

Gender and Education for All THE LEAP TO EQUALITY



Regional Overview

The Arab States¹

The region has made significant progress at all levels of education, but enrolment is far from being universal and large gender disparities remain, especially in primary education and adult literacy. Commitments to international treaties and declarations² by most of the countries will have to be fulfilled to achieve EFA.³

Early childhood care and education (ECCE): still a luxury for nearly all children

Despite great strides in pre-primary education (gross enrolment in half of the countries was below 7.9% in 1990 but had improved to below 15.8% in 2000), ECCE is still a luxury for nearly all children, especially in Algeria, Djibouti, Iraq, Libya, Oman, Saudi Arabia, Syria and Yemen where GER is less than 10 or even 5%. But the figure is above 50% in Kuwait, Lebanon, Morocco and the United Arab Emirates.

ECCE is often provided by private (frequently religious) institutions and is concentrated in urban and wealthy areas where parents tend to be more aware of its benefits and sensitive to the gender issue than rural ones. As a result, girls' access to ECCE is much better than to other levels of education. But substantial gender disparities are found in Morocco, where fewer than six girls are enrolled for every 10 boys.

1. This is the EFA classification of regions. The Arab States are listed in the Table.

2. The first was the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which acknowledged the right of all to education and stated that elementary education would be free and compulsory and higher levels of education accessible to all on the basis of merit.

3. Despite legally-guaranteed free education, primary school fees continue to be charged in several countries – Djibouti, Egypt, Lebanon, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, United Arab Emirates, Yemen – according to a World Bank survey (2002).

Universal primary education: great progress but gender disparities remain

Gender parity is closely tied to universalising primary education. Enrolment at this level grew by a healthy 17% (from 30.5 to 35.7 million) between 1990 and 2000. But about a fifth of eligible children (more than 7 million) were not enrolled in 2000 and NER (81%) was one of the lowest of all the EFA regions and below the 84% world average.

Nearly 60% of out-of-school children are girls. The Arab States (with gender parity of only 0.89), South and West Asia and sub-Saharan Africa are the regions with the world's biggest gender disparities at primary level. The Arab States have some of the lowest GERs (Djibouti and the Sudan) and largest gender disparities (Yemen 0.63 and Djibouti 0.76).

Gender disparities concern not only access to school but also participation in the learning process. In nearly all countries with data, boys repeated more than girls. Gender gaps in favour of girls in this respect are particularly large in Algeria, Egypt, Iraq, Lebanon, Morocco, Oman, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Tunisia, the United Arab Emirates and Yemen. In most countries with data, survival rates to grade 5 are higher for girls than for boys, showing that once girls have access to school, they do as well or better than boys.

Participation in secondary and tertiary education: much improvement over last decade

Demand for **secondary education** has increased as more pupils graduate from primary school. The median gross enrolment ratio rose from 49% in 1990 to almost 70% a decade later. But in some countries (Djibouti, Iraq, Mauritania, Morocco, Sudan and Syria) the GER is less than 50%.

Girls' participation in secondary education increased during the 1990s, with strong gains (more than 20 points on the GPI scale) in Algeria, Mauritania and Tunisia. Progress was so great in Tunisia that disparities there were reversed and enrolled girls now outnumber boys. But large disparities in favour of boys remain in Djibouti, Iraq, and Morocco where they are more pronounced than in primary education.

Enrolment in **tertiary education** also increased substantially. Even though this level is still limited to a few, gross enrolment in half of the countries was below 12% in 1990 but had improved to below 22% in 2000, a rise of more than 80%. Gender disparities vary widely in the region. There are few women students in Djibouti, Iraq, Mauritania (which has only 20%) and Morocco but far more in Jordan, Lebanon, Oman, Qatar⁴ and Saudi Arabia.

What men and women choose to study is a key issue in the debate about gender equality. In countries with data, women are over-represented in so-called "feminine" fields, such as education, social sciences, humanities, services and health-related programmes, that do not boost their chances of equal job opportunities with men.

The right to education: a concern for adult women

The Arab States have some of the world's lowest adult literacy rates, with only 60% of the region's population of 15 and over able to read and to write in 2000, well below the world average of 80%. The rate is less than 50% in some countries (Iraq, Mauritania, Morocco and Yemen). Women account for nearly two-thirds of the region's illiterates, a figure not expected to change much by 2015. Most countries show substantial gender gaps in literacy, with fewer than 8 literate women to 10 men in twelve of them (Algeria, Djibouti, Egypt, Iraq, Lebanon, Mauritania, Morocco, Oman, Sudan, Syria, Tunisia and Yemen).

4. In Qatar, the female GER is three times that of males, perhaps because many males study abroad.

Eliminating gender disparities in primary and secondary education

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.

In the Arab States, as elsewhere, girls' enrolment has increased faster than that of boys over the decade, easing disparities in both primary and secondary education. At secondary level, the median ratio of female to male enrolment rose from 0.64 to 1.03, meaning that in half the countries with data, more girls are now enrolled than boys. Despite this, many countries risk not achieving the gender parity goal in 2005 or in 2015 unless appropriate policies are put in place. 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 (8 out of 20 with data):**
Bahrain, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, the Palestinian Autonomous Territories, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates.
- **Secondary education (3 out of 18 with data):**
Jordan, Kuwait, Oman.

