UNESCO

ARAB BUREAU OF EDUCATION FOR THE GULF STATES

Progress of SDG4 in the Arab Region

A Summary Review

Education 2030

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The Global Education 2030 Agenda

UNESCO, as the United Nations' specialized agency for education, is entrusted to lead and coordinate the Education 2030 Agenda, which is part of a global movement to eradicate poverty through 17 Sustainable Development Goals by 2030. Education, essential to achieve all of these goals, has its own dedicated Goal 4, which aims to "*ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all*". The Education 2030 Framework for Action provides guidance for the implementation of this ambitious goal and commitments.

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Progress of SDG4 in the Arab Region

A Summary Review

Acknowledgements

Upon receiving the revised National Voluntary Reports (NVR) submitted by the countries of the Arab region in late-2020, UNESCO developed the "*Progress of SDG4 in the Arab region: A Summary Review*" which is a snapshot that presents key trends for selected SDG4 targets in the region using data and information from the NVR and the valuable inputs from the Ministries of Education and the Arab regional education institutes.

This report presents a brief story of regional progress of SDG4 as part of the effort by the UNESCO Beirut office to document the progress made by countries in the Arab region, building on the country exercises undertaken in 2019, and taking into consideration the global devastation to the education sector due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The Summary Review presents how well the region has been progressing, flagging critical issues that may need effective planning and coordination at regional and national levels for achieving the desired results. The report also highlights good practices from countries under each target area.

Table of Contents

List of Figures

List of Tables

Acronyms and Glossary

ABEGS	Arab Bureau of Education for the Gulf States
ALL	Adult Literacy and Life Skills Survey
ARMED	Arab Region Meeting on Education
CAN-Q	The College of North Atlantic – Qatar
CDC	Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
CERD	The Centre for Educational Research and Development (Lebanon)
COVID-19	Coronavirus Disease-2019
CRC	the Convention on the Right of the Child
DHS	Demographic and Health Survey
ECCD	Early Childhood Care and Development
ECE	Early Childhood Education
EMIS	Education Management Information System
ESD	Education for Sustainable Development
GAML	Global Alliance for Monitoring Learning
GCC	Gulf Cooperation Council
GCED	Global Citizenship Education
GEM	Global Education Monitoring
GIR	Gross Intake Ratio
GIZ	The German Corporation for International Cooperation
IALS	International Adult Literacy Survey
ICCS	International Civic and Citizenship Education Study
ICF	International Classification of Functioning
ICTs	Information and Communication Technologies
IDA	International Disability Alliance
IDDC	International Disability and Development Consortium
IEA	International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement
ILO	International Labour Organization
ITU	International Telecommunication Union
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MEHE	Ministry of Education and Higher Education (Lebanon)
MENA	Middle East and North Africa
MGIEP	Mahatma Gandhi Institute of Education for Peace and Sustainable Development
MICS	Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey

MPL	Minimum Proficiency Level
NEET	Youth Not in Employment, Education or Training
NGOs	Non-Governmental Organizations
NSO	National Statistical Office
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PAPFAM	Pan Arab Project for Family Health
PIAAC	Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies
PIRLS	Progress in International Reading Literacy Study
PISA	Programme for International Student Assessment
PQTR	Pupil-Qualified Teacher Ratio
PwD	Persons with Disabilities
RCEP	Regional Center for Education Planning
RCQ	Regional Centre for Quality and Excellence in Education (Kingdom of Saudi Arabia)
SAQMEC	The Southern and Eastern African Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
STEP	Skills Towards Employability and Productivity
SYLAS	Syrian Youth Literacy and Life Skills Assessment
TDRA	Telecommunication and Digital Government Regulatory Authority
TIMSS	Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study
TRAA	Telecommunications Regulatory Authority
TVET	Technical and Vocational Education and Training
UAE	United Arab Emirates
UIS	UNESCO Institute for Statistics
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNESCWA	United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNSTATS	United Nations Statistics Division
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
WBG	West Bank and Gaza
WG	Washington Group on Disability Statistics
WGS	Washington Group Short Set

Executive Summary

The Background
This is a snapshot review of the progress of SDG 4 in the Arab region, based upon the national reports of the countries of the region and the valuable inputs from the regional education institutes of the region. In this review, SDG 4 is looked at as an essential part of an interconnected whole of all SDGs. However, it focuses on selected targets and indicators of SDG 4 because of difficulties of accessing consistent data pertaining to the region covering the period from 2010 to 2020. Therefore, internationally comparable data from various sources have been taken into consideration, highlighting at the same time the overall pictures as revealed by the country reports and flagging their select best practices.

School completion rate
The Arab region has registered better completion rates for primary than lower secondary, indicating that a sizable number of children are dropping out of education after primary level.

Learning outcomes
Learning outcomes are placed at the center of educational progress. The global and regional assessments show that in the Arab region (Western Asia & Northern Africa) student proficiency levels are low warranting more concerted efforts to enhance them.

Early childhood education
The SDG4 national reports indicate that early childhood education is promising, with many countries paying attention to ECE laws and policies, school nutrition and healthcare, training of teachers, caregivers and educators; and home-based care programs. It is encouraging to note that some countries have also reported children under 5 years experiencing positive and stimulating home environments.

ICT Skills
As per the two basic ICT skills, namely, ability to open and type an email and using the copy-and-paste function, there has been moderate increase in the ICT skills in the region.

Literacy and numeracy skills
it remains a challenge for most countries to undertake systematic literacy assessments that measure the proficiency levels. Currently, there are attempts made at developing new common scales against which the minimum proficiency levels can be measured. Measuring progress in ESD and

GCED: Monitoring and tracking progress on ESD and GCED would require common consensus among the countries in the Arab region about the required competencies and strategies for implementation at all levels, including policy and curricular changes to align with regional standards for measuring ESD and GCED.

Teachers' Training
The pupil-qualified teacher ratio (PQTR) for primary and secondary levels for most countries of the region indicating that the teaching capacity has grown.

Other issues and challenges
There are three important issues that warrant special focus from policy and planning perspectives and they are:
1. Youth not in employment, education or training (NEET) (SDG8);
2. Disability and learning (several SDGs);
3. Improving data, monitoring and accountability (SDG17).

Best practices from the region
The report reveals good practices from the Arab Region on the topic of disability and education infrastructure, safe school environment, gender sensitive infrastructure, etc.

Assessment of learning loss
The COVID-19 pandemic has affected the Arab world as much as the rest of the world. An important impact has been learning loss. There is a need to assess such learning loss so that suitable 'catch-up' programmes may be designed for use when schools reopen.

Way forward
Building statistical capacity to bridge data gaps for several SDG4 indicators for the countries in the region calls for more coordinated efforts to strengthen the capacity of national statistical systems There is also a need to focus on issues relating to:
1. having necessary policies, frameworks and standards;
2. strengthening coordination and participation;
3. improving quality, availability and use of data;
4. addressing the learning crisis and underpinning the importance of learning assessments;
5. localization of SDG 4; and
6. addressing issues that matter for accelerating the Education Agenda 2030 in the region.

CHAPTER 1
Monitoring SDG4
Progress in the Region

1. Monitoring SDG4 progress in the Region

1.1 Introduction

The Arab region has a geo-political, socio-economic and ethno-lingual ecosystem that is diverse. The region also has countries which, like in many other parts of the world, have been affected by conflict and its consequences of mortality, morbidity, displacement, migration, unemployment and poverty. The COVID-19 pandemic has had serious consequences for learning in almost all the countries of the world, thanks to the necessity of extended lockdown and long closure of schools. The Arab region is no exception to this.

Also important, but perhaps less noticed among such consequences, is learning loss suffered by children, youth and adults. This warrants education interventions that would act both in an emergent damage control mode as well as address the long-term concerns of everyone receiving quality lifelong learning opportunities that would enhance their employment, incomes, health and general well-being. The SDG4–Education 2030 Agenda provides for quick assessment through a review of its progress. Such a review helps education stakeholders to find out what needs to be done in order to accelerate the activities. These activities are monitored and measured by SDG4's seven targets, three means of implementation and 11 global and 43 thematic indicators. The indicators guide the implementing countries in reviewing their own performance. They are, however, free to adapt them to suit their own priorities. Regional review of SDG4 progress helps countries to understand the regional progress made so far and the challenges faced, as well as learn lessons from good practices in the region for improvement. Hence its importance.

A comprehensive review of the progress of SDG4 in the Arab region is further exacerbated by the restrictions on contact and communication with the education stakeholders imposed by the pandemic with its unpredictable and rapidly changing infection patterns. Notwithstanding all these impediments, an attempt is made here to make a review, in realization of the fact that education is a public good, a fundamental human right and a basis for guaranteeing the realization of other rights. This exercise presents a snapshot review of progress of SDG4 in the region.

It is hoped that this snapshot review would trigger further action by countries of the region to generate the needed

robust data for monitoring the education sector more efficiently and effectively. Doing this would call for more systematic monitoring, reporting and evaluating indicators from Early Childhood Education (ECE) to adult education. This would demand clear indicators and their measurement to generate evidence for national and international discourses and advocacy. Moreover, SDG4–Education 2030 is a universal and collective commitment of all countries, regardless of their level of development. Looking at the data requirements to monitor the Education 2030 Agenda, it becomes clear that various data sources other than from the education sector need to be used, including sources such as National Statistical Office (NSO) data and household survey data. In addition, qualitative data may have to be pressed into service where quantitative data alone may not capture the full picture. For example, to capture disaggregated data in respect of activities like acquiring citizenship education, data generation of the qualitative type may have to go beyond school and family and extend well into the community level.

It is important to note at this point that most of the Education Sector Development Plans prepared by several countries in the developing world talk about their vision to make their citizens acquire the 21st century skills, which emphasize competencies relating to citizenship and sustainable development. While these are contained in target 4.7, it must be mentioned that most of these countries have not yet started the process of developing measurable indicators at national level to monitor progress of implementation. Together with developing indicators to measure adult literacy (4.6), this may call for immediate attention for action in the Arab region, as the deadline for Education 2030 Agenda is fast approaching. Review of National Education Indicators Framework as part of the education sector M&E system may help this process of developing measurable indicators for data generation for disaggregated levels, such as those not covered now under the education targets.

If this snapshot exercise serves as a springboard for further action by all the education stakeholders in the region along the lines discussed above, its objective would be fulfilled. UNESCO, as the domain agency of the UN for education, would be more than happy to provide the needed technical support to member states who want to transform human lives through education, with its implicit recognition that education is the main driver of development and is critical to achieving the other SDGs.

1.2 Interconnectedness of the SDGs

The SDGs were designed with their interconnectedness in mind and education can be a central goal in achieving this. By looking at some of the issues covered in other SDGs, one can understand that there is a strong link to SDG4. Successful achievement requires a sense of supporting education to make informed decisions. **Table 1** below shows the link between SDG4 targets and other SDG goals. Monitoring SDG4 should be viewed with this broad perspective since the social and economic lives of individuals and their families shape their learning, thinking and behavior.

For example, SDG8.6 talks about substantially reducing the proportion of youth not in employment, education or training (NEET). This target is directly linked to SDG4.4 and they are dependent on each other for successful achievement of their respective targets. Similarly, SDG4.7 is linked to several other SDG indicators such as SDG12.8.1 (global citizenship), SDG13.3.1 (climate change curricula), and SDG5.c.1 (gender equality).

Although it is beyond the scope of this summary report to present an analysis of other SDGs in relation to SDG4, an example is given later to show the importance of considering such targets while discussing the progress and challenges of SDG4 at regional and national levels.

1.3 Availability of data and tracking progress

This snapshot review presents key trends for only selected targets and indicators. Mention must be made here that this report has taken into consideration the national reports prepared by member states of the region and other reports covering the region. However, due to lack of consistent data available for most indicators covering the period from 2010 to 2020 in the country reports, this summary report provides an analysis based on currently available and internationally comparable data from the UNStats[2], the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS) and other relevant sources such as UNICEF, OECD[3], ESCWA[4] and the World Bank[5], highlights overall pictures as revealed by national reports and flags relevant best practices. It is based on definitions, methodology and interpretation of the SDG4

Table 1. SDG4 Interconnectedness

		Agenda 2030 - Sustainable Development Goals															
		SDG1	SDG2	SDG3	SDG4	SDG5	SDG6	SDG7	SDG8	SDG9	SDG10	SDG11	SDG12	SDG13	SDG14	SDG15	SDG16	SDG17
SDG4	Target 4.1	●			—	●			●			●						
	Target 4.2	●	●	●	—	●			●			●					●	
	Target 4.3				—	●			●									
	Target 4.4				—	●			●									
	Target 4.5				—	●	●		●		●							
	Target 4.6				—	●												
	Target 4.7	●		●	—	●		●	●		●	●	●	●			●	
	Target 4.a	●			—	●	●		●	●		●					●	
	Target 4.b	●			—	●			●		●							●
	Target 4.c				—	●			●		●	●						

Source: Vladimirova, K. and Le Blanc D., 2015[1].

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1 Adapted from Vladimirova, K. and David Le Blanc, 2015: How well are the links between education and other sustainable development goals covered in UN flagship reports? A contribution to the study of the science-policy interface on education in the UN system. Working Paper No. 146 ST/ESA/2015/DWP/146. New York, United Nations, DESA, access: www.un.org/esa/desa/papers/2015/wp146_2015.pdf

2 https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/indicators/database/

3 https://data.oecd.org/education.htm

4 https://data.unescwa.org/portal/e7d41253-2cf5-4f3b-ba5f-6c45b8af1f88

5 https://datatopics.worldbank.org/education/indicators.

indicators as stipulated in UIS metadata for the global and thematic indicators (UIS, 2018)[6].

In 2016, UIS ran a survey[7] to assess the availability of the underlying data required to produce the indicators for monitoring SDG 4 in the Arab region. The main objective of this survey was to examine countries' ability to measure and report on progress made towards achieving the Education 2030 Agenda. The survey covered 18 countries in the region.

