

## Gender and Education for All THE LEAP TO EQUALITY



### Regional Overview

# North America and Western Europe<sup>1</sup>

Is EFA relevant to countries in this group? Definitely. As the world's richest nations, many are important donors that have pledged to help economically less well-off countries achieve EFA. However, a century after they introduced compulsory education, industrialized countries have still not achieved high-quality education for all. Many continue to be challenged by problems of inequity, meeting the needs of marginalized groups, persistent gender inequalities increasingly at the expense of boys, and concerns over the quality of education.

#### Early childhood care and education (ECCE): virtually universal

Although not usually part of compulsory schooling, pre-primary education is well developed. Half the countries have gross enrolment ratios of more than 90%, so ECCE among richer nations is virtually universal. But low GERs (less than 70%) are found in Canada, Cyprus, Finland, Portugal and the United States. The general trend is positive, but ECCE enrolment has fallen in Denmark and Norway (probably due to changes in the reference age group) and (less so) in Malta, the Netherlands and the United States.

There are no gender disparities at this level of education, except in Norway, where boys, with a GER of 71% are less enrolled than girls (82%).

#### Universal primary education: long established

Primary education is universal in nearly all North American and Western European countries for both boys and girls, as a result of the democratic process and compulsory schooling laws. However, in a small number of countries, net enrolment ratios below 95% are found.

#### Participation in secondary and tertiary education: a leap to equality?

Democratization of education, economic growth and social transformation in recent decades has opened new vistas and opportunities and boosted demand for higher education. Most countries have achieved (or are close to achieving) universal secondary education and half of them have NERs above 90%.

Participation in tertiary education is high, though far from the secondary level rate. Half the countries had GERs above 55% in 2000, a major improvement on 1990. GERs range from 10% in Luxembourg to nearly 73% in the United States.

1. This is the EFA classification of regions. The countries of North America and Western Europe are listed in the Table.

Gender parity at secondary level has been fully or almost achieved in two-thirds of countries with data. In others, significant disparities remain at the expense of boys and have sometimes even widened, as in Sweden and the United Kingdom. Disparity is more striking in tertiary education, where in all countries but one (Switzerland) women are far more enrolled than men, due to faster growth of women's enrolment and underachievement of boys in secondary education.

Much evidence shows that girls are still unable to convert their academic edge over boys into greater equality in other spheres of life. While far more enrolled at tertiary level than men, women are still over-represented in so-called "feminine" fields, such as education, social sciences, humanities, services and health-related courses. But men's educational under-achievement has not yet resulted in their falling behind economically and politically and women may need higher qualifications to compete successfully for jobs, equal pay and managerial positions.

### Eliminating gender disparities and inequalities: still a challenge

Achieving this goal involves understanding what holds girls and boys back so that policies can be designed to overcome these obstacles and improve access to and participation in education.

Urgent action is needed in countries where the gender gap is still large in primary and secondary education. An overriding priority is to tackle poverty constraints by reducing the direct and indirect cost of schooling to families and addressing the incidence of child labour. The school environment requires equal attention. Sexual violence and harassment within schools, particularly where HIV/AIDS is prevalent, needs to be confronted vigorously. Revising biases in teaching materials, training teachers to be gender aware and working with them and parents to break taboos are essential ingredients of an "engendered" strategy.

Nearly all North American and Western European countries have achieved gender parity at primary and secondary level, but some may not reach it, especially in secondary education, either in 2005 or in 2015 unless adequate policies and strategies are implemented. Prospects for countries achieving it are based on past rates of change in the gender parity index in primary and secondary enrolment.

#### Countries that have already achieved gender parity:

- **Primary education (all 23):** Austria, Belgium, Canada, Cyprus, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Iceland, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, United Kingdom, United States.
- **Secondary education (12 of 23):** Belgium, Canada, Cyprus, France, Germany, Greece, Israel, Italy, Malta, Netherlands, Norway, United States.

#### Gender parity prospects

(10 countries with data in 1990 and 2000 for both primary and secondary education have not yet achieved it)

- **Countries likely to achieve parity in 2005 (2):** Austria and Portugal.
- **Countries likely to miss parity in 2005 but achieve it by 2015 (2):** Finland and Spain.
- **Countries that may not achieve parity in 2015 (6):** Denmark, Iceland, Ireland, Sweden, Switzerland and the United Kingdom.

