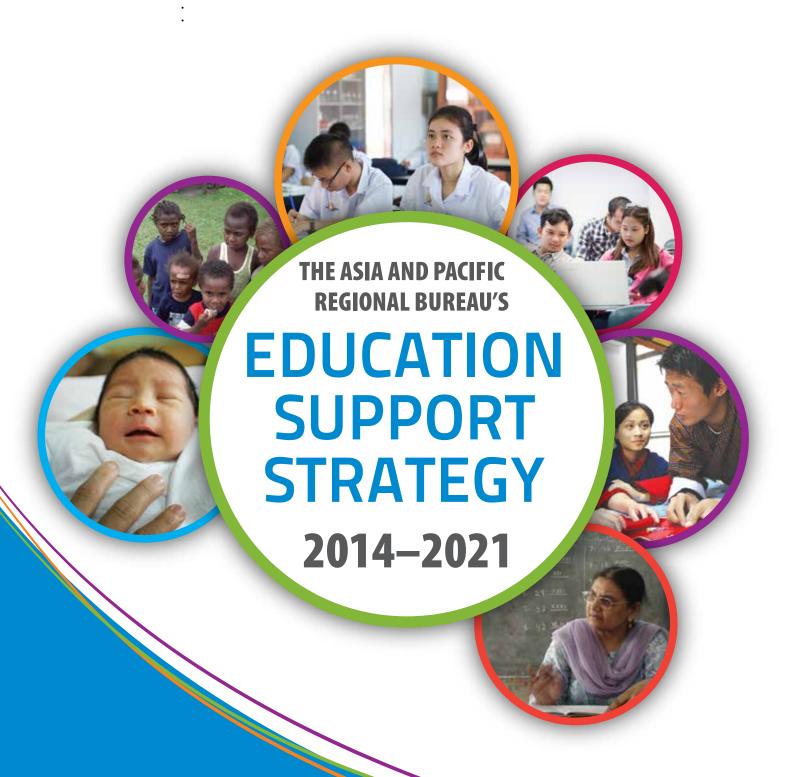**UNESCO**

United Nations
Educational, Scientific and
Cultural Organization

Bangkok Office

**Asia and Pacific Regional Bureau
for Education**

THE ASIA AND PACIFIC REGIONAL BUREAU'S

EDUCATION SUPPORT STRATEGY

2014–2021

"Learning for Peace and
Sustainable Development"

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Contents

ABBREVIATIONS

ACSS — Asian Coalition of Safe Schools
AEC — ASEAN Economic Community
ANER — Adjusted net enrolment rates
ARNEC — Asia-Pacific Regional Network for Early Childhood
ASEAN — Association of Southeast Asian Nations
ASER — Annual Status of Education Report
CAREC — Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation
C/DRR — Conflict/disaster risk reduction
EE-Net — Entrepreneurship Education Network
EFA — Education for All
ECCE — Early childhood care and education
EMIS — Education Management Information System
ERI-Net — Asia-Pacific Education Research Institutes Network
ESD — Education for Sustainable Development
FTA — Free Trade Agreements
GDP — Gross domestic product
HIV — Human immunodeficiency virus
ICT — information and communication technology
IDI — ICT Development Index

LDC — Least Developed Country
NEQMAP — Network on Education Quality Monitoring in the Asia-Pacific
NFE — Non-formal education
OECD — Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PISA — Programme for International Student Assessment
SAARC — South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation
SEAMEO — Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organization
SIDS — Small Island Developing States
SPC — Secretariat of the Pacific Community
TIMSS — Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study
TPP — Trans-Pacific Partnership
TVET — Technical and vocational education and training
UIS — UNESCO Institution for Statistics
UNAIDS — Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS
UNEDAP — United Nations Evaluation Development Group for Asia and the Pacific
UNESCO — United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNGEI — United Nations Girls' Education Initiative
UNICEF — United Nations Children's Fund

INTRODUCTION

UNESCO's global mission as defined in the Organization's Medium Term Strategy 2014–2021 (37 C/4) is:

As a specialized agency of the United Nations, UNESCO – pursuant to its Constitution – contributes to the building of peace, the eradication of poverty, and sustainable development and intercultural dialogue through education, the sciences, culture, communication and information.

The same Medium-Term Strategy sets three education strategic objectives:

1. Supporting Member States to develop education systems to foster high quality and inclusive lifelong learning for all;

2. Empowering learners to be creative and responsible global citizens;

3. Advancing Education for All (EFA) and shaping the future international education agenda.

While the 37 C/4, adopted by 195 Member States of UNESCO, guides the Organization's strategic direction, this regional support strategy is an initiative of the Asia and Pacific Regional Bureau for Education to clarify its strategic programme priorities and approach in the field of education.

The strategy clarifies how the Regional Bureau will contribute to the building of peace and sustainable development in Member States in Asia and the Pacific through education. Specifically, it presents the Regional Bureau's thematic priorities and modalities of cooperation, which in turn will help prioritize and streamline its programmatic activities. As such, it is considered as a rolling strategy in the same way that the 37 C/4 is in order to retain flexibility over eight years and allow the Organization to adapt to new developments and changes in the external environment.

This strategy was prepared by and for the Asia and Pacific Regional Bureau for Education. A working group composed of programme specialists of all education-related units prepared the first draft of this strategy through intensive discussions and peer review processes and the senior management of the Bureau's education sector further improved and refined it. The draft was then finalized after incorporating comments from field offices in the Asia and Pacific region, it builds on the findings and recommendations of the external evaluation of the previous regional education support strategy for 2010–2013 and is informed by the diverse studies and discussions undertaken in the context of the post-2015 education agenda, including those related to the Asia-Pacific Regional Education Conference (August 2014).

The main purpose of this strategy is to provide internal strategic guidelines for Regional Bureau staff, with a view to streamlining the Regional Bureau's programming and resource mobilization for the next eight years under the common vision, mission and priorities. At the same time, this strategy also informs other UNESCO entities (field offices, headquarters and institutes), Member States as well as external partners and donors about the Regional Bureau's strategic direction and programmatic thrusts in Asia and the Pacific.