The survey **(Figure 1)** showed that data for the ten global indicators are not widely collected in the region. Only 47% of the data required to produce the SDG 4 global indictors are collected.

Data for other thematic indicators are 20 percentage points more available in the region, compared to global indicators. This survey also revealed that many countries reported that indicators were derived from educational legislative frameworks, followed by indicators based on administrative records (62%). The disaggregation of data that is available presents an interesting picture where the most common levels of disaggregation have been by sex (88%), age (70%) and geographical location (65%). However, data disaggregated by disability (22%) and wealth (9%) have been limited.

Two critical issues, besides other aspects, emerge from the UIS Regional survey which has direct relevance to the effort to capture the progress of SDG4 in the region. They are:

First, due to limited availability of data required to produce the global and thematic indicators and limited levels of disaggregation of data available, the question of "no one left behind" cannot be fully answered for the region.

The second issue is about the limited applicability of other sources of data, besides administrative data (student and school administrative records). In particular, data from household surveys such as labour force surveys (LFS) and population censuses are very limited to educational attainment and self-reported literacy. Information on other aspects of education such as participation, completion, learning outcomes and skills are rarely collected by national surveys in the region.

Figure 1. Data Availability by Type of Indicator (Arab Region)
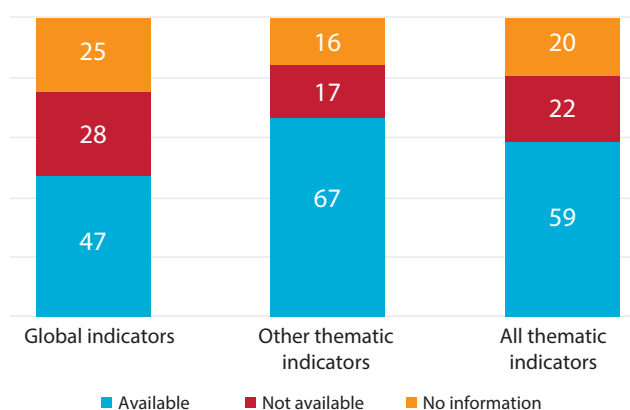
Source: UIS, 2016.

1.4 Other efforts to monitor regional status

This summary report presents only a brief story of regional progress of SDG4 and as already mentioned is more in the nature of a snapshot report. As part of the regional effort by the UNESCO Beirut office to document the progress made by countries in the Arab region, several workshops were held, including the SDG4 Dead Sea Regional Workshop in 2019 (Dead Sea, Jordan), AR-MED III (Dead Sea, Jordan, 2018), Capacity development on the thematic indicators (Muscat, Oman, December 2017), and Rethinking Education in the Arab Region (Sharm El Sheikh, Egypt (December 2017). The Jordan 2019 workshop led to the preparation of country status reports on SDG4 progress. The SDG4 progress report in the region was presented at the AR-MED IV meeting in July 2021[8]. Building on the country exercises undertaken in 2019, and taking into consideration the global devastation to the education sector due to the COVID-19 pandemic which has almost halted formal education and has affected the learning of millions of children and youth globally, the summary report tries to capture the picture relating to SDG progress of some key areas in the region, based on cross-national data available for several countries, if not all, in the Arab region.

1.4.1 The national reports

The national reports on SDG4 progress reflect significant efforts (initiatives, projects, success stories) undertaken since the Cairo Declaration 2015. The national teams worked on drafting national reports on progress achieved in SDG4 indicators, indicating partnerships and success

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6   UNESCO Institute for Statistics. 2018. Metadata for the Global and Thematic Indicators for the Follow-up and Review of SDG 4 and Education 2030. http://uis.unesco.org/sites/default/files/documents/metadata-global-thematic-indicators-sdg4-education2030-2017-en_1.pdf

7   UNESCO Institute for Statistics. 2016. Country readiness to monitor SDG4 education targets- regional survey for the Arab states, Montreal, UIS.

8   https://en.unesco.org/events/fourth-arab-regional-meeting-education-2030-ar-med-iv-education-resilience-working-towards

stories with the support of regional Institutes/Organizations (Arab Bureau of Education for the Gulf States [ABEGS], Regional Center for Educational Planning [RCEP] and Regional Centre for Quality and Excellence in Education (Kingdom of Saudi Arabia) [RCQE]) and UNESCO field offices. Overall, systematic monitoring based on available data (SDG4 national reports before COVID-19) shows that there has been steady progress towards many of the targets over the last five years.

However, some significant gaps remain, such as the need to target marginalized and vulnerable groups like learners with special needs, those with low socio-economic status, refugees and so on. Target-specific highlights, innovative initiatives and success stories with potential for upscaling or replication have been excerpted from the available national reports and added appropriately under the relevant discussions on selected targets.

1.5 How to read this summary report

Keeping the above scenario in mind, this snapshot review has selected a few key targets and indicators to present what has been the trend in the region since 2010 until 2020 and what can be learned from such trend. The purpose of this summary is not to discuss each target and indicator of SDG4. Therefore, the chapters are not arranged by targets, but instead each chapter raises key questions that relate to the overall objective of the particular target. By asking such questions, the story of progress of the targets could be better presented, which in turn would provide the answers to the questions posed. The summary report has used extensive information from the SDG4 national reports.

Short sections are introduced in each chapter, indicated by an icon. These capture key information from the countries regarding interesting and good practices undertaken in respect of specific targets, or policies and programs introduced to achieve the SDG4 targets and other relevant information.

Through discussing the regional trend, the summary report presents how well the region has been progressing. Through this approach, some critical issues will be flagged that may need effective planning and coordination at regional and national levels to achieve the desired results.

The critical issues raised may not necessarily be new, but they are raised again using an evidence-based approach to remind and renew the actions that are needed to achieve the Education 2030 Agenda. Based on this summary report and the relevant national reports, discussions have been held in the regional forum, AR-MED IV, and may be used in similar meetings with a view to taking concrete decisions that would help to accelerate the progress of targets as well as expand the data coverage. Building the relevant capacities and ensuring the comprehensiveness of data coverage are very important for monitoring SDG4 progress. This would help address the concern **(Figure 2)** of making it more inclusive to ensure that 'no one is left behind' in every sense of the term, such as educational access, equity, equality and inclusion.

1.6 Some interesting facts to note

Figure 2 captures some interesting points related to SDG4 progress in the region, as culled from different sources.

Figure 2. Some interesting facts

SDG Progress:	**Upper secondary:**	**Mathematics proficiency:**
Countries such as Bahrain, Egypt, Morocco, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the UAE have experienced greater progress with regard to the SDGs. However, overall and compared to other regions globally, progress is still quite modest (Sachs et al. 2018)	Less than 40% of students finish upper secondary school (UIS, 2018)	The proportion of students completing lower secondary school with minimum proficiency in mathematics is below 50% (ESCWA, 2020)
Unemployment rate:		
The proportion of youth not in employment, education or training (NEET) has increased for both young women and men since at least 2012. The rate in the region was estimated at 34.3 % in 2020, compared to a global rate of 22.3% (ILO, 2020)	In 2016, 90% of youth aged 15-24 were literate, compared to only 53% of adults aged 65+. Among older persons, the female literacy rate is more than 20 percentage points lower than that of males (UIS, 2017)	Displacement due to conflict deprives millions of children, adolescents and youth of an education, undermining the prospects of a generation. The humanitarian crises in the region have taken their toll on education development (UNESCO GEM, 2019)
TVET:		**OOSC:**
The quality of technical and vocational education and training remains low. Only a third of graduates are equipped for the labour market (Maclean and Fien 2017)	Less than one quarter of 3- and 4-year-old children in the region are attending early childhood education (UNICEF, 2017)	More than 16 million children in the region are out of school (UIS, 2018)

Sources: See footnote below[9].

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[9] i. Sachs, Jeffrey et al. (2018), Global Responsibilities. Implementing the Goals - SDG Index and Dashboard Report 2018, New York, Bertelsmann Stiftung and Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN), http://www.sdgindex.org/reports/2018

ii. UNESCO Institute for Statistics. UIS.STAT. http://data.uis.unesco.org/.

iii. ESCWA. 2020. The Arab Sustainable Development Report 2020 (ASDR 2020), ESCWA. Beirut.

iv. ILO. 2020. Global Employment Trends for Youth 2020: Arab States, ILO

v. UIS. 2017. "Literacy Rates Continue to Rise from One Generation to the Next". http://uis.unesco.org/sites/default/files/documents/fs45-literacy-rates-continue-rise-generation-to-next-en-2017_0.pdf.

vi. UNESCO. 2019. Global Education Monitoring Report, Arab States: Migration, Displacement and Education: Building Bridges, Not Walls, Paris: UNESCO.

vii. Maclean, Rupert, and John Fien (2017). "Introduction and Overview: TVET in the Middle East—Issues, Concerns and Prospects". International Journal of Training Research 15 (3): 197–203

viii. UNICEF, 2017. "Early Childhood Education—UNICEF DATA". https://data.unicef.org/topic/early-childhood-development/early-childhood-education/.

CHAPTER 2
Are children in school completing the full cycle of education?

2. Are children in school completing the full cycle of education?

The extent to which children complete a cycle of education is monitored by completion rates. Completion rates indicate how many learners in a given age group have completed the relevant level of education. The SDG4 indicator 4.1.4 on completion rate (primary, lower and upper secondary education) measures how many children enter school more or less on time, progress through the education system and complete at the same time. Figure 3 shows a comparison of completion rates in primary and lower secondary education for both sexes across three regions – Arab, East Asia and Pacific and Sub-Saharan Africa.

2.1 Completion rates across the regions: a comparative snapshot

Figure 3 shows that the Arab region has registered better completion rates for primary than lower secondary. However, the Arab region's completion rates for both primary and lower secondary seem to be much lower than

the East Asia and Pacific region. Overall, completion rates at lower secondary level for all three regions are considerably lower than the primary completion rates, indicating that a sizable number of children are dropping out of education after primary level and, as result, are likely to be deprived of the economic and social benefits that a full cycle of education could provide them.

Figure 3. Completion Rates (both sexes) in Primary and Lower Secondary in Arab, Sub-Saharan Africa and East Asia & Pacific

	Arab World - Primary completion rate, both sexes (%)	Arab World - Lower secondary completion rate, both sexes (%)	East Asia & Pacific - Primary completion rate, both sexes (%)	East Asia & Pacific - Lower secondary completion rate, both sexes (%)	Sub-Saharan Africa - Primary completion rate, both sexes (%)	Sub-Saharan Africa - Lower secondary completion rate, both sexes (%)
2013	85.15	67.43	101.62	94.24	68.24	41.39
2014	86.39	66.96	98.16	91.78	68.64	42.26
2017	84.49	66.95	96.02	86.47	68.88	43.48
2019	86.52	69.01	98.36	89.36	69.8	43.71

Source: World Bank Education Statistics/ UIS. Stat[10].

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[10] UIS and World Bank Education Statistics calculations based on nationally representative household survey data such as Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS), Demographic Health Survey (DHS), Labour Force Survey (LFS).

2.2 Primary and lower secondary completion rates in the Arab region

The Arab region made a solid progress in advancing the completion rates at the primary level. However, the completion rates for primary and lower secondary **(Figure 4 and Figure 5)** levels for individual countries in the Arab region also show a considerable drop from primary to lower secondary level. Understandably both Syria and Yemen, due to conflict, are the most affected with lower secondary completion rates at much lower levels than other countries in the region. Children in many countries in the region will complete primary education successfully. However, the lower percentage of children completing lower secondary indicates that children belonging to the poorest populations and marginalized communities such as migrants and refugees are less likely to complete lower secondary level of education.

Figure 4. Primary Completion Rate (%), Both Sexes in the Arab region, 2010–2018
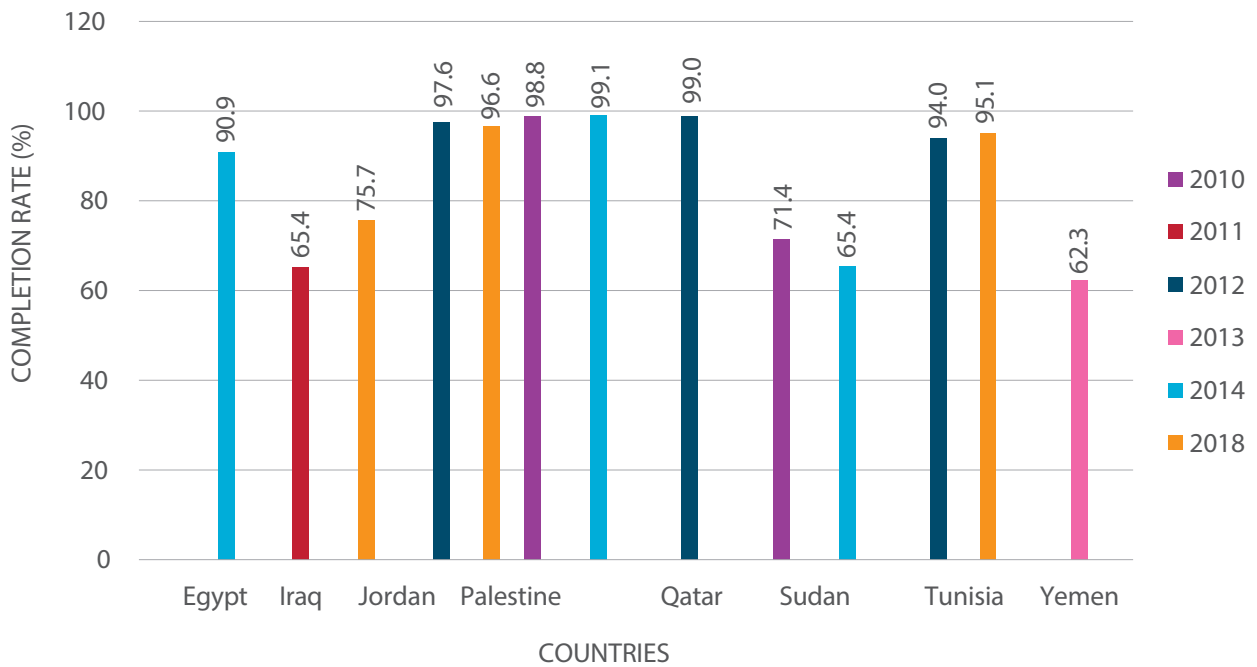
Source: UN Stats.

