

GLOBAL EDUCATION DIGEST 2011

Regional Profile: South and West Asia

Overview

Having started from a low baseline, the South and West Asia region has seen significant advances toward Education for All (EFA) in the past decade. Rates of primary school enrolment have increased, although they have not kept pace with the growth of the school-aged population. Led by progress in India, the region has more than halved the size of its out-of-school population; however, in absolute terms the region is still home to 16 million primary school-age children and 28 million lower secondary school-age children who are out of school. Although more children are moving from primary to secondary school, retention remains a significant challenge, particularly among girls. Even in countries where lower secondary education is compulsory, less than 90% of children are enrolled.

Key indicators

Children enrolled in primary school

Of the 702 million children enrolled in primary school worldwide in 2009, 28% of them resided in South and West Asia. Over the past decade, enrolment has risen by 28% to accommodate a nearly 4% increase in the population of this age group. Getting children into school at the right age remains a challenge. Nevertheless, the adjusted net enrolment rate for the region is estimated at 91%, an impressive 12 percentage point gain since 1999.

Primary school completion

Of children who enrol in primary school, only two-thirds reach the last grade. Nevertheless, there has been progress. In the South and West Asia region, the gross intake ratio (GIR) to the last grade of school was 86%, compared to 67% in 1999. Country-level data show a mixed record. India and Nepal have only marginally improved survival rates since 1999, while Bhutan reached 90% in 2008.

Transition from primary to secondary school

The effective rate of transition from primary to secondary school, a new UIS indicator, is a useful measure of the demand for secondary education. In South and West Asia, the rate varies widely across the region from 98% in Bhutan to 74% in Pakistan.

Lower secondary school enrolment

Over the past decade, the global GER for lower secondary education rose by 8 percentage points to 80%. In South and West Asia, it rose an impressive 9 percentage points from 62% to 71%.

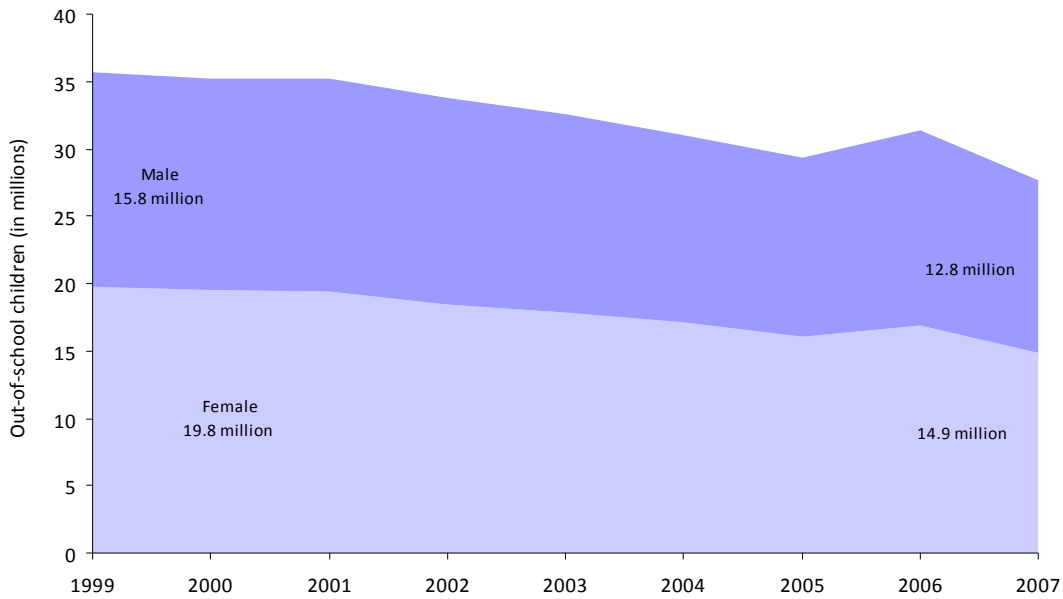
Gender disparities in lower secondary school enrolment

The gender gap in terms of access to lower secondary education is significant in this region. The gross enrolment ratio for girls was 69% in 2009, compared to 74% for boys, limiting opportunities for millions of girls. Globally, more girls are participating in lower secondary education, a measure of the efforts to decrease the gender gap in education. Between 1999 and 2009, girls' participation in lower secondary education in South and West Asia rose substantially from 53% to 69%.

Out-of-school children

Some 16 million children of primary school age in South and West Asia, nearly 59% of them girls, were not enrolled in school in 2007. The region has the greatest share of the global population of out-of-school children of lower secondary school age (28 million) at 39%. Many of them are considered dropouts, unlikely to ever return to school.

Figure 1. Number of out-of-school children of lower secondary school age in South and West Asia, 1999-2007



Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics.

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