1 VISION AND MISSION

The UNESCO Asia and Pacific Regional Bureau for Education's vision is guided by the principle of education as a human right and deeply rooted in the belief that education is an enabler and driver of peace and sustainable development. Taking into account the Organization's global strategic vision described in the Medium-Term Strategy 2014–2021 (37 C/4) as well as the diverse studies and discussions undertaken in the context of the post-2015 education agenda, the Regional Bureau envisions a region where:

Every person in Asia and the Pacific learns and contributes to peace and sustainable development.

To contribute to the realization of this vision, the Regional Bureau has comprehensively reviewed and revised its priorities for 2014–2021 in order to fulfil the Regional Bureau's mission:

To strengthen UNESCO Member States' capacities to provide equitable and quality education throughout life.

2 | WHO WE ARE

UNESCO's five functions as defined in the 37 C/4 are:

1. Serving as a laboratory of ideas and generating innovative proposals and policy advice in its fields of competence;

2. Developing and reinforcing the global agenda in its fields of competence through policy analysis, monitoring and benchmarking;

3. Setting norms and standards in its fields of competence and supporting and monitoring their implementation;

4. Strengthening international and regional cooperation in its fields of competence, and fostering alliances, intellectual cooperation, knowledge-sharing and operational partnerships;

5. Providing advice for policy development and implementation and developing institutional and human capacities.

The Medium-Term Strategy emphasizes the particularly high relevance of Function 4 at the regional level, considering UNESCO's convening power and its existing broad partnerships with governmental, non-governmental and inter-governmental organizations, the private sector, research and academic institutions and networks.

Moreover, the Regional Bureau is staffed with dedicated and specialized professionals. It collects, synthesizes and presents research evidence, good practices and innovative ideas in order to support Member States' evidence-based policy-making and practice (Function 1). The Regional Bureau also plays a critical role in gathering and distilling inputs to the global education agenda (e.g. consultations on the post-2015 education agenda), by analyzing the region's trends and emerging issues, and leading broad-based consultations (Function 2) and monitoring progress toward global commitments (e.g. Education for All (EFA) and Education for Sustainable Development (ESD), norms and standards) (Function 3).

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Similarly, the Regional Bureau supports other field offices in providing policy advice, technical assistance and capacity development support at the country level, both from the education sector-wide perspective and in specialized sub-sectors and cross-cutting themes (Function 5).

UNESCO has 46 Member States and two Associated Members in the Asia-Pacific and has a presence in these regional countries with a network of 14 field offices. Established in 1961, UNESCO Bangkok has a dual role as both the Regional Bureau for Education and as a cluster office. As the Asia and Pacific Regional Bureau for Education, UNESCO Bangkok provides policy advice and technical and capacity development support to Member States and other UNESCO field offices in the region and facilitates knowledge partnership and networking in the area of education. As a cluster office, UNESCO Bangkok is responsible for the implementation of all UNESCO programmes in Lao PDR, Myanmar, Singapore and Thailand, as well as in Cambodia and Viet Nam in collaboration with UNESCO field offices in Phnom Penh and Hanoi, respectively.

The Asia and Pacific Regional Bureau for Education seeks to ensure the universal relevance of its education programme and mobilize all Member States in the region, while giving global priority to the Least Developed Countries (LDCs), Small Island Developing States (SIDS) and countries in transition.

3 THE REGION'S TRENDS AND CHALLENGES IN EDUCATION

This section provides an overview of the region's development contexts and trends in education based on the "Regional Report on Progress towards Education for All in Asia and the Pacific" prepared by the UNESCO Asia and Pacific Regional Bureau for Education in 2014 (UNESCO Bangkok, report forthcoming).

3.1 Overall Development Context

The Asia-Pacific region is home to more than 4.3 billion people, or roughly 60% of the world's population (ESCAP 2013). Development gains in Asia and the Pacific will, therefore, continue to have a significant impact on the global development outlook. In fact, the region has achieved appreciable progress towards the Millennium Development Goals, in particular in reducing poverty.

Despite rapid economic growth, social development and technological advances, ongoing significant challenges remain, especially in terms of governance, quality of life and inequalities within the region, sub-regions and even within countries. The region is also characterized by diversity in all aspects – landscape, society, history, culture, religion and ethnicity. There are over 3,500 languages spoken across the region (Lewis, et al. 2014).

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Addressing such development challenges – while appreciating and nurturing diversity – will be the key to the overall prosperity, peace and sustainable development of the region.

3.2 Emerging Trends and Changes that Affect the Education Sector's Development

Changes in the Economy and the Labour Market in the Asia-Pacific region

The Asia-Pacific region as a whole has made impressive gains in global economic development over the last forty decades and further gains are expected. In 1990, the Asia-Pacific region constituted roughly 21% of the world's gross domestic product (GDP), while by 2011 the region accounted for 30% of world GDP (World Bank, 2014 cited in UNESCO Bangkok 2014a). The region's economic growth is expected to continue and is predicted to reach 51% of global GDP by 2050 (ADB, 2011). Moreover, according to the World Bank, there were 15 low-income countries and 15 middle income countries in the Asia-Pacific region in 1990. By 2012, the number of low-income countries decreased by more than half (7 countries) while the number of middle-income countries increased to 32 (World Bank, 2014).

While many countries have enjoyed sustained economic growth, some are feeling that they might be heading to or are already in the so-called "middle income trap" as they lose their competitiveness in sectors such as manufacturing to newly emerging countries. In order for these countries to avoid such a trap, transformation to a knowledge-based economy is crucial. Education sector reform to improve access to learning and the quality of education,

especially post-basic education, is critically important. Moreover, countries are increasingly acknowledging that such a transformation requires more focus on the acquisition of a range of "transversal competencies", also known as 21st century skills, such as innovative thinking, creativity, adaptability, respect for diversity, global awareness and communication.

