mainstream children with special educational needs and disabilities.
- Mother tongue programmes are more effective than those in the official language, which remain the norm around the world.
- Well-designed programmes can challenge gender stereotypes.
- The single most important determinant of ECCE quality is interaction between children and staff, with a focus on the needs of the child. This requires reasonable working conditions, such as low child/staff ratios and adequate materials.
- Continuity in staffing, curriculum and parental involvement ease the transition to primary school. Quality improvements in the early years of schooling are needed to better accommodate young children from diverse backgrounds and experiences.
- Well-enforced national quality standards covering public and private provision for all age groups.
- Stronger and more partnerships between government and the private sector, an important ECCE stakeholder in many regions.
- Upgrading of ECCE staff, particularly through flexible recruitment strategies, appropriate training, quality standards and remuneration that retains trained staff.
- Increased and better-targeted public funding of ECCE, with particular attention to poor children, children living in rural areas and those with disabilities.
- The specific inclusion of ECCE in key government resource documents, such as national budgets, sector plans and Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers.
- More attention – and more funding – from donor agencies.

What would it take to reach the ECCE goal?

- High-level political support, an essential element.
- A consultative process to develop a national ECCE policy for children from birth to age 8, specifying the administrative responsibilities and budgetary commitments across relevant sectors and levels of government.
- Ongoing national and international data collection and monitoring efforts to assess needs and outcomes in meeting the EFA goals.
- The designation of a lead ministry or agency for policy on young children and ECCE, and an interagency coordinating mechanism with decision-making power.