Figure 5. Lower Secondary Completion Rate (%), Both Sexes in the Arab region
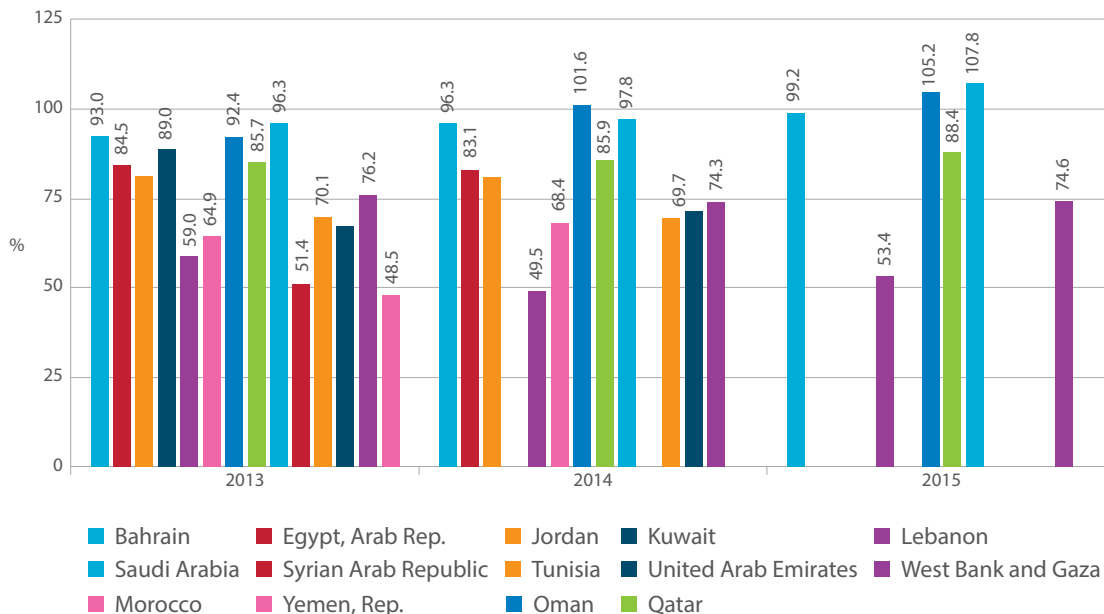
Source: UN Stats.

2.3 From the SDG4 national reports

According to the SDG4 national reports, the GIR (gross intake ratio) to the last grade of primary and lower secondary has shown improvement between 2015 and 2019 for most countries in the region, with a few exceptions.

◻ **Innovative approach of Yemen to improve GIR via accelerated learning**

This is an innovative approach of the Yemeni Government. In light of the increasing number of children out of school and in an effort to provide appropriate educational opportunities notwithstanding the various difficult circumstances that the Yemeni children face, the Ministry of Education established in 2018 a General Administration for Community Education. The General Administration, with the support of UNESCO, drafted a frame of reference for community education. It also prepared study material for children, opened classes for accelerated learning and trained a number of contractual teachers and facilitators during the academic year. This type of education aims to give children intensive education (the child studies the course of the academic year in a semester) so that they can catch up with students of their age and return to school in formal education. The program is currently progressing at a high pace and has been met with great community interaction, and therefore it can be said that it has achieved a reasonable level of success, with potential for up-scaling.

◻ **Bahrain's specific efforts to achieve SDG 4.1.**

Bahrain has introduced a series of initiatives including policy and programmes as well as monitoring tools to track student and teacher performance. Some of these initiatives introduced with aim of achieving Target 4.1 are given below:

1. Implementing self-administration initiative at public schools where internal improvement teams in each school work on drafting a performance development plan, on improving literacy and numeracy rates to reach international levels and on dealing with academic challenges, personal development and support so that external assessment visits based on international quality education standards reach a satisfactory rating.

2. Developing the school qualification policy to implement the framework developed by the Training and Quality Education Authority, as well as national and international test criteria.

3. Development of the Quality score card to follow up on technical and administrative operations. The Quality score card is a useful tool to collect important data about the daily, weekly, quarterly and yearly school performance. It is also used to monitor student and teacher attendance rates during the school day and the outcomes of teachers' class visits, and to measure progress or delay in student academic and personal achievement, in addition to indicators about the school leadership performance, support and educational services provided to learners.

4. Linking "the school performance assessment" to yearly incentives and prizes that are offered to schools based on their excellent performance and to individual categories of educators in all types of schools.

CHAPTER 3
How well are children in the Arab region learning?

3. How well are children in the Arab region learning?

3.1 Learning outcomes

Target 4.1 advocates for free and compulsory education for at least the first nine years of formal education, consisting of primary and lower secondary education. While the achievement of universal access remains an important element of this target, an explicit emphasis is placed on equity, as well as on the quality of learning outcomes upon completion of each cycle of education.

Global indicator 4.1.1 reflects the main innovation of the SDG4 Education 2030 Agenda and places learning outcomes at the center of educational progress. Indicator 4.1.1 measures proportion of children in Grade 2 or 3, primary and lower secondary achieving minimum proficiency level in reading and mathematics. While it is possible to assess reading and mathematics proficiency through both national and cross-national assessments, the data presented here are based on data published by cross-national assessments. Data from national learning achievements reveal that most countries set their own standards based on national curricula and expectations by level of education and subject. Performance levels from national assessments are not directly comparable. Learning assessments are comparable only for those participating in cross-national assessments. GAML[11] (Global Alliance to Monitor Learning) is working on a common metric to help countries to identify minimum proficiency levels for reading and mathematics.

3.2 Global snapshot

The global and regional assessments given in **Figure 6** show that in the Arab region (Western Asia & Northern Africa) student proficiency levels are low compared to Asia Pacific, North America and Europe. Achieving higher levels of proficiency levels in both reading and mathematics in the Arab region may need more concerted efforts through policy interventions, quality learning, teacher training and curriculum development with specific focus on children from marginalized and vulnerable groups.

Figure 6. Percentage of Primary and Secondary School Students Achieving Minimum Proficiency Levels in Reading and Mathematics by Income Level and SDG region, 2011- 2015
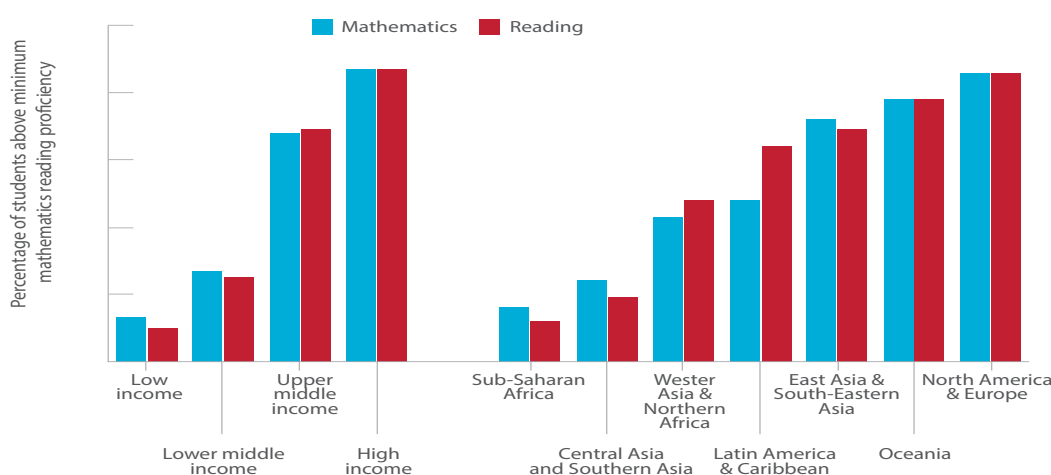
Note: Subregional grouping is based on SDG regions. The results were processed by the UIS, based on data from PIRLS 2011, TIMSS 2015, PISA 2015 and SAQMEC III.

Source: UIS, Data Centre.

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[11] GAML Task Forces have been established to address technical issues and provide practical guidance for countries on how to monitor progress towards SDG 4. The Task Forces make recommendations to the Alliance and are specifically responsible for: i. The framework for all global and thematic indicators related to learning and skills acquisition for targets/indicators 4.1.1., 4.2.1, 4.4.2, 4.6.1, 4.7.4 and 4.7.5; ii. Tools to align national and cross-national assessments into a universal reporting scale for comparability; iii. Mechanisms to validate assessment data to ensure quality and comparability; iv. Standards, guidelines and tools to guide countries in implementing and evaluating the quality of their learning assessments; v. Capacity-development tools and resources to complement existing ones and support countries in collecting, analysing and using learning assessment data; and vi. Guidelines and templates to help countries develop their own strategies to monitor learning. See: http://gaml.uis.unesco.org

3.3 Arab regional snapshot: setting minimum proficiency levels (MPLs)

Indicator 4.1.1 is considered one of the main critical issues introduced in the SDG4–Education 2030 Agenda. Baselines are available for countries participating in international assessments such as the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) and Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS). For example, PISA distinguishes between six levels of proficiency and students reaching Level 2 are considered to have achieved minimum functional skill level in mathematics and reading. Similarly, for TIMSS (Grade 4) the minimum proficiency level is 'Intermediate' and for PIRLS the minimum proficiency level is 'Low'. The data presented below are based on the above method of fixing the proficiency levels for reading and mathematics in primary and lower secondary levels.

3.4 Learning in the Arab region

Figures 7, 8 and **9** present the proficiency levels of primary and lower secondary students among countries that participated in international learning assessments. Some key observations to take note of from these proficiency scores are given below.

1 In general, the proportion of students from primary and upper secondary levels reaching minimum proficiency levels in reading and mathematics has been showing gradual increase.

2 The proficiency levels for reading for both primary and upper secondary among participating countries are higher than minimum proficiency levels for mathematics. Poorer performance in mathematics compared to reading is an area that may need more focused interventions to ensure that more students will be able to reach the minimum proficiency levels by 2030.

3 Further analysis at country level regarding the performance of boys and girls and by geographical location of urban and rural may reveal disparities.

4 The minimum proficiency levels for reading and mathematics at primary levels are proportionally higher than lower secondary levels, which may indicate that more students are likely to complete schooling with lower proficiency levels.

5 Consistent with other regions of the world, the Arab region has also seen females outperforming males in achieving minimum proficiency levels in reading and mathematics in lower secondary education.

Figure 7. Percentage of Students in Grade 4 achieving minimum proficiency in Reading, by Both Sexes (PIRLS and MICS) 2011–2018
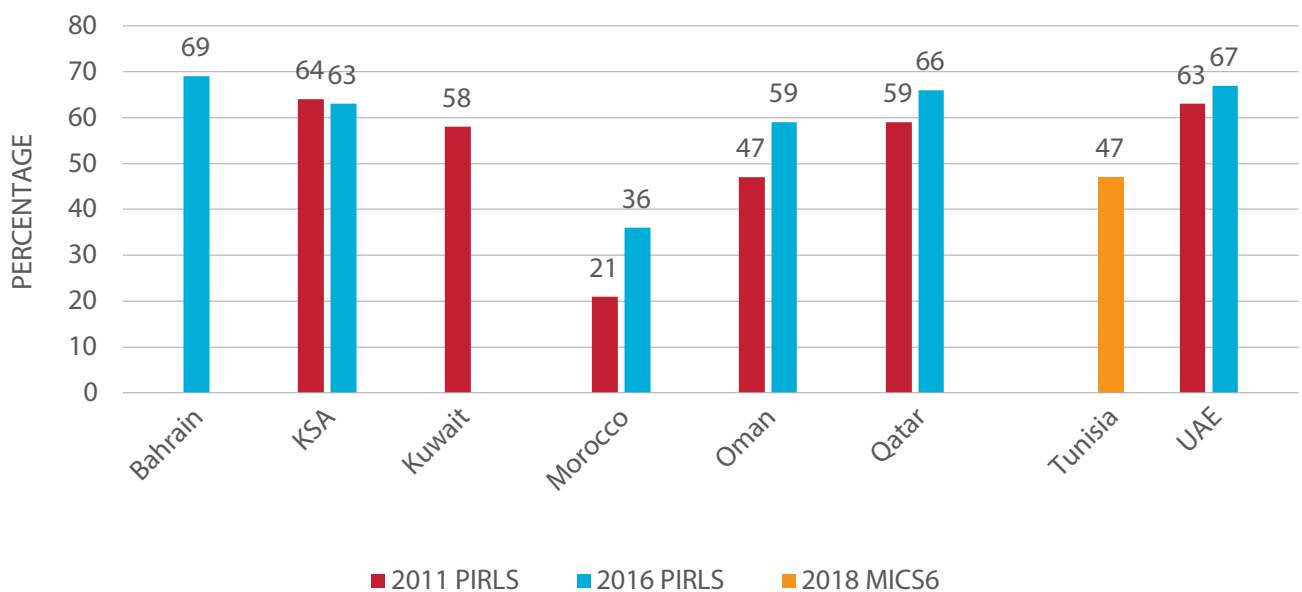
Figure 8. Percentage of Students Achieving Minimum Proficiency Levels in Reading at the End of Lower Secondary Level (PISA) 2011–2018