The labour market landscape has also changed notably in the region as employment rates in the agriculture sector have shrunk significantly while employment in both service and industry sectors is growing far more than in other regions of the world. These developments have resulted in substantial adjustments to economic structures and have had direct impacts on the human resources required for different and evolving labour needs. This trend calls for expansion and improvement of post-basic education, including technical and vocational education and training (TVET) as well as continuing education, so that learners can equip themselves with the relevant skills required in the labour market and stay adaptable and abreast with changes in labour market demands.

The evolving economic and employment structures are accompanied with a move towards regional integration as Asia-Pacific countries become more economically interconnected with each other as well as with the global market. The number of Free Trade Agreements (FTAs) has skyrocketed since 2000. This trend is expected to continue with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) moving towards its economic integration as the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) in 2015, alongside other major trade agreements, such as ASEAN+6 FTAs and the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), being discussed. Countries in the Asia-Pacific region are now facing increasingly challenging tasks of ensuring the global competitiveness of nations, while avoiding the potential pitfalls of globalization and regional integration such as increased inequality, environmental degradation, youth unemployment and loss of cultural identity.

Technological Advancement

The rapid advance and expansion of technology is also a key factor in changing trends in educational development. By 2014, six billion people globally had gained access to a mobile phone and three billion to the Internet. The numbers of connections to these respective communications media have tripled over a period of 10 years from 2005 and the level of access continues to grow. Opportunities that such advancement in ICT could bring to educational development are unprecedented. Access to a vast amount of educational resources and information anywhere and at any time has made possible the realization of lifelong and "life-wide" learning. On the other hand, the Asia and the Pacific region shows a greater disparity in ICT development compared to other regions in the world as the regional countries' ICT Development Index (IDI) ranges from 1.73 to 8.57, out of a possible maximum score of 10 (ITU, 2013). This digital divide in the region could result in uneven access to information and in turn exacerbate the knowledge divide between the haves and have-nots.

Demographic Changes

According to the United Nations' 2013 World Youth Report (United Nations, 2014), the Asia-Pacific region has the world's largest share of the youth population at approximately 60%. This young and dynamic population has been a driver of economic development in many countries. However, there are increasing signals of low birth rates and waning "demographic dividend" that can hinder economic growth soon. Furthermore, the region has been experiencing the high mobility of people across and within countries and beyond. The resulting diverse and multicultural student profiles require flexibility and appropriate adjustments in the content and teaching-learning processes. The higher education sector is expected to be particularly affected by mobility rates as universities in the region increase their efforts to attract foreign students.

Another notable demographic pattern within the Asia-Pacific region is its rapid urbanization, particularly in low and middle-income countries. Asia is home to half of the world's urban population and 66 out of the 100 fastest-growing urban areas (UNICEF, 2012). This rapid urbanization brings new opportunities and challenges for education and eventually for inclusive and sustainable development. On average, residents in urban areas are likely to have more educational opportunities than their rural counterparts. However, proximity to services does not guarantee access to them as poverty – often reinforced by discrimination on the grounds of gender, ethnicity, race or disability, etc. – can severely limit a person's access to essential services such as electricity, clean water, heath care and education. Many children are forced to work instead of attending school. The UNICEF report (2012) states that children from poor urban neighbourhoods are among the least likely to attend school, particularly at the secondary level, and even less likely than rural residents. Moreover, their living conditions are often vulnerable to disasters, crime, disease, or the threat of eviction.

Continual Disaster and Conflicts

Since the year 2000, the Asia-Pacific region has experienced more natural disasters than any other region in the world and these natural disasters bring significant development

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challenges within the region. For instance, more than 1.6 billion people in East Asia and the Pacific have been affected by natural disasters since 2000 and governments are subsequently faced with an increasing burden to rehabilitate the affected areas (Jha and Stanton-Geddes, 2013). Armed conflicts in the region have also undermined economic growth, exacerbated poverty, displaced populations and diverted resources from investment in education to military spending (UNESCO, 2011). The persisting instability, threats to sustainable livelihoods, and tensions among and within nations increasingly require appropriate educational responses.

The presence of armed conflict, communal violence and natural disasters has also led to the disruption of education with many schools forced to close down (World Bank, 2011). In particular, persistent ethnic and religious discrimination and violence in this diverse region require the education sector to work to promote tolerance and respect for diversity among students, schools and communities. At the same time, the rising number of refugees, displaced persons and migrant workers means that today's transnational realities must also be taken into account by education systems in both source and destination countries, both in terms of access as well as ensuring that teaching and learning content is relevant and sensitive to their needs. Existing and potential threats to peace and sustainability at global, regional and local levels all call for an education that can equip students with the knowledge, skills, values and attitudes that are crucial to building a more inclusive, tolerant and equitable society.

Diversity and Interconnectedness

The region's diversity in many aspects including in demographics, traditions, cultures, languages and geography within and across countries offers opportunities for development such as the transmission of languages, intercultural knowledge, sensitivity and awareness (UNESCO, 2009). At the same time, the region can also be prone to social, political and cultural vulnerability, which, if not properly attended to may disrupt

peaceful and sustainable development. While the region has seen significant economic growth in recent years, increasing inequality and competition will likely contribute to rising tensions and social exclusion (ADBI, 2014). The role of education in mitigating and eliminating these tensions is gaining increased momentum. Governments should ensure that education systems are inclusive of and relevant to all students, being cognizant of the potential risks of exclusion, gender inequality and violence in schools. In the era of a growing globalizing, interdependent, interconnected and multicultural world, the need for education to foster learning to live together and to encourage students to think critically and act responsibly in our "global village" is not an option but a necessity.

3.3 Education Challenges

Some of the aforementioned sustainable development challenges illustrated call for more and better learning opportunities for all children, youth and adults. The demand for more and better education opportunities is also driven from within the education sector, in which the quantitative achievement of universal primary education has been realized in most countries.