These are only forecasts based on past trends. All these countries, most of them moving away from the goal, are likely to miss reaching gender parity by 2005 but policies are available in the region to achieve it within a few years.

## Helping developing countries reach their EFA goals

Most developed countries interpret EFA in their role as donors. Overall bilateral aid flows to education declined from almost US\$5 billion in the early 1990s to less than US\$4 billion in 2001. But aid to basic education rose more than 60%, from US\$486 million to US\$800 million between 1998/99 and 2000/01. Support for basic education from all OECD-DAC countries increased from 13 to 24 percent of bilateral education aid during the period.

Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Luxembourg, Portugal and the United States have increased aid to education (including basic education) between 1998-99 and 2000-01. Education aid from France and Japan, among the biggest providers, fell overall (by 40% and 24% respectively), though their support for basic education increased. In Austria, Germany, Switzerland and three Scandinavian countries (Finland, Norway and Sweden), basic education assistance declined.

## New commitments

At the 2002 G8 Summit in Kananaskis (Canada), Japan and Canada announced additional funds for basic education. At the UN Conference on Financing for Development in Monterrey the same year, France pledged to boost its ODA to 0.7% of GNP over the next decade.

The United States announced a 50% increase in core assistance to developing countries over the next three years, involving a \$5 billion annual increase over current levels by 2006. The Netherlands recently said it would earmark €2.5 billion (US\$2.9 billion) over five years for basic education.

The Fast-Track Initiative, designed mainly by the World Bank and launched in April 2002, has also attracted funds. Nine bilateral agencies have pledged to raise about US\$207 million for the period 2003-2005 for the seven countries<sup>2</sup> endorsed for funding in November 2002. But by August 2003, the estimated financial gap remained at about US\$118 million. ■

2. Burkina Faso, Guinea, Guyana, Honduras, Mauritania, Nicaragua and Niger.

## ACRONYMS

**FTI** Fast-Track Initiative. Designed primarily by the World Bank, the FTI was launched in April 2002 as a process that would provide quick and incremental, technical and financial support to countries that have policies but are not on track to attain Universal Primary Education by 2015.

**GER** Gross enrolment ratio. Number of pupils enrolled in a given level of education, regardless of age, expressed as a percentage of the population in the relevant official age group.

**GPI** Gender parity index. Ratio of female to male value of a given indicator. A gender parity index equals 1 indicates parity between sexes; a GPI that varies between 0 and 1 means a disparity in favour of boys; a GPI > 1 indicates a disparity in favour of girls.

**GNP** Gross national product.

**NER** Net enrolment ratio. Number of pupils in the official age group for a given level of education enrolled in that level expressed as a percentage of the total population in that age-group.