	Jordan	Lebanon	Morocco	Qatar	Saudi Arabia	Tunisia	United Arab Emirates
■ 2012 PISA	49.3			42.9		50.7	64.5
■ 2015 PISA	53.7	29.6		48.4		28.4	59.6
■ 2018 PISA	58.8	32.2	26.7	49.1	47.6		57.1

■ 2012 PISA   ■ 2015 PISA   ■ 2018 PISA
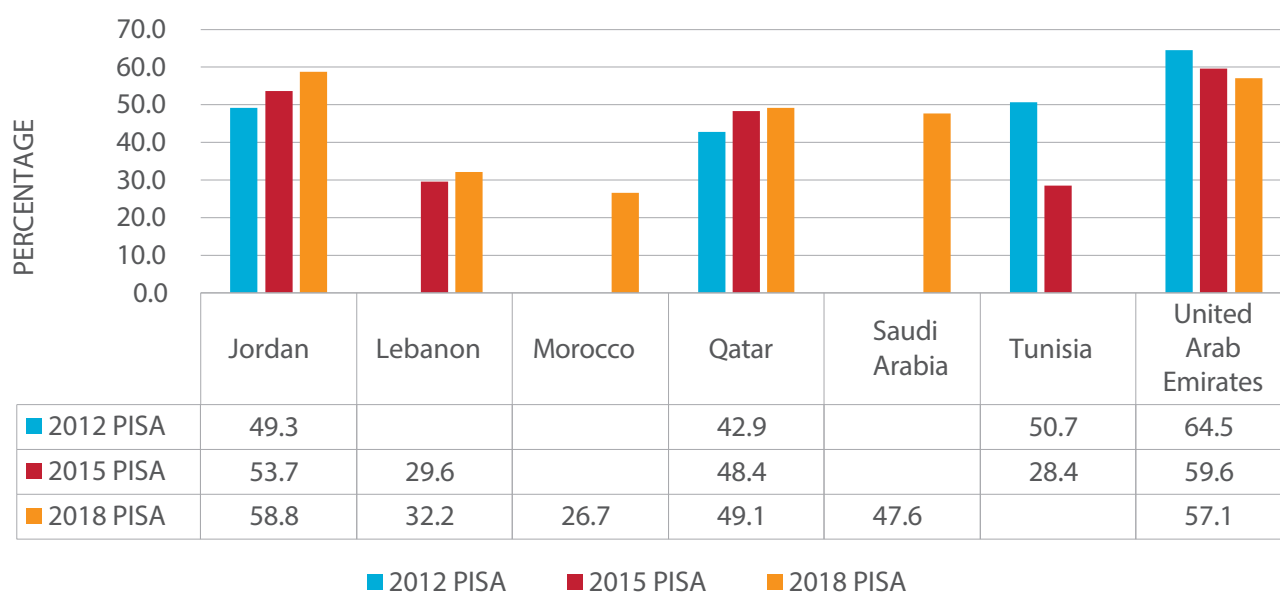
Figure 9. Percentage of Students Achieving Minimum Proficiency levels in Mathematics at the End of Lower Secondary Level (TIMSS and PISA) 2011–2018

	Bahrain in (TIMS)	Egypt in (TIMS)	Jordan in (TIMS)	Kuwait in (TIMS)	Lebanon in (TIMS)	Morocco in (TIMS)	Oman in (TIMS)	Palestine in (TIMS)	Qatar in (TIMS)	Saudi Arabia in (TIMS)	Syrian Arab Republic in (TIMS)	Tunisia in (TIMS)	United Arab Emirates in (TIMS)
■ 2011	26.2				37.7	11.8	16.4	25.3	29.1	20.2	17.3		42.5
■ 2012			31.4									32.3	
■ 2015	39.5	21.3	32.5	18.3	34.8	14.1	23.4		36.0	11.1		25.2	46.4
■ 2018			40.7										

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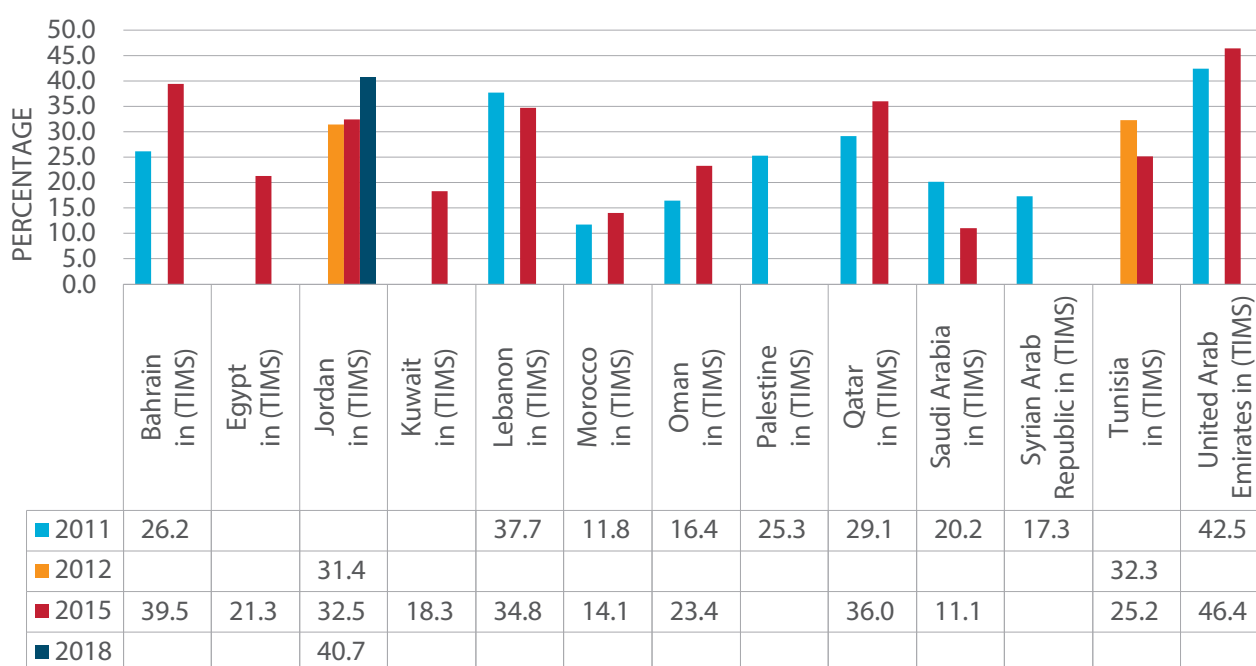
12 TIMSS benchmarks for has four levels- low benchmark- 400 or less, intermediate 400- 475, high 475-550 and advanced 550-625. The high benchmark scores indicate that for grade 4 Maths, students are able to "apply conceptual understanding to solve problems and grade 8 Maths, students are able to "apply their understanding and knowledge in a variety of relatively complex situations", while intermediate benchmark for grade 4 maths indicate that students are able to 'apply basic knowledge in simple situations and grade 8 students at intermediate level are able to 'apply basic mathematical knowledge in a variety of situations.. Similarly for Grade 4 science, high benchmark indicates that students are able to 'communicate and apply knowledge of life, physical and earth sciences and grade 8 students are able to 'apply understanding of concepts from biology, chemistry, physics and earth sciences. The intermediate level in science for grade 4 indicate the ability of students to 'show knowledge and understanding of some aspects of science and grade 8 students at intermediate level are able to "show and apply some knowledge of biology and the physical sciences" For further information see https://timssandpirls.bc.edu/timss2019/

Figures 10 and **11** give average scale scores for Grades 4 and 8 in Mathematics and Science (TIMSS 2019). Figure 10 on Mathematics achievement shows that two out of seven countries have achieved the high benchmark level (475-550) for Grade 4 and two countries have reached intermediate level (400-475). Similarly, for Grade 8, seven out of 10 countries have achieved the intermediate benchmark.

Figure 10. Average Scale Scores of Grades 4 and 8 Maths Achievement (TIMSS) 2011/2015/2019

	UAE G4	UAE G8	Bahrain G4	Bahrain G8	Qatar G4	Qatar G8	Oman G4	Oman G8	Saudi Arabia G4	Saudi Arabia G8	Morocco G4	Morocco G8	Kuwait G4	Kuwait G8	Lebanon G4	Lebanon G8	Jordan G4	Jordan G8	Egypt G4	Egypt G8
2011	434	456	436	409	413	410	385	366	410	394	335	371	342			449		406		
2015	452	465	451	454	439	437	425	403	383	368	377	384	353	392		442	388	386		392
2019	481	473	480	481	449	443	431	411	398	394	383	388	383	403		429		420		413

Figure 11. Average Scale Scores of Grades 4 and 8 Science Achievement (TIMSS) 2011/2015/2019

	UAE G4	UAE G8	Bahrain G4	Bahrain G8	Qatar G4	Qatar G8	Oman G4	Oman G8	Saudi Arabia G4	Saudi Arabia G8	Morocco G4	Morocco G8	Kuwait G4	Kuwait G8	Lebanon G4	Lebanon G8	Jordan G4	Jordan G8	Egypt G4	Egypt G8
2011	428	465	449	452	394	419	377	420	429	436	264	376	347			406		449		
2015	451	477	459	466	436	457	431	455	390	396	352	393	337	411		398		426		371
2019	473	473	493	486	449	475	435	457	402	431	474	394	392	444		377		452		389

Note: * Grade 4 (7 countries), Grade 8 (10 countries), Grade 4 mathematics average scale scores are slightly higher than Grade 8 mathematics

* Interestingly, Grade 8 science average scale scores are better than Grade 4 scores.

3.5 From the SDG4 national reports

SDG4 indicator 4.1.2 refers to "Administration of a nationally-representative learning assessment (a) in Grade 2 or 3; (b) at the end of primary education; and (c) at the end of lower secondary education.

In Qatar, a nationally-representative learning assessment is organized for Grade 3 in Arabic language, English language and mathematics, and for Grades 6 and 9

national assessments are conducted in Arabic language, English language, mathematics and science. Tables 2 and 3 below give the status of students (male and female) who appeared and obtained minimum proficiency levels for both primary and upper secondary for 2016–2018. Both scenarios show a positive trend of females doing well at both primary and lower secondary levels in all three subjects tested.

Table 2. Proportion of students who applied for the national assessment and obtained the minimum level of efficiency in attainment in literacy, mathematics and English at the end of primary stage, 2016–2018

Sex	Arabic			Mathematics			English		
	2016	2017	2018	2016	2017	2018	2016	2017	2018
Males	81%	56%	69%	85%	69%	49%	62%	63%	62%
Females	86%	74%	85%	84%	84%	69%	58%	75%	73%
Total	84%	66%	78%	84%	77%	60%	60%	69%	68%

Table 3. Proportion of students who applied for the national assessment and obtained the minimum level of efficiency in attainment in literacy, mathematics and English for Grade 9 (end of first stage of secondary), 2016–2018

Sex	Arabic			Mathematics			English		
	2016	2017	2018	2016	2017	2018	2016	2017	2018
Males	83%	60%	66%	47%	34%	43%	92%	64%	76%
Females	91%	73%	84%	51%	40%	64%	93%	78%	92%
Total	87%	67%	75%	49%	37%	54%	92%	71%	84%

Source: Report on Sustainable Development Goals in the State of Qatar 2018, Department of Planning and Statistics.

CHAPTER 4

Preparing children for school:
How is the Arab region doing?

4. Preparing children for school:

How is the Arab region doing?

Target 4.2. looks at the issue of early childhood development and care. Attendance at pre-school education in an organized learning or child education program is important as preparation for entry to primary education. Pre-primary education and early childhood educational development play an important role in the development of a child's ability to learn throughout life.

Data required for tracking indicator 4.2.1 on children's development in health, learning and psychosocial well-being and indicator 4.2.3 on positive and stimulating home environments are not readily available and not necessarily available for many countries. Household surveys such as the Demographic Health Survey (DHS) collect data that can tell us which health and nutrition aspects to assess to see if children are developmentally on track and provide information on the home learning environment and childcare at household level.

4.1 What the SDG national reports say

The SDG4 national reports indicate that early childhood education is promising, with many countries paying attention to ECE laws and policies, school nutrition and healthcare, training of teachers, caregivers and educators; and home-based care programs. The reports further show that most countries provide free organized learning one year before the official primary entry age. However,

there is huge variation in participation rates. Rates are not comparable between the countries due to varying methods used for calculation. It is encouraging to note that some countries have also reported children under 5 years experiencing positive and stimulating home environments.

Figure 12 shows the participation rate in organized learning one year before the official primary entry age (as of 2018), given in the national reports of the region.

Figure 12. Participation Rate in organized learning one year before the official primary entry age
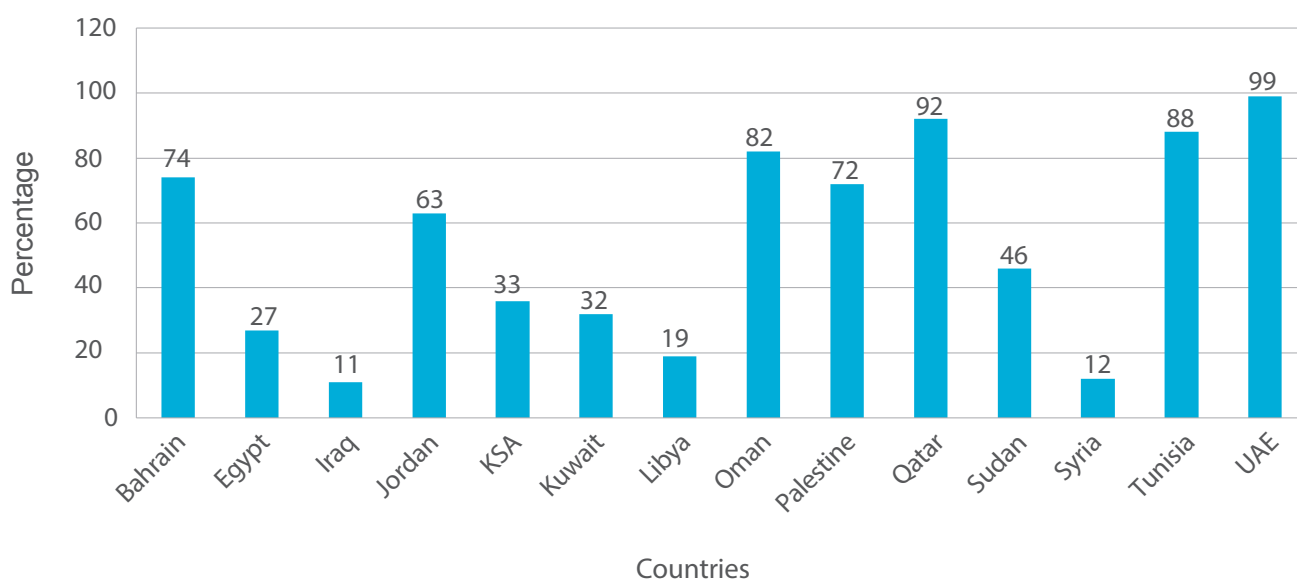
Source: SDG4 National Reports, 2019.