Whereas the Educational For All (EFA) agenda called on governments and the international community to meet the basic learning needs of all individuals, the regional EFA synthesis report (UNESCO Bangkok, forthcoming) points to – while emphasizing that EFA is unfinished business – new education challenges that

countries in Asia and the Pacific are facing, in particular, in expanding participation beyond both ends of basic education, namely early childhood care and education (ECCE) and post-basic education, including higher education, technical and vocational training and continuing education, and in focussing on *learning* for the individual to acquire the skills and competences needed for life and work. For this reason, the Asia-Pacific Statement on Education Beyond 2015 adopted at the Asia-Pacific Regional Education Conference (Bangkok 2014) identifies "lifelong learning for all" as the first of the regional priority action areas.

Despite the enormous diversity among countries, the Asia-Pacific region faces several common challenges to its education sector development. Among these challenges, the Regional Bureau has identified four priority issues that it sees as relevant and critical to its mandate and functions.

Balanced education system development

It is increasingly recognized that past educational development focused attention and resources on formal primary education – sometimes at the expense of other sub-sectors such as early childhood care and education (ECCE), post-basic education (including TVET), and continuing/non-formal education. Therefore, governments need to rethink funding priorities to achieve a more balanced education system development, while establishing legal and policy frameworks that promote accountability, transparency, and the enhanced participation of all stakeholders, at all levels of the system. As clearly stated in the Asia-Pacific Statement on Education Beyond 2015, government is the primary duty bearer for the efficient, equitable and sustainable financing of education, but funding can also be drawn from multiple sources and innovative financing strategies need to be developed.

Equality and equity in education

Addressing all forms of marginalization, disparities and inequalities in access to education and learning processes and outcomes is a main

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priority and is necessary to ensure the fulfilment of the EFA goals, at all levels and forms of education. Equitable participation in education is impeded by several factors including the learners' backgrounds (e.g. gender, language, religion, ethnicity and social class), government policies (e.g. language of instruction, fee structure and scholarship/incentives) and the learners' environment (e.g. geographical location and quality of education provision). Although the region's adjusted net enrolment rates (ANER) at the primary level increased from 85% in 2000 to 91% in 2012, more than 17 million children of primary school age were out of school in the Asia-Pacific region as of 2012, of which 8.1 million were in four countries (Bangladesh, India, Indonesia and Pakistan). Moreover, 34.3 million of adolescents in the lower secondary school age were not in school, leaving many young people needing access to second-chance programmes if they are to acquire foundation skills. There is a major challenge in ensuring equitable transition to higher levels of education. Adult and youth literacy continues to be a major issue in the region, which accounts for 64% of the world's illiterate adult population. Within the region, 82.2% of illiterate adults are located in South and West Asia and 64% are women according to UIS data.

Teaching and learning processes

The Asia-Pacific Statement on Education Beyond 2015 highlights that the quality learning approach is a priority for the region and teachers are central to this quality learning method. All educational settings need to ensure that all learners are taught by qualified, professionally-trained, motivated, committed and well-supported teachers who use appropriate pedagogical approaches. Quality in education also needs to be supported by learning environments that are safe, healthy, gender-sensitive, inclusive and conducive to learning, mother tongue-based multilingual education, and comprehensive monitoring and quality assurance systems. The quality of education and learning is another important issue receiving increasing focus across the region.

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The relevance of education for decent life and work

The socio-economic and demographic transformations described earlier are impacting the skills and competencies that learners need to acquire. However, many children, youth and adults in the region still lack foundational skills including literacy and numeracy. Globally around 250 million children are not learning the basics. In South and West Asia, for example, two-thirds of children either did not reach Grade 4 or did not learn minimum reading standards (UNESCO, 2014). As for older learners, the 2012 Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) showed that 15-year-old students in countries such as Indonesia, Kazakhstan, Malaysia and Thailand performed well below the OECD average in reading, mathematics and science (OECD, 2013). In addition, the region is home to 65% of the world's adult illiterate population, accounting for close to 513 million adult illiterates, which is likely to remain as a serious challenge in the foreseeable future. Moreover, the gap prevails between what is taught in school and what is actually needed in the labour market and society. All learners should acquire relevant skills including technical and vocational skills for decent work and entrepreneurship as well as the transferrable skills and competencies to be creative and innovative, to think critically, to communicate effectively, to solve problems independently, and to be able to adapt to and assimilate change.

4 OUR CONTRIBUTIONS

In response to the region's development context and the trends, challenges and emerging issues in the education sector summarized earlier, UNESCO's Asia and Pacific Regional Bureau for Education identified four broad thematic priorities:

- Policies and planning for lifelong learning;
- Equality and equity in education;
- Teaching and learning processes;
- Quality and relevance of education.

The expected outcomes within these thematic priorities are articulated below, along with the medium-term results that the UNESCO Asia and Pacific Regional Bureau for Education commits to supporting among Member States during this strategy period. Concrete inputs, activities and short-term outputs to operationalize this strategy will be developed in work plans and project documents.

Thematic Priority 1
Policies and Planning for Lifelong Learning

Expected Outcome

Holistic and coherent education sector plans and policies in place to improve efficiency, effectiveness and resilience of education systems.

- Member States have formulated sound and evidence-informed education sector plans to reflect the lifelong learning principle;

- Member States have introduced governance policies suited to the country and community needs, based on the key principles of ensuring equity, accountability and local capacity development;

- Member States have incorporated C/DRR into their national education planning and sector management;

- Member States have improved coverage, timeliness, and the quality of the data in the Education Management Information System (EMIS) as well as their usage in policy and plan development and monitoring.