Gender parity prospects

(14 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 (3): Egypt, Mauritania, Oman.
- Countries likely to miss parity in 2005 but achieve it by 2015 (4): Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Syrian Arab Republic.
- Countries that may not achieve parity by 2015 either at primary, secondary or both levels (7): Algeria, Bahrain, Djibouti, Iraq, Morocco, Tunisia, United Arab Emirates.

These are forecasts based on past trends. While more than three-quarters of the countries (11 out of 14) are likely to miss reaching gender parity at either primary or secondary level or both by 2005, appropriate policies are available to many of them to achieve it within a few years.

Resources and aid

Eliminating gender disparities and inequality while achieving all the other EFA goals is costly. Some countries will need to allocate more of their own resources and use them more effectively (in comparison with the average percentage of national income spent on education for developing countries, -4.1%). But the least developed among them, with the lowest education indicators, will need more external aid to achieve EFA. Yet overall bilateral and multilateral aid to education fell between 1998/99 and 2000/01, though it increased for basic education. Even if the Arab States region already receives 16% of the total bilateral aid to education, current problems of turning aid commitments, especially the FTI,⁵ into reality do not augur well for international assistance to countries at risk or serious risk of not achieving the EFA goals, particularly the gender targets. ■

5. Of the 18 countries initially invited to participate in the Fast-Track Initiative, two – Mauritania and Yemen – are from the Arab States.

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.

The Arab States: 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		
Algeria	30 291	6-16	Yes	66.7	0.75	3.3	1.00	98.3	0.92	46.6	70.8	1.08	...	...	...	0.87
Bahrain	640	...	Yes	87.5	0.91	39.2	0.94	95.9	1.00	74.1	101.3	1.07	...	...	3.1	0.94
Djibouti	632	6-13	No	64.6	0.72	0.4	1.44	32.6	0.76	28.0	18.9	0.62	0.9	0.70	...	0.61
Egypt ¹	67 884	6-14	Yes	55.3	0.66	12.5	0.95	92.6	0.93	52.9	85.7	0.94	...	...	...	0.83
Iraq	22 946	6-11	...	39.3	0.42	5.7	1.00	92.9	0.82	...	38.3	0.62	13.6	0.54	...	0.67
Jordan	4 913	6-16	No	89.8	0.89	30.6	0.91	93.6	1.00	...	87.7	1.03	28.6	1.14	5.0	0.94
Kuwait	1 914	6-14	Yes	81.9	0.95	112.8	0.98	83.1	0.98	84.9	55.9	1.04	...	...	...	0.89
Lebanon ¹	3 496	6-12	Yes	86.0	0.87	70.8	0.98	86.5	0.97	86.3	75.7	1.10	42.3	1.09	2.9	0.90
Libyan Arab Jamahiriya	5 290	6-15	Yes	79.9	0.75	7.9	1.01	...	1.02	...	...	...	48.8	0.96	...	...
Mauritania ^{1, 2}	2 665	...	Yes	40.2	0.59	...	...	64.0	0.93	23.7	21.0	0.88	3.7	0.20	3.6	0.61
Morocco	29 878	6-15	Yes	48.8	0.58	53.4	0.57	78.0	0.87	40.8	39.3	0.80	10.3	0.80	5.6	0.71
Oman	2 538	...	Yes	71.7	0.77	4.8	0.90	64.6	0.96	58.0	68.2	0.98	8.5	1.40	...	0.81
Palestinian Autonomous Territories	3 191	6-15	...	...	...	33.8	0.94	96.8	1.01	53.9	82.6	1.08	28.5	0.96	...	...
Qatar ¹	565	...	Yes	81.2	1.03	29.9	0.93	...	1.00	64.1	89.0	1.06	24.6	2.97	...	0.90
Saudi Arabia ¹	20 346	...	Yes	76.2	0.81	5.0	0.93	57.9	0.96	52.3	67.8	0.90	22.4	1.29	...	0.79
Sudan ¹	31 095	6-14	Yes	57.7	0.67	19.7	1.01	49.5	0.85	...	28.8	...	...	...	...	0.69
Syrian Arab Republic	16 189	6-12	Yes	74.4	0.68	9.7	0.93	96.3	0.93	67.6	43.3	0.89	...	...	4.4	0.87
Tunisia	9 459	6-16	Yes	71.0	0.74	15.8	0.99	99.2	0.96	49.8	78.3	1.05	21.7	0.97	7.2	0.88
United Arab Emirates ¹	2 606	6-11	Yes	76.2	1.06	84.3	1.00	86.6	1.00	73.8	75.1	1.12	...	...	...	0.89
Yemen ^{1, 2}	18 349	6-14	Yes	46.4	0.37	0.4	0.92	67.1	0.63	...	...	...	...	...	10.6	...
Arab States	274 887	...	...	60.1	0.67	15.8	0.99	80.9	0.89	53.9	69.5	1.03	22.1	1.13	...	...
Developing countries	4 700 496	...	...	73.6	0.82	30.9	0.99	82.1	0.92	61.5	59.9	1.01	10.4	0.73	4.1	...
World	6 041 386	...	...	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. Countries invited to participate in the Fast-Track Initiative (FTI).

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 in 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.