Figure 13. Participation rate in organized learning (one year before the official primary entry age) both sexes, 2011–2019

	Bahrain	Egypt	Jordan	Kuwait	Morocco	Oman	Palestine	Qatar	Saudi Arabia
2011	82.4				52.3	80.8	66.7	89.0	42.4
2012	82.9	39.7		79.9	46.6	86.2		91.4	44.7
2015	76.6	38.1	41.9	75.9	54.1	83.0	64.4	91.6	46.8
2018	70.5	37.1	43.4	81.2	50.0	80.7	67.8	92.4	45.8
2019	70.1	36.7	45.2		65.1	85.8	65.2	91.5	50.1
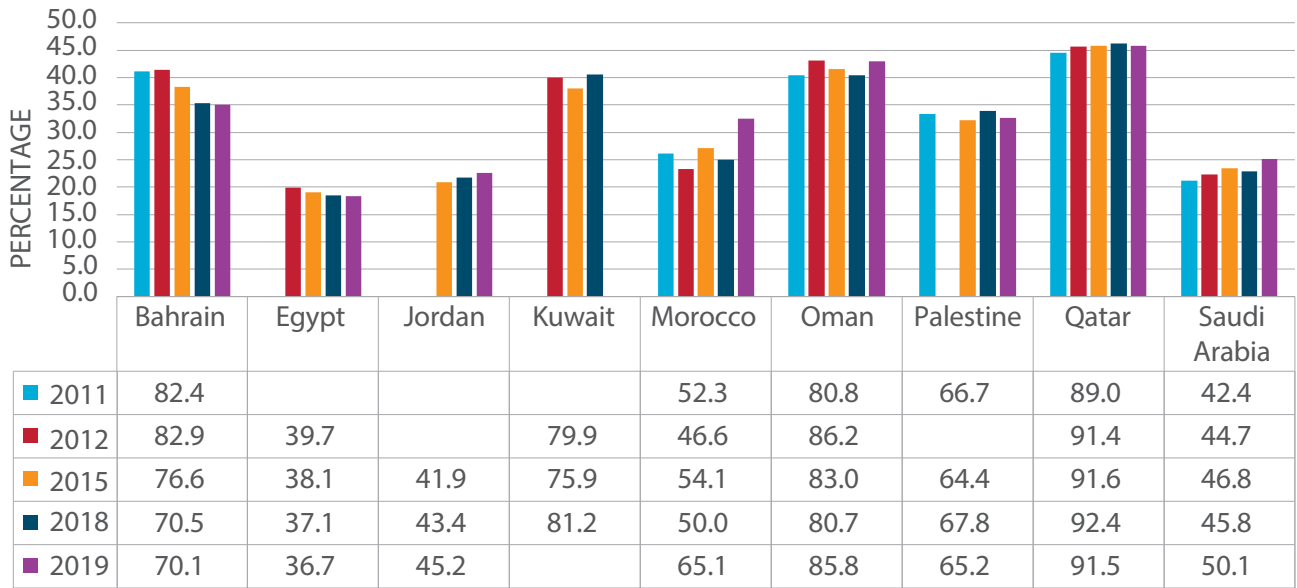
Source: World Bank Education Statistics/ UIS. Stat.

4.2   Participation in organized learning: trends as revealed by other data

Participation in organized learning (one year before the official primary entry age) by sex (SDG 4.2.2) is an indication that children are exposed to stimulating organized learning activities which provide the basis for better results in terms of later school performance (UNICEF, 2013)[13].

Figure 13 shows uneven levels of participation rates, with three (Egypt, Jordan, and Saudi Arabia) out of nine countries presented having very low participation rate, four (Bahrain, Kuwait, Morocco, and Palestine) having better participation rates and two (Qatar, and Oman) having high participation rates.

A closer look at country level may reveal internal disparities such as location. Children living in urban areas are likely to participate more than those living in rural and remote locations.

4.3   From the SDG4 national reports on ECE initiative

Three examples are cited here as country-level best cases excerpted from SDG4 national reports.

1   Jordan's program on parents' participation in nursery and the first three grades. The Ministry of Education, through the ERfKE 1 project, launched an initiative allowing parents to participate in public kindergarten from 2006 so that parents would become partners in educating their children through daily activities that contribute to children's growth and development. Parents would also be able to undertake various activities in line with their children's developmental needs, having a positive impact on children, parents and teachers and increasing the sense of belonging to the school among children and their parents. The Ministry is still implementing this project.

2   Parents and community involvement through raising awareness on ECE (Iraq)

3   Improving quality of ECE in Qatar through alignment with international standards:
The State of Qatar has granted special attention to early childhood education through the drafting of legislation or the ratification of some relevant international

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[13] UNICEF. 2013. Water, Sanitation and Hygiene in Primary Schools in South-East Asian Countries: Realities, Needs and Recommendations. Bangkok: UNICEF East Asia and Pacific Regional Office.

resolutions and conventions. The second training and education sector strategy has fixed four intermediate outcomes relating to early childhood education that serve the second target of SDG4, namely, offering equitable opportunities to all children to enrol in high-quality early education programs regardless of gender, age or capacities. The initiative also focuses on developing children's cognitive, social, emotional and physical capacities in their early years in order to improve their readiness to move from home to the school-based compulsory education system. The other focus aspects are: developing awareness and pride among all children as to the values and heritage of Qatari society, while promoting tolerance, mutual understanding and respect of other cultures and populations; and improving the quality of performance of the early childhood education level staff, which extends in Qatar over two academic years (Kindergarten and pre-school). The 'Improving the quality of early education in Kindergarten and public schools' program aims to improve students' attainment ratios in literacy and numeracy in the early education stage, develop the children's social, emotional and physical capacities in the early education stage, improve competence of teachers and school leaders in the early education stage and provide inclusive child-oriented education.

4.4 Developmentally tracking health, learning and psycho-social wellbeing of children below 5 years

Indicators of health and nutrition status are important to assess this aspect of childcare. SDG 4.2.1 refers to children below 5 years being developmentally 'on track' in health, learning and psychosocial well-being. Health and nutrition are critical for ensuring that children under 5 years are 'on track' towards reaching the desired outcomes of this indicator. This is an area where three service delivery systems, namely, healthcare, nutrition programs, and maternal and child health services need to synchronize. Any deficiency at under 5-year-old development will lead to lifelong adverse impacts. For instance, aspects like preventing in utero micro-nutrient malnutrition, ensuring safe delivery, first-hour breastfeeding, exclusive breastfeeding for the first six months of life, complementary feeding after that, proper nutrition supplementation with particular emphasis on preventing micro-nutrient malnutrition, weighing and growth monitoring of infants, functioning of a good referral system, following meticulously the immunization schedule, proper parenting for brain development and pre-school learning are all important aspects on which there is need for close

monitoring and well-coordinated inter-departmental implementation to help the children grow in a physically and psychologically proper and healthy way. Comprehensive data to monitor progress on all the aspects mentioned above for the Arab region are not readily available for discussion here. However, DHS, MICS and other household surveys do collect some of this information. Here again, regional aggregations in respect of all data are hard to come by. Therefore, data on select indicators as available in an aggregated manner for the region are presented below.

4.5 What some selected indicators from DHS and other surveys say on this aspect of childcare in the Arab region

This brief given under this section is based on the 'DHS Comparative Reports 46' of the USAID – ICF (2017)[14]. This report examines 13 maternal and child health indicators in 11 Middle East and North African countries using the most recent nationally representative household surveys carried out since 2005. The data used in the analysis were obtained from 17 surveys from three sources: the Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS), and the Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys (MICS). For the purposes of this snapshot report, select indicators that have direct relevance to child health, care and development targets of SDG4, as available in the above-mentioned DHS Comparative reports, are examined here. Relevant excerpts and figures are reproduced below (Figures 14, 15 and 16), with slight adaptations to suit context.

4.5.1 Stunting
The percentage of stunted children was by far the highest in Yemen in 2013, with almost half of children under age 5 being stunted. Yemen also had the lowest percentage of overweight children under age 5. Stunting significantly decreased in Egypt, Jordan and the West Bank and Gaza (WBG). Approximately one-fifth of children under age 6 were stunted for the most recent surveys available in Egypt, Iraq and Syria. For the most recent surveys of the remaining countries, stunting was approximately 10% or below. It was lowest in West Bank and Gaza (WBG) in 2014 and Jordan in 2012, below 10%.

4.5.2 Overweight
Egypt had one of the highest levels of overweight children under age 6 in 2014: approximately 15%. This was similar to the level in Tunisia in 2012. The most recent surveys of the remaining countries were below this level, with most having approximately 10% overweight children. Significant decreases in levels of overweight children were observed in Egypt and Jordan.

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14   Assaf, Shireen, Leah Horton, Marta Bornstein, and Thomas Pullum. 2017. Levels and Trends of Maternal and Child Health Indicators in 11 Middle East and North African Countries. DHS Comparative Report No. 46. Rockville, Maryland, USA: ICF.

Figure 14. Percentage of children under age 5 who are stunted
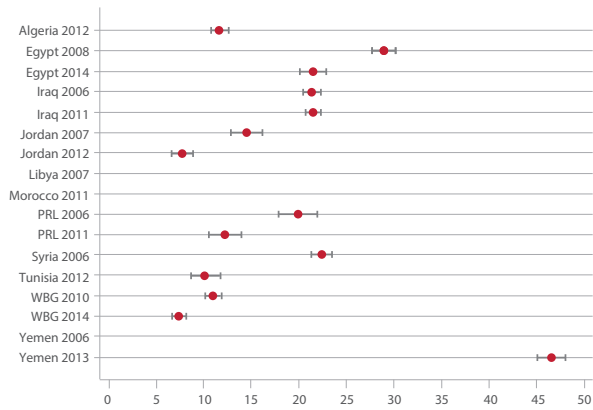
Source: Assaf, Shireen, Leah Horton, Marta Bornstein and Thomas Pullum, 2017.

Figure 15. Percentage of children under age 5 who are overweight
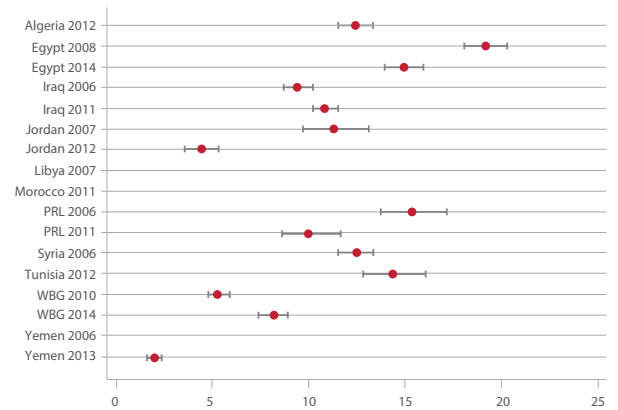
Source: Assaf, Shireen, Leah Horton, Marta Bornstein, and Thomas Pullum, 2017.

4.5.3 Under-5 mortality

As for under-5 mortality, the rate significantly decreased in Yemen from 77/1,000 births in 2006 to 53/1,000 in 2013. Among all the countries with available data on this indicator, Yemen remained the country with the highest under-5 mortality rate. The second highest rate was found in Iraq, approximately 40/1,000 in both surveys. Under-5 mortality was approximately 20/1,000 for Algeria, Tunisia, Jordan and the WBG in both surveys.

Figure 16. Under 5 mortality rates for 5 years before the survey
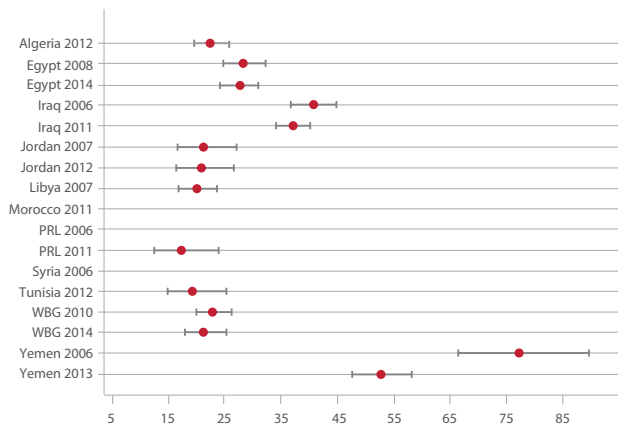
Source: Assaf, Shireen, Leah Horton, Marta Bornstein, and Thomas Pullum, 2017.

As for other indicators, such as, anaemia and home learning environment, they need to be worked upon further.

