

# Overview

## PART I. A COMPREHENSIVE APPROACH

### Chapter 1 Learning begins at birth

Learning begins before a child walks through the classroom door. This Report focuses on the first of the six Education for All (EFA) goal, which calls upon countries to expand and improve comprehensive early childhood care and education (ECCE), especially for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children. It adopts a holistic approach encompassing health, nutrition, hygiene and children's cognitive development and socio-emotional well-being. Early childhood programmes are vital to offset social and economic disadvantage. ECCE is an instrument to guarantee children's rights that opens the way to all the EFA goals and contributes powerfully to reducing poverty, the overarching objective of the Millennium Development Goals.

The Report monitors progress towards all six EFA goals, giving special attention to issues of equity and inclusion. With a 2015 time horizon for achieving the goals, urgent and comprehensive action is needed, particularly to identify and enrol hard-to-reach children, make a dent in the global literacy challenge, and move ECCE up the agenda.



## PART II. MONITORING EFA

### Chapter 2 The six goals: how are we doing?



This chapter reviews progress towards the six EFA goals since Dakar, comparing the latest available data with those for 1999.

There has been considerable progress towards achieving universal primary education, with sharp enrolment increases in sub-Saharan Africa, and in South and West Asia, and more modest increases in the Arab States. Primary school progression and completion remain major concerns in those regions and, to some extent, in Latin America and the Caribbean. The number of primary school age children out of school declined by 21 million from 1999 to 2004 but remained unacceptably high at 77 million. The chapter details these children's background characteristics, notably household poverty, place of residence, gender and mother's education level. About two-thirds of countries with 2004 data have achieved gender parity in primary education, though only one-third have achieved it at the secondary level. Little progress has been made on literacy, with one in five of the world's adults still not literate.

The Education for All Development Index, calculated for 125 countries, shows improvement in many of the lowest-ranking countries. Countries lacking data – many in conflict or post-conflict situations – are not included but are likely to suffer from low levels of educational development, compounding the continuing global EFA challenge.

### Chapter 3 Tackling exclusion: lessons from country experience



Education for All requires an inclusive approach. This chapter offers examples of policies and programmes that have been effective in extending education generally and, more

specifically, in identifying and overcoming the barriers that deprive marginalized groups of the same learning opportunities as others. Key policies include abolishing school fees, providing financial incentives to reduce household dependence on child labour, designing specific measures for children affected by HIV/AIDS and helping schools integrate children with disabilities. Non-formal education programmes for youth and adults offer a second chance at learning and are most effective when they are community-based, flexible and relevant to learners' lives. Armed conflict – increasingly involving child soldiers – and internal displacement call for urgent interventions offering basic education services and medical and psychological care.

Countries need sound education plans to overcome exclusion and improve education quality. Adequate public spending, availability of trained and motivated teachers and the capacity to expand secondary education are three key aspects of sound plans. While the overall trend in public education spending is positive (increases of more than 30% in some twenty countries), spending as a percentage of GNP fell in forty-one countries, particularly in Latin America and the Caribbean, and in South and West Asia. Many countries are under increasing pressure to expand secondary education. The EFA goals cannot be achieved without recruiting and training new teachers, and providing incentives for those working in difficult conditions, especially in rural areas.

## Chapter 4

### International support: making better use of more aid



Basic education benefited from an increase in overall aid to education between 2000 and 2004. Including funds channelled as direct budget support, aid to

basic education for all low-income countries increased from US\$1.8 billion to US\$3.4 billion. Multilateral donors allocated 11.8% of their total aid in 2003-2004 to education, with about half of this going to basic education. Donor presence remains uneven across the world's poorest countries and the relative importance donors give to education in total aid is not the same for all regions.

At US\$11 billion a year, the price tag for fulfilling the EFA agenda is higher than originally expected. Even if recent promises to increase aid are met, the flows for

basic education will be inadequate if its current share in total aid and its distribution across levels and income groups are maintained, and further harmonization does not occur. The share of total aid going to basic education must at least double and be focused more on low-income countries rather than on middle-income ones. The Fast Track Initiative process has become an important mechanism for donor dialogue and coordination. Greater efforts, however, will be needed internationally to persuade (a) donors to increase the volume and predictability of aid for basic education and (b) governments of low-income countries to give greater priority to basic education and to allocate to it a bigger share of the savings from debt relief.

## PART III. EARLY CHILDHOOD CARE AND EDUCATION

### Chapter 5

#### The compelling case for ECCE



Early childhood sets the foundations for life. Early childhood programmes are important, first, to guarantee the rights of young children, enshrined in the

Convention on the Rights of the Child now ratified by 192 countries. Second, early childhood is a highly sensitive period marked by rapid transformations in physical, cognitive, social and emotional development. Undernutrition, deprivation of care and poor treatment are particularly damaging to young children, with repercussions often felt into the adult years.

