

Regional fact sheet – Arab States

The Arab States region has made some progress since the Education for All goals were adopted in 2000, but that progress has been less dramatic than that made in South and West Asia or sub-Saharan Africa. There are strong disparities between countries of the region, and significant gender gaps persist in several of them.

EFA progress and challenges

- Children who suffer nutritional deprivation in the womb or malnutrition during the early years of life are at risk of developmental delays that impede later learning. Some 26% of children under age 5 suffer from severe or moderate stunting in the Arab States. In some countries, particularly the Sudan and in Yemen, about one-third of children are underweight at birth.
- Enrolment in pre-primary education in the Arab States increased by 26% since 1999, with 3.1 million children enrolled in 2007. However, pre-primary coverage in the region remains far lower than average income might seem to indicate: out of nineteen countries in the region with data for 2007, fourteen had gross enrolment ratios (GER) below 50%.
- Between 1999 and 2007, the average net enrolment ratio (NER) in primary education in the Arab States increased from 78% to 84%. Country NERs range from 45% in Djibouti to 98% in Bahrain.
- Total enrolment in the region was 40.5 million in 2007, up by 5.1 million since 1999.
- The Arab States region has registered significant progress since 1999 in reducing its out-of-school population by 28% or 2.2 million, down to nearly 5.8 million in 2007. This represents 8% of the global total. Morocco and Yemen, which both started the decade with high numbers of out of school children, have made great progress.
- There has been some progress towards gender parity – the gender parity index (GPI) of the regional GER was 0.90 in 2007, up from 0.87 in 1999. Nine of the twenty Arab States have achieved gender parity. In countries that had low enrolment levels in 1999, such as Djibouti, Morocco and Yemen, moving towards gender parity from a low starting point has helped generate large increases in primary enrolment.
- In the Arab States, there were 4 million out-of-school adolescents in 2007, equivalent to 18% of the lower secondary school age group. 59% were girls.
- The regional secondary gross enrolment ratio (including both upper and lower secondary education) was almost 65% in 2007, ranging from less than 25% in Mauritania to 103% in Qatar.
- The regional adult literacy rate climbed by thirteen percentage points between the periods 1985-1994 and 2000-2007, reaching 71%. All the ten countries with data

for both periods reported increased rates, with several countries achieving major advances.

- An estimated 29% of the adult population in the Arab States, or 58 million adults, lack the basic literacy and numeracy skills needed in everyday life. Egypt is among the top ten countries in the world with the largest illiterate adult population, with 17 million - a third of its adult population. Algeria, Morocco, the Sudan and Yemen each have 5 to almost 10 million adult illiterates.
- Increasing the recruitment of primary teachers has gone hand in hand with higher enrolment in primary education since 1999. In the Arab States, the number of primary school teachers increased by 26% to reach about 2 million in 2007.
- No country in the region has achieved the four most easily quantifiable EFA goals, but of the fourteen countries with data in 2007 three were close to doing so, six countries ranked in an intermediate position and five Arab States were far from achieving EFA.

Marginalization in education

A new data set on education marginalization, which highlights how poverty and gender intersect with language, ethnicity, disability and regional differences to limit the educational opportunities of millions. The levels of absolute deprivation in education remain higher in many of the Arab States than their level of per capita income would suggest. With double the average income level of Lesotho, Morocco has twice the population share with fewer than four years of education. At the same average income level as Egypt, Jordan has an incidence of education poverty seven times lower.

- The incidence of deprivation among poor women in Egypt is high. While rich urban boys and girls both average just over ten years of education, poor rural males average fewer than eight years, declining to under five years for girls. In the rural part of Upper Egypt, poor rural females average just over four years of schooling

National education finance

- The share of GNP devoted to education, available for half of the twenty Arab States in 2007, ranged from 1.6% in the United Arab Emirates to 7.8% in Djibouti.
- The share of education in *government budgets* ranged from 9.6% in Lebanon to 31.1% in Oman, where it had increased by ten percentage points since 1999.

International aid for education

- Averaged over 2006 and 2007, total aid to education to the Arab States amounted to US\$1.7 billion, up from US\$1.2 billion annually over 1999 and 2000. However, while education accounted for 18% of total aid flows to the region in 1999 and 2000, the share was only 9% in 2006 and 2007. Aid to basic education has increased by 54% since the beginning of the decade.
- Several of the Arab States are 'emerging donors', including Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. Saudi Arabia spent US\$2.1 billion on aid in 2007 and is the largest emerging donor.