4.6 From the SDG4 national reports

Jordan's initiative

Indicator 4.2.1: Percentage of children under 5 years of age who are developmentally on track in health, learning and psychological well-being, by sex

The percentage of under-five children who are developmentally on track in health, learning and psychological well-being during the 2017–2018 school year reached a total of 70.7%, with 66.1% for males and 75.9% for females[15]. These percentages were attributed to efforts made by the Ministry of Education and partners as follows.

1. The Ministry of Education trained 115 female teachers on the Kid Smart Program. In addition, 5,596 parents and care-givers in 2016–2017 and 5,631 care-givers in 2017–2018 were also trained on knowledge and practices pertaining to early childhood in terms of health, nutrition and social protection in order to raise their awareness and educate them about methods and means to raise children at an early age, how to offer a secure family environment to guarantee their growth, ways to support children' rights in life, growth, protection and participation and ways to help local communities in capacity building to serve this sector.

2. The Ministry of Social Development, UNICEF and partners implemented parental awareness-raising programs and activities in light of priorities and participatory roles provided for in the 2015–2016 National Human Resource Development Strategy and the Jordan Response Plan. The parental awareness-raising program started to be implemented in Jordan in 1996 with the support of UNICEF and with the participation of the majority of sectors working on children, in light of needs revealed by a 1996 survey.

Figure 17. **Percentage of children under 5 who are developmentally on track in health, learning and psychological well-being, by sex**
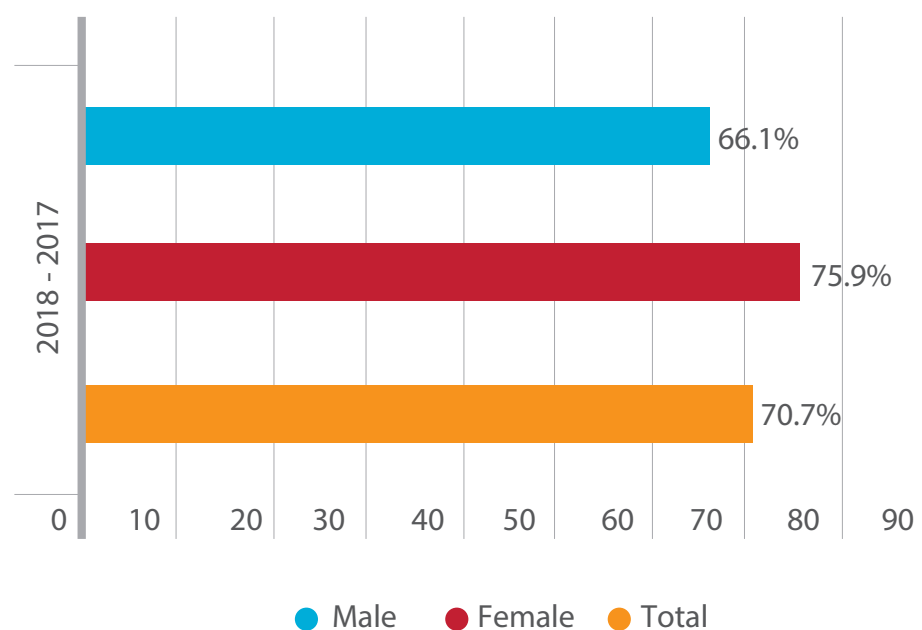
15 SDG4 indicators matrix by Target (EMIS)/ Ministry of Education (not published).

CHAPTER 5
Do youth and adults have the basic ICT skills?
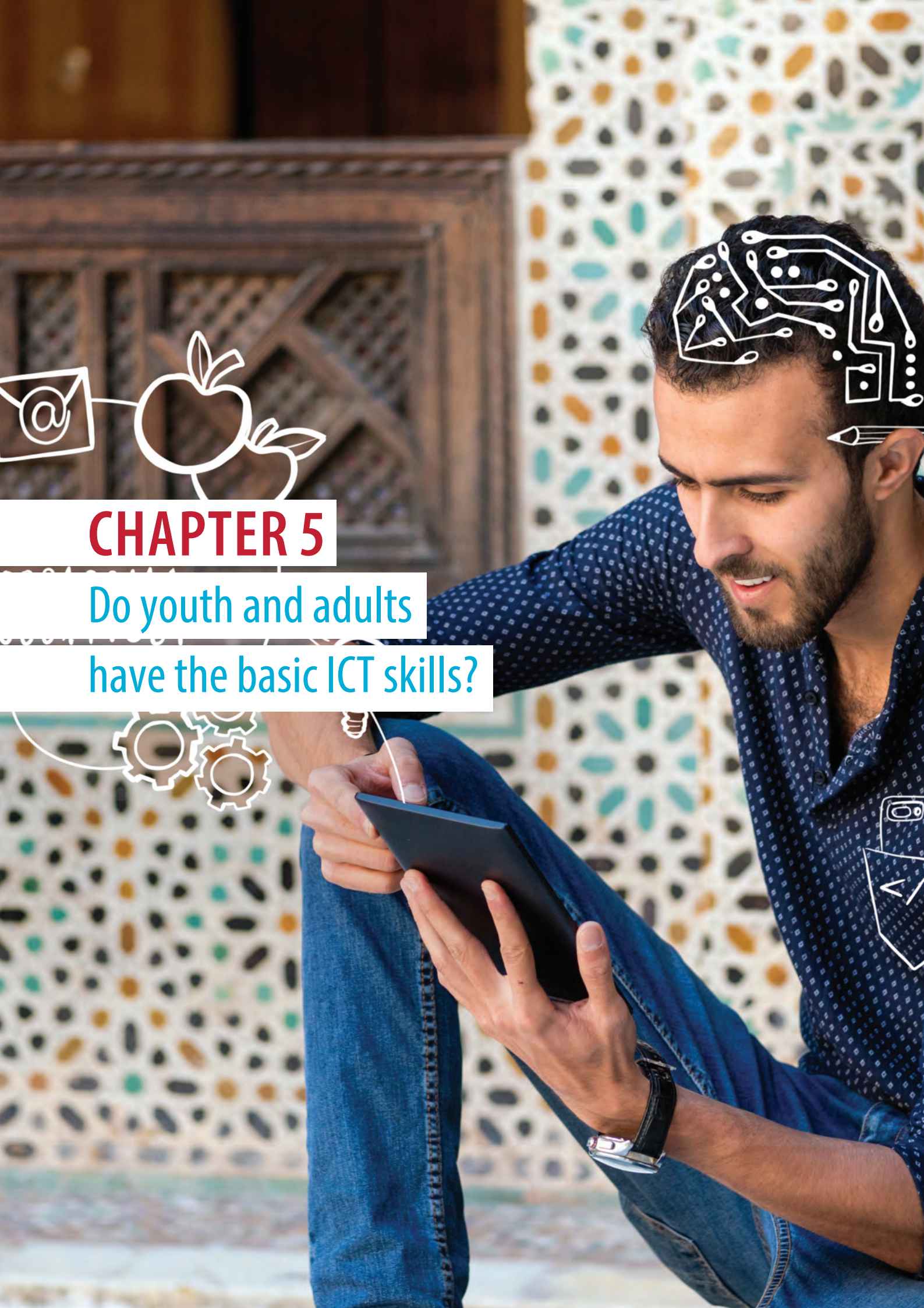
5. Do youth and adults have the basic ICT skills?

ICT skills determine the effective use of information and communication technology. The lack of such skills continues to be one of the key barriers that keep people, and in particular women, from fully benefiting from the potential of information and communication technologies to enhance their life situations.

5.1 Monitoring ICT skill proficiency

ICT skills are critical for both the social and economic lives of youth and adults. Particularly, work-specific skills vary considerably, although the effective use of information and communication technology (ICT) has become a necessity of life especially for youth and adults. Some estimates predict that nearly 80% of all future jobs will require basic ICT skills for their performance[16].

Indicator 4.4.1 is relatively new but it is based on an internationally-agreed definition and methodology, which have been developed under the coordination of the International Telecommunications Union (ITU)[17]. It represents the proportion of youth and adults with information and communications technology (ICT) skills, by type of skill as defined as the percentage of youth (aged 15–24 years) and adults (aged 15 years and above) who have undertaken certain computer-related activities in a given time period (for example, within last three months). The data as portrayed for this indicator look specifically at the proportion of youths and adults who are able to use 'copy and paste' tools to duplicate or move information within a document.

5.2 Data availability on ICT skills

Country-level data that provide measures of ICT skills and digital literacy are limited. The data for this indicator are not readily available with the Ministries of Education. In most cases, the data are collected from various sources in the Arab region, depending on the availability of such sources of information at country level. The data sources for the calculation of this indicator for the selected countries in Arab region include various Ministries/Departments such as the Information and E-Government Authority (Bahrain),

the Telecommunications Regulatory Authority (TRA) (Bahrain), the Communications and Media Commission (Iraq), the Central Statistical Organisation (Iraq), the Communication and Information Technology Regulatory Authority (Kuwait), l'Agence Nationale de Réglementation des Télécommunications (Morocco), la Direction de la Statistique (Morocco), the Ministry of Transport and Communications (Qatar), the Central Bureau of Statistics (Sudan), the Federal Competitiveness and Statistics Authority (UAE) and the Ministry of Communications and Information Technology (Egypt).

Around 690 million people aged 15–24 years, nearly 60 per cent of the world's youth population, are based in Asia and the Pacific and the Arab States. These youth live in a thriving region where working poverty is decreasing, the middle class is gaining ground, gender gaps are narrowing and overall employment rates are trending upwards. Yet a number of labour market challenges disproportionately impact this age group.

5.2.1 UNICEF-MENA-Gen 2030 Projections on the Demographics of the MENA region

UNICEF has made the following demographic projections for the MENA region[18].

Given the projections of increase in youth population and given the increasing digitization of various sectors of industry, youth employment in the coming years will hinge on the changing demand patterns of job markets in favour of ICT skills. This underscores the need for generating robust data on ICT skills in the Arab region.

[16] Dalberg. 2017. Advancing Women's Empowerment ICT Skills for Girls and Women in Southeast Asia. Tokyo, Sasakawa Peace Foundation and Dahlberg Global Development Advisors.

[17] Definition: The proportion of youth and adults with information and communications technology (ICT) skills, by type of skill as defined as the percentage of individuals that have undertaken certain ICT-related activities in the last 3 months. The indicator is expressed as a percentage. See: https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/metadata/files/Metadata-04-04-01.pdf

[18] https://www.unicef.org/mena/media/4141/file/MENA-Gen2030.pdf

Figure 18. Number of Children (0-17 Years), Adolescents (10-19 years), and Youth (15-24 Years) by Countries of the region for 2015, 2030 and 2050

Number of children (17-0 years old) by country

Number of adolescents (19-10 years old) by country

Number of youth (24-15 years old) by country

Egypt • Iran • Sudan • Iraq • Algeria • Yemen • Morocco • Saudi Arabia • Syria • Jordan
Tunisia • Palestine • Libya • Lebanon • UAE • Oman • Kuwait • Qatar • Djibouti • Bahrain
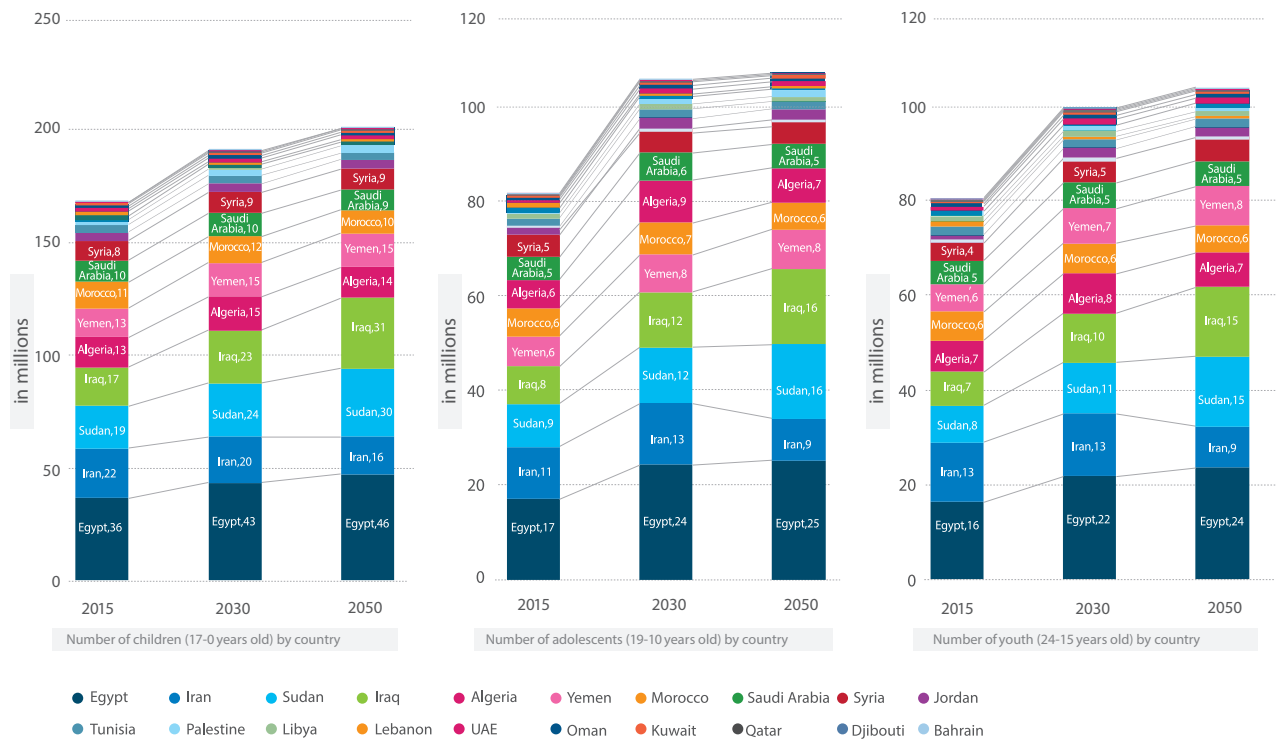
5.3 ICT skills in the Arab region – a snapshot

Figure 19 presents two basic ICT skills – ability to open and type an email and using the copy-and-paste function. There has been moderate increase in the ICT skills in the region, with the exception of Sudan, which has the lowest ICT skill levels, followed by Iraq.