**UIS** UNESCO Institute for Statistics.

## North America and Western Europe: selected education indicators, 2000.

Countries	Total population (thousands)	Compulsory education (age group)	Legal guarantee for free education	Adult literacy rate (%)		Pre-primary education		Primary education			Secondary education		Tertiary education		Total public expenditure on education as % of GNP	EFA Development Index (EDI)
				Total	GPI	GER (%) Total	GPI	NER (%) Total	GPI in GER	% of female teachers	GER (%) Total	GPI	GER (%) Total	GPI		
Andorra	86	6-16	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...
Austria <sup>2</sup>	8080	6-15	Yes	...	...	82.7	1.00	90.9	0.99	...	99.0	0.96	57.7	1.14	5.9	...
Belgium <sup>2</sup>	10249	6-18	Yes	...	...	113.3	0.99	99.9	0.99	78.1	104.9	0.99	58.0	1.16	5.8	...
Canada	30757	6-16	Yes	...	...	64.4	0.99	99.8	1.00	68.1	106.4	0.99	59.2	1.34	5.5	...
Cyprus	784	6-15	Yes	97.1	0.97	59.7	1.00	94.9	1.00	75.2	93.4	1.01	22.2	1.35	5.7	0.98
Denmark	5320	7-16	Yes	...	...	89.9	1.00	99.3	1.00	64.0	128.2	1.05	58.9	1.35	8.3	...
Finland	5172	7-16	Yes	...	...	53.8	1.00	100.0	1.00	72.3	126.0	1.11	...	...	6.3	...
France	59238	6-16	Yes	...	...	114.4	1.00	99.8	0.99	79.8	107.8	1.01	53.6	1.23	5.8	...
Germany	82017	6-18	Yes	...	...	103.3	0.99	...	1.00	82.0	99.5	0.99	...	...	4.6	...
Greece	10610	6-15	Yes	97.2	0.97	71.8	1.03	97.2	1.00	...	98.4	1.02	62.7	1.10	3.7	...
Iceland	279	6-16	Yes	...	...	109.3	0.99	99.9	1.00	...	108.7	1.07	48.7	1.74	6.1	...
Ireland	3803	6-15	Yes	...	...	...	...	90.2	0.99	80.7	123.1	1.07	47.5	1.27	5.1	...
Israel <sup>1</sup>	6040	5-15	Yes	94.8	0.96	112.6	0.99	99.9	1.00	83.1	93.3	0.99	52.7	1.39	7.6	...
Italy	57530	6-15	Yes	98.4	0.99	96.3	0.99	99.8	0.99	94.8	95.9	0.97	49.9	1.32	4.7	0.99
Luxembourg	437	6-15	Yes	...	...	119.1	...	96.7	1.00	66.5	94.4	1.06	9.3	1.19	4.0	...
Malta	390	5-16	Yes	92.0	1.02	100.3	0.98	97.9	1.00	85.8	90.0	0.97	25.1	1.30	4.9	0.97
Monaco	33	6-16	No	...	...	...	...	...	...	86.5	...	...	...	...	...	...
Netherlands <sup>2</sup>	15864	6-17	Yes	...	...	97.3	0.98	99.5	0.98	77.6	124.5	0.97	55.0	1.07	4.8	...
Norway	4469	6-16	Yes	...	...	79.3	1.06	99.9	1.00	...	114.6	1.02	70.0	1.52	6.9	...
Portugal	10016	6-15	Yes	92.2	0.95	69.7	1.03	100.0	0.98	82.1	113.6	1.06	50.2	1.37	5.9	...
San Marino	27	6-16	No	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...
Spain	39910	6-16	Yes	97.6	0.98	101.8	1.02	99.7	0.99	70.8	115.6	1.05	59.4	1.15	4.6	...
Sweden	8842	7-16	Yes	...	...	74.6	0.99	99.7	1.02	79.9	148.8	1.26	70.0	1.52	7.9	...
Switzerland	7170	7-15	Yes	...	...	95.2	0.99	99.0	0.99	72.5	99.6	0.94	42.1	0.78	5.2	...
United Kingdom	59415	5-16	Yes	...	...	80.7	1.00	98.9	1.00	81.6	156.4	1.17	59.5	1.27	4.4	...
United States	283230	6-16	No	...	...	60.8	...	94.9	1.00	86.5	95.2	1.01	72.6	1.32	4.9	...
North America and Western Europe	709768	...	...	98.6	0.99	92.5	1.00	96.5	1.00	79.9	106.4	0.99	55.0	1.07	5.5	...
Developed countries	859780	...	...	98.6	0.99	89.9	1.00	97.0	1.00	79.9	107.1	1.00	56.4	1.11	5.3	...
World	6041386	...	...	79.7	0.87	46.7	1.01	83.8	0.93	72.3	77.5	1.06	22.9	1.04	4.5	...

Source: EFA GMR 2003, Statistical annex.

Data in italics are for 1999.

1. Primary school fees continue to be charged despite legally-guaranteed free education, according to a World Bank survey (2002).

2. No tuition fees are charged but some direct costs have been reported, according to a World Bank survey (2002).

Note: EDI is a new composite index that incorporates indicators for the four most quantifiable EFA goals – UPE, adult literacy, gender parity and quality of education. It aims to give a broader picture of progress toward EFA and identify countries doing well on all fronts, those succeeding in only some areas and those with all-round difficulties (for further explanation, see Appendix 2 of the full Report). The EDI for a country is the arithmetical mean of the observed values of indicators selected for each of the EFA goals. Since these are percentages, the value can vary from 0 to 1. The higher it is, the closer a country is to the goal and the greater its EFA achievement.