The Asia-Pacific region has made impressive progress in expanding opportunities for schooling. Basic education (primary and lower secondary) has become almost universal in most countries and upper secondary and higher education enrolment rates have also increased significantly. However, many countries in the region face remaining as well as emerging challenges that require *systemic* responses:

Ensuring balanced and coherent development of education systems

Despite EFA's expanded vision of "education", it is increasingly recognized that past educational development focused attention and resources on formal primary schooling – sometimes at the expense of other sub-sectors. With increasing recognition of the importance of ECCE for further learning as well as increasing demand for post-basic education and lifelong learning opportunities, including upper secondary education, TVET and higher education, countries need to find an optimal balance of investing in various sub-sectors of education as well as ways to effectively engage and coordinate numerous education stakeholders at the central and local levels.

Improving efficiency and effectiveness of education systems

In many countries, education expenditures are increasingly under scrutiny by the general public who is demanding more value for money and improved results. Good governance and innovative financing, including through decentralization, are often considered as a means to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of education systems. However, the experiences of Member States in implementing such policies have been mixed and it remains to be seen how these policies, mainly tested in other regions, can be applied to the Asia-Pacific region.

Building more resilient education systems

The Asia-Pacific region is the world's most disaster-prone region and is home to some of the most fragile states in the world. Armed conflicts and natural disasters such as earthquakes, active volcanoes, floods, extreme winds, landslides and wildfires endanger the lives of people in and outside schools and children's rights to education. These adverse factors also threaten to waste long-term investments in education infrastructure. All of these adverse consequences can be mitigated through systematic planning and risk reduction.

In this context, the Regional Bureau will focus on supporting Member States to: (1) develop and implement sound sector-wide strategic plans with synergy and coherence across sub-sectors; (2) improve governance and financing in education, especially through empowerment and capacity building at sub-national levels; and (3) improve resilience of their education systems through integration of conflict/disaster risk reduction (C/DRR) in education planning and sector management. The Regional Bureau will also support Member States to develop, enhance or update their Education Management Information System (EMIS) for monitoring and data-informed policy development.

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Thematic Priority 2
Equality and Equity in Education

Expected Outcome

Education systems enhanced to be more equitable, inclusive and gender-responsive at all levels.

- Member States have introduced equity-focussed reform of education systems and policies;

- Member States have adopted inclusive approaches to teaching and learning processes;

- Member States have developed policies, curricula and delivery mechanisms on NFE/flexible leaning programmes that are equivalent to formal education;

- Member States have incorporated and are utilizing ICT to improve access to educational opportunities, especially for marginalized groups;

- Member States have mainstreamed gender equality principles in their national education policy and planning.

While in general there is an increase in access to and participation in pre-primary, primary and lower secondary education across the region, there is still a challenge in ensuring equitable and inclusive participation for all children.

Reaching marginalized groups

A key challenge faced by most countries is educational disparities and the systematic exclusion of some groups of learners such as people with disabilities; street children and working children; rural and remote populations, nomads and migrant workers; children from indigenous groups and ethnic, racial, religious and linguistic minorities; refugees and displaced persons; and children affected by HIV. In particular, inadequate state monitoring of the education of persons with disabilities has led to uncertainty around the degree of their exclusion from education. Likewise, ethnic minorities and migrants face severe disadvantages in education, partly due to socio-economic disparities, but the language of instruction is also a critical barrier. Children in rural isolated communities may suffer

and/or be immensely disadvantaged because schools are either too far away to attend, are of a poor quality, or are not available at all. In many countries, children without citizenship are also at a high risk of exclusion from education. Innovative ICT-enabled educational platforms should be explored and utilized to provide the underprivileged with improved access to educational opportunities.

Ensuring equitable and smooth transition

There is also the challenge of ensuring smooth transitions from ECCE to primary school and from primary school to secondary school and higher education. Transition is also influenced by many factors including the learners' backgrounds (e.g. gender, language, religion, ethnicity and social class) as well as government policies (affirmative action, the fee structure, and scholarship/incentives) and the learners' environment (urban/rural and the quality of the education system) (UNESCO, 2010). Again, marginalized groups face particular challenges in progressing through education systems. The high costs of schooling also make it impossible for children from poor households to attend or continue with their schooling. Even when school fees are not required, other overhead costs (e.g. for materials, uniforms) can still be significant enough that low-income families decide not to send their children to school. The opportunity costs of education often present more immediate

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challenges for low-income families and many families cannot forego the income that their children would bring if they were to work instead of attending school.

Ensuring gender equality

In general, most countries in the region achieved gender parity at all levels in 2012 except for a few countries. There is a correlation between early marriage and the low educational achievements of girls; early marriage puts young girls at a disadvantage because of the loss of educational opportunity and at the same time, girls who are not allowed to go or stay in schools are at risk of being prematurely married off. In South and West Asia, girls in rural communities stay in school, on average, for as little as two years. Moreover, many girls in the Asia-Pacific region are struggling to advance to post-basic education. Within the Asia region, the gross enrolment ratio of girls in 2012 from primary through secondary to tertiary education changes significantly by level; 112% at the primary level falls drastically to 72% at the secondary level and to a mere 28% at the tertiary level. On the other hand, more boys are dropping out in many middle and high income countries, particularly at the secondary level. Member States have made efforts to provide equal opportunities for boys and girls to realize their potential. In some subject areas, particularly mathematics and science at the secondary level, girls increasingly outperform or catch up with boys. However, career opportunities for girls related to these fields have not correspondingly increased.

The Regional Bureau will strengthen the capacity of Member States to reform the education system and realize equitable education at all levels. The Regional Bureau will build the capacity of curriculum planners in the region in adopting an inclusive approach to curriculum development, so that national curricula – both school and teacher training – provide content and methods that are participatory, learner-centred, flexible and responsive to the needs of all learners. The Regional Bureau will also enhance the capacity of teacher education institutions in developing

and delivering teacher training programmes that support the use of interactive, child-friendly and learner-centred teaching and learning methods to address diversity. In the area of reaching marginalized children, youths and adults, the Regional Bureau's action includes policy advice and technical and institutional support for Member States to provide inclusive and effective formal education system as well as non-formal education (NFE) and flexible learning programmes including mother tongue-based multilingual education, multi-grade learning, equivalency programmes and innovative literacy programmes (e.g. the use of mobile technologies). The Regional Bureau will support Member States to harness the potential of ICT to achieve quality and inclusive lifelong learning for all. Member States will also be supported in mainstreaming the principles of gender equality in education into national education policies and planning.