Availability of other related data on ICT such as internet access and mobile usage which are disaggregated by sex, location and education can give more insights on other factors that may act as barriers for youth and adults in gaining ICT skills. For example, **Figure 20** (which records the number of individuals who have used the internet from any location in the last three months) tells us that the low

ICT skills reported for Sudan and Egypt may be related to internet access. The internet can be used via a computer, mobile phone, personal digital assistant, games machine, digital TV and so on.

The digital divide, which refers to disparities between rural and urban populations, and poor and rich populations, is another factor that hinders access to ICT among rural and poorer populations. More disaggregated and systematic data will help to track the ICT and digital skills of youth in the region.

Figure 19. Proportion of youth and adults with ICT skills by type of skill, 2015–2019
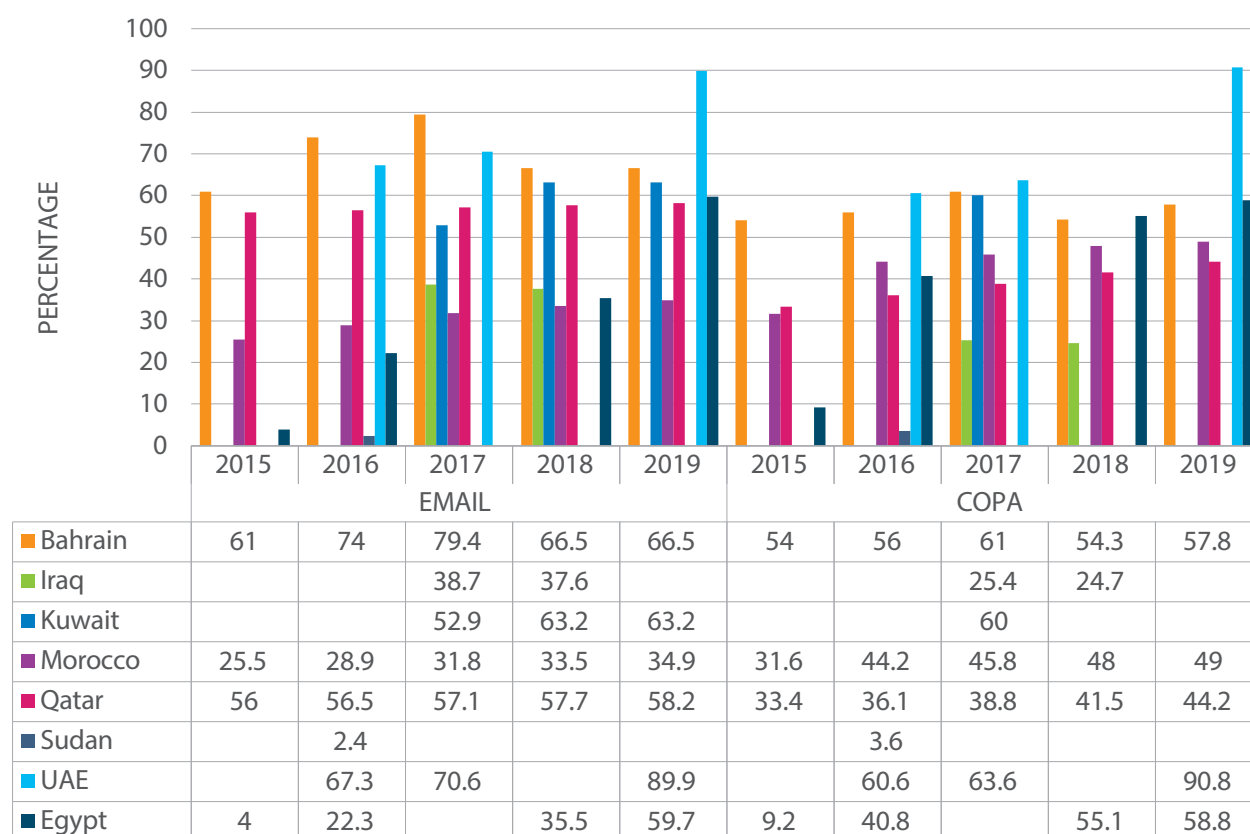
	2015 EMAIL	2016	2017	2018	2019	2015 COPA	2016	2017	2018	2019
■ Bahrain	61	74	79.4	66.5	66.5	54	56	61	54.3	57.8
■ Iraq			38.7	37.6				25.4	24.7	
■ Kuwait			52.9	63.2	63.2			60		
■ Morocco	25.5	28.9	31.8	33.5	34.9	31.6	44.2	45.8	48	49
■ Qatar	56	56.5	57.1	57.7	58.2	33.4	36.1	38.8	41.5	44.2
■ Sudan		2.4					3.6			
■ UAE		67.3	70.6		89.9		60.6	63.6		90.8
■ Egypt	4	22.3		35.5	59.7	9.2	40.8		55.1	58.8

Source: International Telecommunication Union (ITU) World Telecommunication/ICT Indicators Database.

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[19] Internet users are individuals who have used the Internet (from any location) in the last 3 months. The Internet can be used via a computer, mobile phone, personal digital assistant, games machine, digital TV, etc.

Figure 20. Individuals using the internet (% of the population), 2015–2019
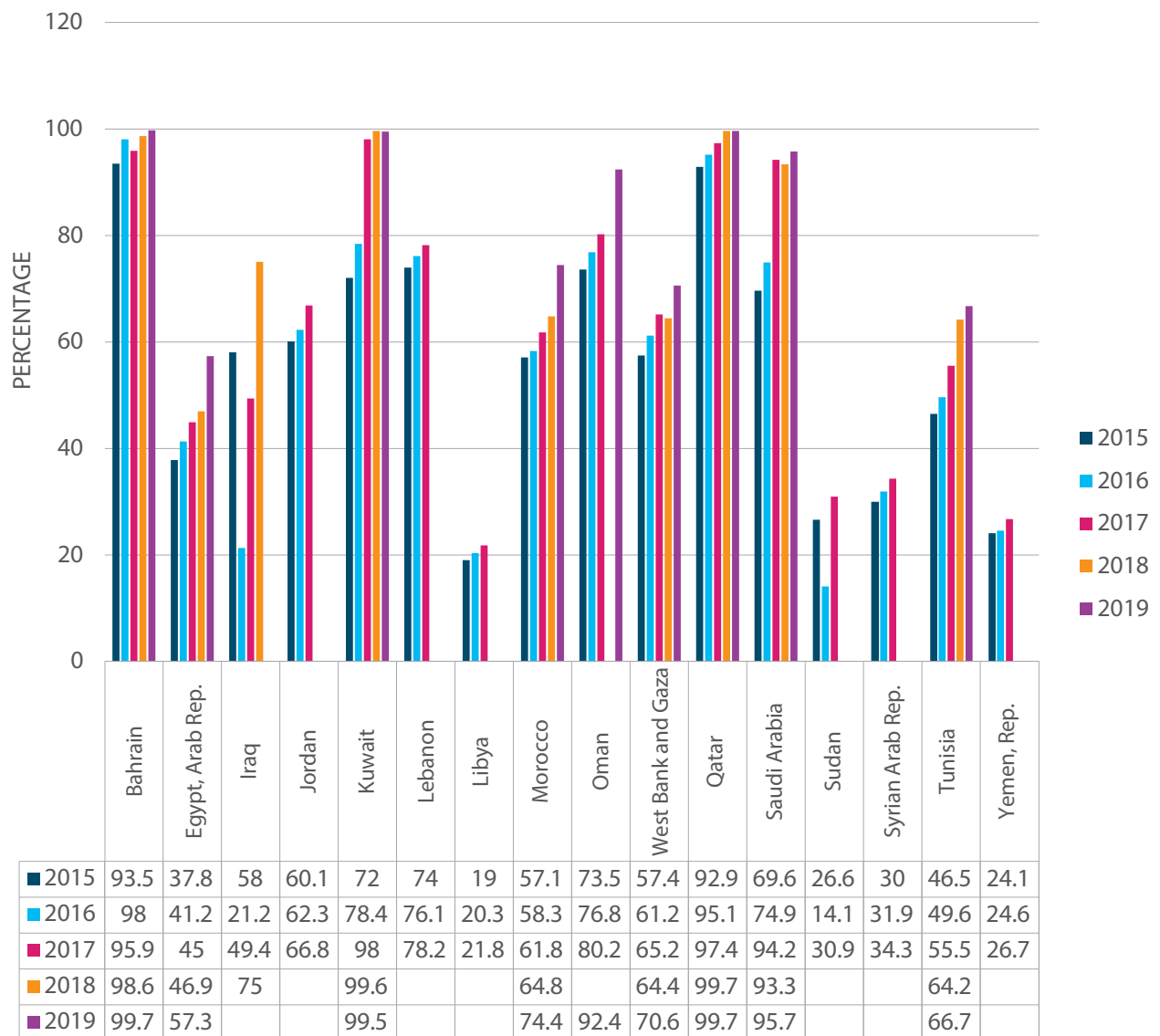
	Bahrain	Egypt, Arab Rep.	Iraq	Jordan	Kuwait	Lebanon	Libya	Morocco	Oman	West Bank and Gaza	Qatar	Saudi Arabia	Sudan	Syrian Arab Rep.	Tunisia	Yemen, Rep.
2015	93.5	37.8	58	60.1	72	74	19	57.1	73.5	57.4	92.9	69.6	26.6	30	46.5	24.1
2016	98	41.2	21.2	62.3	78.4	76.1	20.3	58.3	76.8	61.2	95.1	74.9	14.1	31.9	49.6	24.6
2017	95.9	45	49.4	66.8	98	78.2	21.8	61.8	80.2	65.2	97.4	94.2	30.9	34.3	55.5	26.7
2018	98.6	46.9	75		99.6			64.8		64.4	99.7	93.3			64.2	
2019	99.7	57.3			99.5			74.4	92.4	70.6	99.7	95.7			66.7	

Source: International Telecommunication Union (ITU) World Telecommunication/ICT Indicators Database.

5.4 Status of ICT skills as indicated in the national reports

Most countries have invested in programs and initiatives in providing ICT skills to youth and adults. Bahrain, Iraq, Jordan, Qatar, Oman, Palestine, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates have presented snapshots of ICT skill levels through surveys.

UAE's Best Practices on ICT Skills

1   **The Center for Digital Innovation**, the Codi Center, was established by the TDRA in its search to focus on innovation, research, education, training and development of skills. Different seminars were held and many services provided to ensure quality education, offer good counselling and enable the

citizens and the government of the Emirates to go through the journey of digital transformation easily.

2   **The One million Arab Coder initiative** was launched in 2017 under the sponsorship of His Excellency Sheikh Mohammad bin Rashid Al Maktoum, UAE Vice-President and Prime Minister and Governor of Dubai. It is an educational platform where three training programs are provided for individuals who would like to develop their digital skills. This enables one million Arab youths to strengthen the basic skills required in the labour market and to learn the language of the future in the tracks that are the most requested in the coding area.

3   **The BETHA scholarship program** was launched within the strategy set by the TDRA to develop

human resources for communication and information technology. The aim is to strengthen the role and place of the national education sector through providing support and care for gifted students and promote education, namely in scientific specializations needed in light of future labour market requirements

4 **The "Eedad" (preparation) program by Smart Dubai** was launched to train newly-qualified graduates from different universities, giving them on-the-job market skills for their profession before they join it. The program offers training to high levels of qualifications so that individuals join their positions in Smart Dubai without any obstacles while developing the productivity, innovation and creativity levels in different areas of work. The focus here is on job market skills.

◻ **Kingdom of Saudi Arabia**

1 **The shift towards digital education to support student and teacher progress "The Gateway to the Future":** The initiative provides an interactive educational portal through the use of information and communication technologies. It depends on an integrated digital electronic environment capable of displaying courses via electronic networks, providing ways of guidance and direction, organizing tests, as well as managing resources and processes, and having them evaluated by the teacher. The initiative also includes enhancing the level of schools' digital infrastructure by connecting them to the network and equipping classrooms with the necessary technical tools, which enables the ultimate benefit from the interactive portal.

5.5   Status of TVET – examples from the national reports

The SDG4 country reports indicate a clear vision in the region to increase the enrolment of young men and women in TVET to equip them with necessary technical knowledge and skills and build a positive attitude towards their future careers. Planned improvements include opening up new pathways for young people and introducing new specializations to match industry demands and better employability.

3 **Kuwait** has a programme of Partnership with private sector for TVET training.

4 **Qatar's UNESCO Chair for TVET**
The College of North Atlantic – Qatar has been granted the UNESCO Chair for TVET for inclusive

and sustainable development 2017, which is unique in Qatar and in the region. The main goals of the UNESCO Chair are inclusive development, so that the benefits of economic development include all sectors; and sustainable development, which seeks to limit the negative effects of economic growth and development on the environment. The UNESCO Chair undertakes targeted research and awareness and provides leadership for the State of Qatar in educational tracks that are linked to the evolution of the workforce, which provides opportunities for the Qatari youth in order to acquire the necessary skills in the field they choose so that they can be qualified for building their future and the future of their State. CAN-Q and UNESCO signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) by virtue of which both organizations will work together on a number of projects and activities which will promote communication, research, support and programming for TVET and sustainable development in Qatar. The MoU between the National Commission for Education, Culture and Science and the College of North Atlantic – Qatar and the announcement by UNESCO of the granting to the CAN-Q of the prominent UNESCO Chair for TVET and sustainable development, are considered as an achievement for the new partnership.