Well-designed ECCE programmes can significantly enhance young children's well-being in these formative years and in the future, complementing the care they receive at home. Programmes that combine nutrition, health, care and education have a positive impact on cognitive outcomes. Participation in ECCE also facilitates primary school enrolment and leads to better results in the first years of school, especially for disadvantaged children. From an economic viewpoint, investment in early childhood programmes offers a high pay-off in terms of human capital, so there is a strong case for public intervention. Finally, early childhood programmes can reduce social inequality: they can compensate for vulnerability and disadvantage resulting from factors such as poverty, gender, race, ethnicity, caste or religion.

## Chapter 6 Worldwide progress in early childhood care and education



This chapter first examines the changing contexts – smaller households, more working women, maternity benefits and new gender roles – in which the provision

of care and education for young children has historically evolved. It then assesses countries' progress towards the ECCE goal for three groups: children under age 3, those between 3 and the primary school entry age, and vulnerable and disadvantaged children. Finally, the chapter characterizes the type, composition and professional status of the carers and educators in ECCE programmes.

Among the main findings: many countries have no programmes addressing the diverse needs (health, nutrition, care and education) of children in the first three years of life. Few countries have established national frameworks to coordinate ECCE programmes. Access to pre-primary education has expanded worldwide. ECCE enrolments fell sharply in transition countries after the breakup of the Soviet Union but are now recovering, although not to previous levels. Among developing country regions, coverage is greatest in Latin America and the Caribbean but remains low in sub-Saharan Africa and the Arab States. Children from poorer and rural households have less access to ECCE programmes than those from richer and urban ones.

In developing countries, the ECCE workforce typically possesses minimal education and pre-service training. In most industrialized countries, highly trained professionals work alongside untrained child care workers and part-time volunteers. Many countries have implemented policies to expand and upgrade their ECCE workforce, but progress is uneven and slow.

## Chapter 7 The making of effective programmes



ECCE programmes are extremely diverse: there is no universal model of early childhood provision. No matter the setting, however, successful programmes offer support to parents during the child's earliest years, integrate educational activities with other

services (notably health, care and nutrition) and ease the transition to primary school. Parents, or other custodial carers, are the child's first educators, and for the youngest age group the home is the prime arena for care. The past decade has seen an increase in the number of parenting programmes that aim to reach children under age 3. Home visiting programmes offer support to individual parents and can be particularly positive for at-risk families by favouring the child's development and raising parents' self-esteem. Local communities also play a key role in supporting young children and their families through home- or community-based child care.

The most common form of ECCE, particularly for the 3 to 6 age group, is centre-based provision. It is crucial to make this experience a positive one by ensuring that practices are suited to the child's age and cultural environment. Research shows that positive interactions between staff and child are the most important predictors of children's enhanced well-being. Early learning is most effective in the mother tongue yet teaching in the official language still predominates. At the same time, this first exposure to organized learning is an opportunity to challenge traditional gender roles. Finally, programmes should be inclusive and take into account circumstances of children with disabilities or in armed conflict. Because ECCE is also an important foundation for subsequent education, it is important to foster continuity between pre-primary and primary school. Several countries are integrating ECCE more closely with primary education to facilitate the transition for children.

## Chapter 8 Fostering strong ECCE policies



A more favourable policy environment for ECCE is emerging, influenced by a growing body of research on its benefits and the support of strong international networks. To help build on this momentum, several key elements contribute to strengthening political will and developing national ECCE policies. High-level political endorsement can put ECCE on the agenda. In recent years, leaders in several countries have made early childhood a national priority, leading to new policies and increased resources. Broad stakeholder involvement encourages public support for ECCE. Government partnerships with international organizations or aid agencies can generate important seed money for projects that can then be taken to scale. Aligning ECCE policies with other national and sector development policies is strategic to leverage resources. Public campaigns can promote ECCE and provide information to carers.

Although national ECCE policies are country-specific, they should include guidelines on governance, quality and financing questions. ECCE involves multiple sectors, making coordination a frequent challenge. Defining a lead administrative body and setting up coordination mechanisms with real decision-making power can advance the agenda for young children. Governments need to ensure that minimum acceptable standards are met for all children, whether the provider is public or private. Expanding and improving ECCE will require additional public and private funds. In many developing countries, targeting of resources to the most disadvantaged children may be the first step of a broader national ECCE policy for all children. Finally, donor support for ECCE has been limited; increased support is essential.

## PART IV. SETTING PRIORITIES

### Chapter 9 EFA: action now



The considerable progress made towards the EFA goals since the Dakar forum provides a measure of just how much can be accomplished when countries and the international community act together. This chapter makes nine recommendations that warrant urgent policy attention:

1. Return to the comprehensive approach of Dakar.
2. Act with urgency to enrol all children in school, expand adult literacy programmes and create opportunities for children living in conflict and post-conflict situations.
3. Emphasize equity and inclusion.
4. Increase public spending and focus it better.
5. Increase aid to basic education and allocate it where it is most needed.
6. Move ECCE up domestic and international agendas.
7. Increase public financing for ECCE and target it.
8. Upgrade the ECCE workforce, especially as regards qualifications, training and working conditions.
9. Improve the monitoring of ECCE.

Policies must address all six EFA goals and stay the course: with only nine years left to 2015, the time for comprehensive action is now.