Thematic Priority 3
Teaching and Learning Processes

Expected Outcome

Effective and innovative teaching and learning practices adopted within enabling and safe environments.

● Member States have developed human resource policies, including status, working conditions and competency standards for teachers and school leaders at all levels and in both formal and non-formal sectors;

● Member States have integrated innovative pedagogies in teacher training at all levels to prepare learners for a changing world;

● Member States have formulated evidence-based policies, plans and programmes on school-related gender-based violence and other threats to the learners' well-being;

● Member States have strengthened emergency preparedness, response and recovery programmes in schools and communities.

Teachers are at the core of the education system, and education quality improves when teachers are well supported. Recruiting the best and most suitable candidates for the teaching profession, providing them with the best education and continuous training opportunities are top priorities – practices evident in top performing countries in the region. Flexible policies to encourage teachers from diverse backgrounds and under-represented groups to join the profession also help promote more balanced teacher profiles. Amidst increasing globalization, rapid technological innovations and a growing knowledge-based society, the challenge for teachers and school leaders is how to adapt to these changes and become change agents themselves.

Attracting and retaining the best people to the teaching profession

Three strategies can be developed to address this key challenge in education: (i) provide conducive working conditions and a supportive environment to attract the best candidates and retain high performing teachers; (ii) develop and implement relevant and appropriate pre-service training and continuous professional development opportunities for teachers in accordance with the national teacher competency standards from ECCE to post-secondary education, including TVET and higher education, and in both formal and non-formal sectors; and (iii) ensure effective school leadership and management practices to implement relevant school policies and practices. Equity issues such as gender imbalance in the teaching profession and management positions need to be addressed. School leadership is another area requiring special attention. Traditionally, school heads in Asia and the Pacific work under highly centralized systems, limiting their roles mainly to administrative functions with less emphasis on instructional leadership duties.

Adopting innovative pedagogies to foster 21ˢᵗ century skills

We live in a changing world where information and knowledge is not static: a fact of today may not be true tomorrow. Advanced information and communication technologies (ICTs) have resulted in virtually unlimited sources of knowledge. The effective use of ICTs in education is crucial to enable learners and teachers to adequately respond to the world of change and to empower them to become agents of change. Learners and teachers alike are required to become lifelong learners who can critically evaluate and responsibly use the information, self-regulate and reflect on their learning and effectively collaborate with others. Inevitably, the new skill sets, namely the 21ˢᵗ century skills, necessitate different and innovative teaching and learning activities, such as collaborative learning, self-regulatory learning, project-based learning and so on. These innovative pedagogies need an enabling environment where educational policies are cohesive, school leaders are supportive, teachers are continuously trained and empowered, and curriculum and assessment are relevant. While ICTs can enhance teaching and learning processes, learners are exposed to unprecedented risks and potential harm, and therefore policy-makers, teachers and parents need to empower students to cope with possible risks and be aware of their responsibilities in using ICTs.

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Creating safe and secure teaching and learning environments

All learners have the right to learn in safe and secure learning environments. Violence in or around schools threatens this right and other children's rights, including those regarding health, non-discrimination, privacy and autonomy. In particular, education systems, structures and capacity are technically and physically compromised in fragile and conflict-affected situations as well as in post-disaster settings, and learners, particularly girls, may have their education cut short. Schools may be destroyed, or closed due to fears of violence or disasters, and the physical and psychosocial trauma experienced in such settings can affect children for the rest of their lives. Education plays a critical role in changing social norms to promote peace, non-violence and gender equality; building skills and competencies of learners and teachers to prevent, identify and respond to violence; and promoting social transformation and cooperation.

The Regional Bureau will provide technical support to Member States in implementing the above-mentioned strategies to support teachers, improve their pedagogical practices and create enabling learning environments. It will also facilitate research studies to increase knowledge and disseminate good practices among Member States and enhance networking among stakeholders. Teacher education institutions will be engaged to develop the capacity of pre-service and in-service teachers in ICT-enhanced pedagogy to effectively facilitate 21ˢᵗ century skills learning. Moreover, the Regional Bureau will strengthen the capacity of Member States to address broader contexts of vulnerability to violence in and around school settings. This includes providing technical assistance and institutional support to build disaster response capacity at all levels. In the area of school-related gender-based violence, UNESCO will expand the evidence base on critical knowledge and operational gaps, and support Member States to pilot and take to scale promising interventions within the education sector to prevent and respond to violence.

Thematic Priority 4
Quality and Relevance of Education

Expected Outcome

Education systems reformed for learners to acquire the knowledge, values and skills for decent life and work.

- Member States have reviewed and reformed their education policies and strategies to promote the holistic development of learners through the balanced acquisition of foundation, specialized and transversal skills;

- Member States have strengthened the alignment between curricular aims, teaching practices and assessments;

- Member States have improved their capacities and mechanisms to monitor the quality of education.

Like the rest of the world, the Asia-Pacific region continues to undergo rapid social and economic change. Building knowledge economies has become a major priority for most governments of the region, while the construction of peaceful and sustainable societies is of equal concern. To support the formation of such economies and sustainable development, governments need to rethink and reform their education systems and to ensure that students achieve quality learning outcomes. Holistic skills development will "allow them to be more creative and innovative, to think critically, to communicate effectively, to solve problems independently, and to be able to adapt to and assimilate change. Such knowledge, skills, values and attitudes should be developed so as to enable all children, youth and adults to enjoy secure lives, participate actively and responsibly in their communities, embrace diversity, live and work together harmoniously, and contribute to peaceful and sustainable development" (UNESCO Bangkok, 2014b).

