

FACT SHEET ■ SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA

Strong foundations: early childhood care and education



Early childhood care and education

- 176 of every 1000 children born in recent years will not reach age 5, well above the 86 per 1000 live births observed worldwide
- Less than half the sub-Saharan countries (42%) with data available have programmes for children under three years old.
- Sharp rise in pre-primary enrolments between 1999 and 2004 (43.5%) but participation in pre-primary remains very low, with an average gross enrolment ratio (GER) of only 12% in 2004, up from 10% in 1999.
- Rises of more than seven percentage points in pre-primary GERs in Cameroon, Equatorial Guinea, Kenya, Lesotho, Namibia, Sao Tome and Principe and South Africa.
- Large regional disparities: pre-primary GERs are under the 12% regional average in 17 countries, including Burkina Faso, Burundi, Central African Republic, Mali and Niger where participation is less than 2%. Pre-primary participation is above 50% in Cape Verde and Kenya, close or above 100% in Mauritius and Seychelles.
- Private institutions account for about two-thirds of total enrolment in the majority of countries. In several, all pre-primary institutions are private, suggesting serious problems of access for society's poorest children. Attendance rates are considerably higher for urban children and those from better-off households.
- Pupil-teacher ratios are higher than in any other region at this level – above 25:1 in more than half the countries in 2004. Many pre-primary teachers are employed on a contract basis, receive a low salary and have limited professional training. Teachers receive less training than their primary school counterparts.
- Promising signs: high-level political endorsement for early childhood in several countries, including Senegal and Ghana.

Primary education: sharp increases in enrolment, low completion rates

- The number of children enrolled rose steeply from 80 million in 1999 to some 101 million in 2004, a 27% increase, reflecting rapid increases in new entrants to Grade 1 (about 31% over the period)
- Regional net enrolment ratios increased from 44% to 65%. In some cases, increases follow abolition of school fees.

Out-of-school children

- 38 million children out of school. Over 5 million out-of-school children in Ethiopia and Nigeria; more than one million in Burkina Faso, Mali and the Niger. More than two-thirds of the region's out-of-school children have never been enrolled and may never go to school unless additional incentives are implemented.
- Over 80% of out-of-school children live in rural areas; children from poorest income group are three times more likely to be out of school as those from wealthiest category. A child whose mother has no education is twice as likely to be out of school.

School retention and completion

- Less than two-thirds of a cohort of pupils who had access to primary education reached the last grade in the majority of countries with data. In some countries the survival rate to the last grade is lower than 40%.
- Children who reach the last grade of primary school do not necessarily complete it. There can be a gap of more than 25 percentage points between survival rates and completion rates (Burundi, Mali and the Niger). In Ethiopia rural children are sixty times more likely to drop out than urban children.

Secondary education

High increases: 43% increase in number of children enrolled since 1999. Participation remains low with an average GER below 30%. Secondary education is more developed in English-speaking countries. Higher participation in lower secondary than in upper secondary: GERs of 36% and 23% respectively. Participation gaps between the two can be up to 40 percentage points

Literacy

On average 61% of adults in sub-Saharan can read and write with understanding, one of the lowest adult literacy rates in the world. The absolute number of adult illiterates continues to rise because of high population growth, from 133 million in 1990 to around 144 million today. More than 60% are women. Adult literacy rates range from 19% in Mali to 90% in Seychelles. Fourteen of the 22 countries in the world with literacy rates below 60% are in sub-Saharan Africa.

Gender parity

Primary level: rapid progress but disparities remain detrimental to girls. Overall 89 girls to 100 boys enrolled in primary schools in 2004, up from 85 in 1999. Gender parity in primary education achieved in less than 30% of the 39 countries with data available. Disparities accentuated at higher levels: 78 girls for 100 boys in secondary.

Educational quality

- National and international learning assessments continue to underscore poor literacy and numeracy skills.
- High incidence of grade repetition: close to or above 20% in more than half the countries with data available.
- Teacher shortage: the region needs to recruit an average of 6% more teachers each year – an additional 1.6 million between 2004 and 2015.

Financing

- Public spending on education as share of GNP increased in most of the Sub-Saharan African countries between 1999 and 2004 but remains below 5% in the majority of countries with data available.
- In almost all the few countries with data available in the region, the share of pre-primary education in the total current expenditure on education is lower than 2%.

External aid

- The region was the main recipient of total bilateral aid in 2004 (one third of global amount), but the average share devoted to education across 22 countries was just 11% of total aid received.
- Proportion of aid to education that goes to basic education is just over 20%, far below the 50% for South and West Asia.
- Early childhood care and education receives a tiny share of donor aid. The majority of donors allocate less than 0.5% of total aid to education to this level.



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