The UNESCO Asia and Pacific Regional Bureau for Education works towards supporting policy dialogue and education reform in Member States in order for education systems within the region to foster the holistic development of all learners by promoting the balanced acquisition of three interlinked categories of learning outcomes:

1. Foundation skills, including functional literacies and numeracy;

2. Specialized skills, including those needed for work and life; and

3. Transversal skills, including competencies for sustainable livelihoods and global citizenship.

Ensuring the acquisition of foundation skills for all

The average level of learning achievement in many developing countries is disappointingly low and disparities in learning outcomes between and within countries are serious. The magnitude of adult illiteracy continues to be an alarming issue in the region. While the Asia-Pacific comprises top performers in international assessments such as the PISA and the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS), many countries are yet to educate students to the desired level. The region thus calls for greater attention to ensuring that all children and youth obtain functional literacy and other foundation skills. The situation is particularly alarming for socio-economically disadvantaged, marginalized or vulnerable groups, such as poor women, girls, people in remote or rural areas, those from ethnic and language minority groups, migrants and people with disabilities (UNESCO and UNICEF, 2012b).

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Enhancing the acquisition of specialized skills

The region's remarkable economic growth and social development will involve overcoming various challenges such as labour market transformations, income inequalities, demographic changes and environmental concerns, all of which will influence the skills needed and the way such skills are imparted. Of particular significance is youth unemployment in the region including among university graduates, which in 2012 stood at 10.6% and is expected to rise in the coming decades (ESCAP, 2013). At the same time, a survey of 8,600 hiring managers in selected countries revealed that a shortage of applicants (32%), a lack of occupation-specific, technical competences (31%), and a lack of workplace competences or "soft skills" (28%) were the most cited challenges in filling jobs (Manpower Group, 2013). Skills mismatches are largely attributable to the quality and relevance of learning and teaching, especially in post-basic education. As more countries move to knowledge-based economics, education and training systems will need to pay more attention to post-basic education, particularly TVET and higher education. Although the depth of such "talent shortage" and ways to approach the problem differ from country to country, there are common yet crucial factors to help reduce the skills mismatch such as monitoring skills needs, multi-stakeholder partnerships, career counselling, as well as narrowing the learning gaps among marginalized groups, including girls and women.

Emphasizing the acquisition of transversal skills

While globalization has opened up new opportunities for development in the region, political, economic, social and demographic pressures and tensions persist and this calls for appropriate responses in education systems. In recognition of this, education systems have increasingly been emphasizing the importance of promoting the behavioural and socio-emotional domains of learning through the integration of so-called "transversal" or 21st century skills in education policies and practices to ensure that learners are equipped with skills not only for jobs but also for life in general. Such cross-cutting skills include creativity, problem solving, critical thinking and communication, among others. Moreover, education is also called to further foster values and attitudes among students such as empathy, respect for diversity and intercultural understanding, in ultimately contributing to building peaceful, tolerant and inclusive societies (UNESCO, 2014b).

The Regional Bureau will support Member States to reform and improve education policies and practices so that national education systems can better equip learners with the skills and competencies needed to live a decent life, contribute meaningfully to society, and adapt to the continuous changes in today's world. This work includes research, policy design, capacity development, networking, policy dialogue and knowledge dissemination in the areas of learning outcomes, skills development, curricula, pedagogy and learning assessments. The Regional Bureau will thus contribute to making education systems more conducive to imparting the skills and competencies that are crucial for the learner's personal and professional fulfilment as well as to promoting peace and sustainable development.

5 OUR MODALITIES OF COOPERATION

In fulfilling UNESCO's five functions, the UNESCO Asia and Pacific Regional Bureau for Education will implement its programme activities in close collaboration with the other field offices in the region and according to the following interrelated modalities of cooperation.

Knowledge Generation and Sharing

The UNESCO Asia and Pacific Regional Bureau for Education works with Member States to generate knowledge in relation to its priority areas through research and analytical work. This work takes various forms (e.g. comparative/regional studies, case studies, policy briefs) and harnesses strategic networks which are led by UNESCO Bangkok, such as the Asia-Pacific Education Research Institutes Network (ERI-Net) and the Network on Education Quality Monitoring in the Asia-Pacific (NEQMAP). Policy-makers, researchers and practitioners from Member States are engaged so as to ensure that the knowledge generation and sharing process starts with the collection of best policies and practices and results in regional synthesis and consolidation, which can then lead to consensus building among Member States in the region. This engagement of diverse stakeholders also makes sure that any knowledge collectively generated and shared is relevant to the needs of Member States.

In fulfilling its role as a laboratory and clearinghouse of ideas, the Regional Bureau shares the knowledge generated and/or distilled via various means, such as networks and knowledge portals on specific topics (e.g. HIV and AIDS Education Clearinghouse, National Education Systems and Policies in Asia-Pacific (NESPAP), newsletters (e.g. ICT in Education, "Education Policy Matters"), listservs, social media and conferences. In so doing, the Regional Bureau aims to develop and maintain a knowledge base of quality and open education resources for mutual learning among Member States. During the 2014–2021 period, more innovative strategies will be considered to expand the reach of these knowledge products.

Policy Advocacy and Dialogue

As an inter-governmental organization, UNESCO has convening power and is well positioned to provide Member States with diverse platforms to foster multi-directional dialogues on policy, research and practice in pursuing holistic and innovative education systems to contribute to peace and sustainable development. Through this function, UNESCO encourages Member States to examine their existing situations, including opportunities and limitations, share and exchange good practices and lessons learnt, and formulate relevant policies and plans to address the issues. UNESCO provides such platforms for advocacy and dialogue, including regional and sub-regional ministerial fora (e.g. The Asia-Pacific Ministerial Forum on ICT in Education, the Asia-Pacific Regional Policy Forum on ECCE, and the Central Asia Regional Symposium on ICT in Education), as well as occasional fora to address emerging issues (e.g. internationalization of higher education, global citizenship education, responsible and safe use of ICT). International and regional conventions,

such as the Asia-Pacific Regional Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications in Higher Education, are another medium of promoting international cooperation for the region's educational development.

Similarly, through its extensive and rich networks, UNESCO advocates education as a major contributor to peace and sustainable development. UNESCO raises awareness on critical and topical issues in education such as early childhood, gender-responsiveness, inclusion and equity and mobilizes political support for accelerating the progress towards the desirable outcomes. Through these networks, the Regional Bureau disseminates its policy recommendations on emerging issues. Moreover, the Regional Bureau produces education policy briefs that provide policy recommendations and options as well as focused rationales and implications for choosing particular policy options.

Capacity Development

The Regional Bureau will provide continuous capacity development support to Ministry of Education officials and other key stakeholders through training workshops, in-country technical support and facilitation of mutual learning. The areas of the Regional Bureau's work in developing individual, institutional and organizational capacity include: conducting education sector and policy analysis to identify challenges, bottlenecks and strategies to undertake reforms; developing evidence-based and costed education sector plans; improving monitoring, assessment and evaluation mechanisms of education systems through collecting and analysing data for better policy formulation and implementation; and identifying and addressing capacity gaps in education administration, especially in the context of decentralization.

The Regional Bureau will also provide capacity development support to diverse sub-sectors and cross-cutting themes in cooperation with other UNESCO field offices in the region upon request.

Monitoring

The Regional Bureau will work with headquarters, specialized institutes and field offices to support regional monitoring of education development. Such work involves fulfilling one of UNESCO's functions of setting norms and standards in its fields of competence and supporting and monitoring their implementation. As such, the Regional Bureau will monitor whether and how the international conventions and agreements are observed and/or applied by Member States, and to what extent they have influenced the development of national laws and practices. The right to education is established as a fundamental right in a number of standard-setting instruments adopted by the United Nations and by UNESCO. It is as an integral part of UNESCO's mission and central to the Education for All (EFA) process. Within the framework of the UNESCO Convention against Discrimination in Education and other relevant conventions and recommendations, Member States have assumed legal and political obligations for their realization. In countries that ratify these conventions, these instruments have the force of law for governments.

The Regional Bureau also monitors how Member States are progressing vis-à-vis the internationally agreed goals, especially global education goals

and targets through 2015 and beyond. The Regional Bureau will provide support to Member States in strengthening their capacities for quality assurance and education monitoring, building solid EMIS and reporting on education progress against the aforementioned goals and targets.

Cooperation and Partnership Building

The Regional Bureau will draw on existing partnerships and establish new ones to take forward the expected results of this strategy. This includes working with UNESCO's own structures including field offices, headquarters, institutes and centres, and national commissions. As part of the United Nations System, UNESCO will support and take part in policy dialogue and coordinated action through the United Nations Development Group and the Regional Coordination Mechanism in the Asia-Pacific region as well as thematic working groups and UN inter-agency programmes and initiatives such as the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) and the United Nations Evaluation Development Group for Asia and the Pacific (UNEDAP). Joint programmes and projects will also be established, where possible, with other UN agencies, bilateral and multilateral organizations.

The regional intergovernmental bodies such as the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), the Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC) and the Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation (CAREC) are important platforms for multi-sectoral planning and action, while the Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organization (SEAMEO) remains the intergovernmental body to coordinate action in education.

In promoting equity and quality education, UNESCO will continue to engage in regional and global networks, such as the United Nations Girls' Education Initiative (UNGEI), the Asia-Pacific Regional Network for Early Childhood (ARNEC), the Gender Education Network in Asia-Pacific (GENIA), the Entrepreneurship Education Network (EE-Net) and the Asian Coalition of Safe Schools (ACSS). Other partners include international and national civil society organizations and research institutes, while the private sector and foundations will continue to be engaged to leverage funding and expertise for Member States in critical areas.

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Annex: The Regional Bureau's Strategic Framework

Vision: Every person in Asia and the Pacific learns and

Mission: To strengthen UNESCO Member States' capacities

Holistic and coherent education sector plans and policies in place to improve efficiency, effectiveness and resilience of education systems

Education systems enhanced to be more equitable, inclusive and gender-responsive at all levels

- Member States have formulated sound and evidence-informed education sector plans to reflect the lifelong learning principle
- Member States have introduced governance policies suited to the country and community needs, based on the key principles of ensuring equity, accountability and local capacity development
- Member States have incorporated C/DRR into their national education planning and sector management
- Member States have improved coverage, timeliness, and the quality of the data in the EMIS as well as their usage in policy and plan development and monitoring

- Member States have introduced equity-focussed reform of education systems and policies
- Member States have adopted inclusive approaches to teaching and learning processes
- Member States have developed policies, curricula and delivery mechanisms on NFE/flexible leaning programmes that are equivalent to formal education
- Member States have incorporated and are utilizing ICT to improve access to educational opportunities, especially for marginalized groups
- Member States have mainstreamed gender equality principles in their national education policy and planning

contributes to peace and sustainable development

to provide equitable and quality education throughout life

Effective and innovative teaching and learning practices adopted within enabling and safe environments

Education systems reformed for learners to acquire the knowledge and skills for decent life and work

◆ Member States have developed human resource policies, including status, working conditions and competency standards for teachers and school leaders at all levels and in both formal and non-formal sectors

◆ Member States have integrated innovative pedagogies in teacher training at all levels to prepare learners for a changing world

◆ Member States have formulated evidence-based policies, plans and programmes on school-related gender-based violence and other threats to the learners' well-being

◆ Member States have strengthened emergency preparedness, response and recovery programmes in schools and communities

◆ Member States have reviewed and reformed their education policies and strategies to promote the holistic development of learners through the balanced acquisition of foundation, specialized and transversal skills

◆ Member States have strengthened the alignment between curricular aims, teaching practices and assessments

◆ Member States have improved their capacities and mechanisms to monitor the quality of education

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