5.6   Status of Higher Education as excerpted from the national reports

Many countries plan to focus on reforming or improving the current higher education system to enhance young graduates' prospects of better employment. For example, new majors offered to meet local and international labor market demands such as AI, data science, education technology, renewable energy, biological and medical sciences and logistics management. In HE enrolments, female enrolment is seen to be better than males.

Country examples

1 **Kuwait University** (strategy – quality, innovation and sustainable development and alignment with the SDGs)

2 **Kingdom of Saudi Arabia**: Human capacity development program – improving outputs of education and training at all levels and all aspects (curricula, governance, professional development, partnerships with international partners, assessment tools, align with market demands, and so on.)

CHAPTER 6

Are the youth and adults in the region acquiring literacy and numeracy skills?

6. Are the youth and adults in the region acquiring literacy and numeracy skills?

6.1 The new and emerging definition of literacy

Beyond its conventional concept as a set of reading, writing and counting skills, literacy is now understood as a means of identification, understanding, interpretation, creation, and communication in an increasingly digital, text-mediated, information-rich and fast-changing world.

The definition of literacy in the context of youth and adult education needs to incorporate all these characteristics plus other aspects like critical thinking, self-confidence, leadership, respect for socio-cultural and linguistic diversities, inter-personal communication, coping and self-management, citizenship and the ability to identify and acquire skills needed most in the prevailing job market at national and international levels. Some of these skills, again, are also linked to ESD and GCED indicators, discussed later in this report.

6.2 Literacy is a continuum of proficiency levels

As technology and globalisation have continued to bring about major changes in the workplace, poor skill levels have become an increasingly urgent issue for governments aiming to increase the overall productivity and build sustainable growth. There is growing evidence of the need amongst employees for a more complex combination of skills than in the past, including literacy, numeracy, ICT and workplace-specific skills. It may be noted at this point that higher proficiency levels allow individuals to master new skills effectively and contribute to one's own community and self, socially and economically. While practices relate to what adults do with their literacy and numeracy skills, proficiency relates to what adults can do.

It is important that the variety of education and training programmes provided for youth and adults should match the different levels of their literacy and proficiency skills.

The Framework for Action for the implementation of SDG4 emphasizes that the principles, strategies, policies, plans and actions for this target are underpinned by a contemporary understanding of literacy not as a simple dichotomy of 'literate' versus 'illiterate' but as a continuum of proficiency levels[20]. In short, it is understood not just as a simple process of acquiring basic cognitive skills in a short period, but of using these skills in ways that contribute to societies, economies and personal life situations.

Literacy data are mostly collected through the population census and in some cases are collected by NGOs and other community organizations. However, these literacy data are mostly based on self-declaration by the respondents.

6.3 Literacy rate in the region

Literacy data are mostly collected through the population census and in some cases are collected by NGOs and other community organizations. However, these literacy data are mostly based on self-declaration by the respondents.

Figures 21 and **22** indicate that in general the adult and youth literacy rates in most countries of the region have been progressing well. Experiences have shown that data on people self-declaring themselves as literate can suffer from problems of over-reporting. Population census data on the number of illiterates can thus be used as the minimum basis for targeting and planning literacy action, bearing in mind that the number of people who self-declare as illiterate may be underestimated because of the tendency to over-report one's level of literacy.

Household surveys are useful for planning youth and adult literacy programmes if the data collected on the characteristics of both the household and individuals within the household can also include variables on youth and adult literacy, besides the usually covered variables on the age and sex of the respondent, literacy status, educational attainment and/or missing school participation as well as employment situations, among others. The advantage of household surveys is that they typically collect data on a nationally representative sample of households, which are randomly selected from a list of households and therefore the data they produce are considered robust.

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[20] UNESCO 2015. Incheon Declaration and Framework for Action for the implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 4.

Figure 21. Adult literacy rate, population 15+ years, both sexes (%)

Legend:
- Lebanon
- Bahrain
- Egypt, Arab Rep.
- Iraq
- Jordan
- Kuwait
- Libya
- Morocco
- Oman
- Qatar
- Saudi Arabia
- Syrian Arab Republic
- Tunisia
- United Arab Emirates
- West Bank and Gaza
- Yemen, Rep.
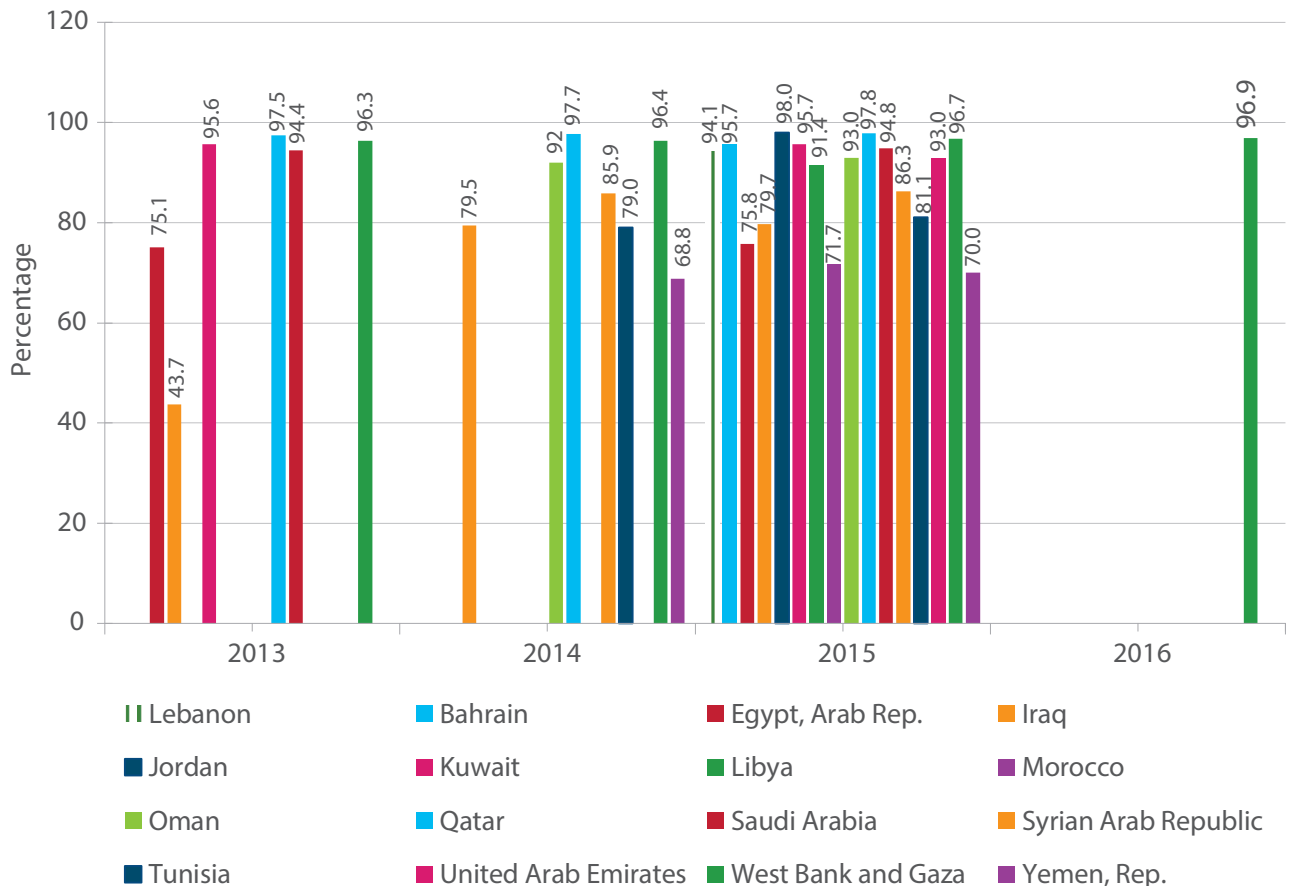
Source: UIS.Stat.

Figure 22. Youth literacy rate, population 15-24 years, both sexes (%)

Legend:
- Bahrain
- Egypt, Arab Rep.
- Iraq
- Jordan
- Kuwait
- Lebanon
- Libya
- Morocco
- Oman
- Qatar
- Saudi Arabia
- Syrian Arab Republic
- Tunisia
- United Arab Emirates
- West Bank and Gaza
- Yemen, Rep.
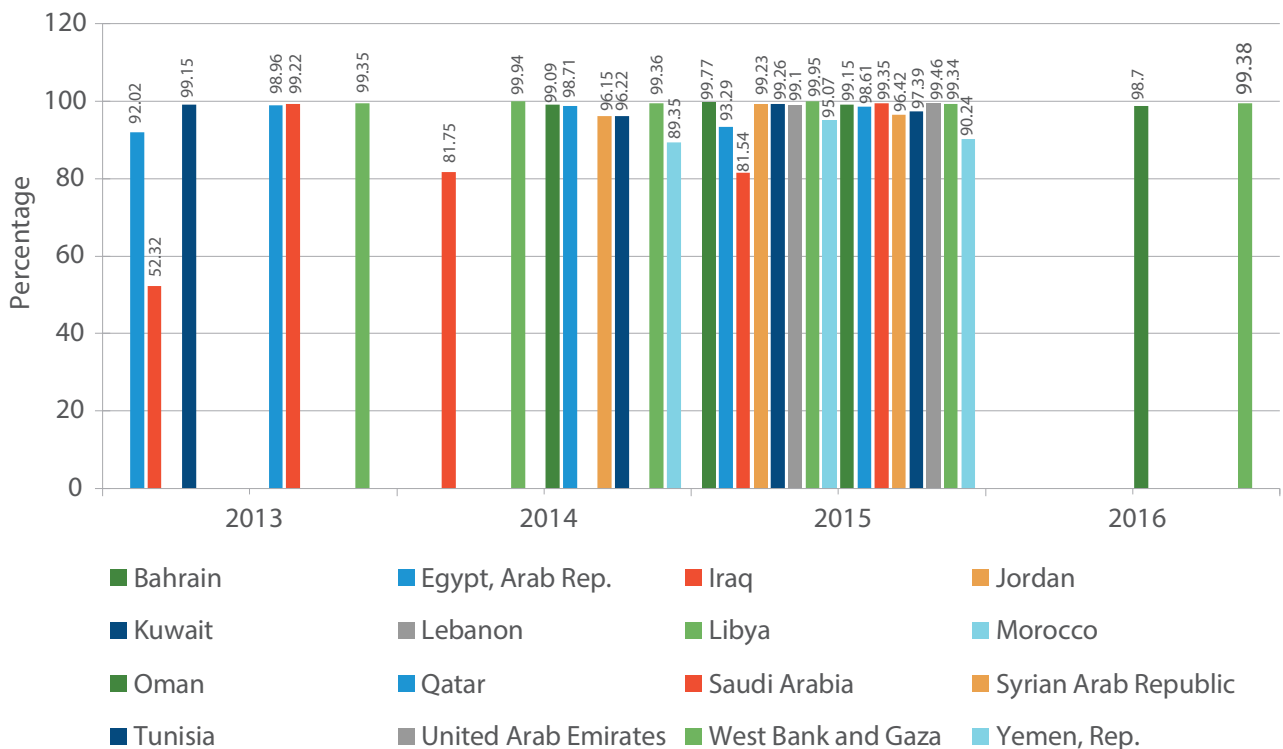
Source: UIS.Stat.

6.4 Overall status as reflected in the national reports

The following literacy programs have been cited in the national reports.

1 Literate village project to reduce illiteracy in villages **(Egypt)**;
2 Youth Literacy & Life skills assessment **(Syria)**,
3 Accelerated Education Schools (12–18 years) **(Iraq)**
4 **Yemen's** Non-formal education program for out-of-school children

   *Accelerated Learning***:** In light of the increasing number of out-of-school children and in an effort to provide appropriate educational opportunities and despite the various circumstances that the children of Yemen suffer from, the Ministry of Education established in 2018 a General Administration for Community Education. The General Administration, with the support of UNESCO, drafted a frame of reference for community education. It also prepared study material for children, opened classes for accelerated learning and trained a number of contractual teachers and facilitators during the academic year. This type of education aims to give children intensive education (the child studies the course of the academic year in a semester) so they catch up with students their age and return to school in formal education. The program is currently progressing at a fast pace and has been met with great community interaction, and therefore it can be said that it has achieved an acceptable success.

5 **Oman's** *literacy initiatives*

Oman's literacy rate for 15 years and above reached 96.2% in 2018 from 96% in 2016. Similarly for 15–44-year-olds it was 97.97% in 2018 (97.99% in 2016), showing no significant increase. However, the success of such high youth and adult literacy rates can be attributed to several targeted interventions by the government to improve the literacy rate. Two such programs that targeted remote marginalized communities are Learning village and campaign for the disabled.

Learning villages opened and spread in all Omani governorates have had a huge impact on accelerating literacy actions. This project targets all illiterate youth and adults of the selected villages. It started during the academic year 2004–2005 and is still ongoing. By the end of 2018, there were 30 such learning villages of literate youth and adults. Literacy campaign for the disabled is one of the projects that started during the academic year 2018–2019, targeting

illiterate Omanis with disabilities who are ready to learn, in collaboration between the Ministry and the competent authorities that are supportive of the target group.

Table 4. **Literacy rates of the total population**

Year	Literacy rates (15 and above)	Literacy rates (15-44 years)
2016	96%	97.99%
2017	96.1%	97.95%
2018	96.2%	97.97%

Source: Oman SDG4 national Report, National Center for Statistics and Information.

6.5 Lack of systematic literacy assessment that measures the proficiency levels of youth and adults

Measuring the proficiency levels of youth and adults is a huge challenge globally. There have been several literacy assessments undertaken in the past such as the Adult Literacy and Life Skills Survey (ALL) the International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS)[21], the World Bank's Skills Measurement Programme (STEP)[22] and the recent Programme for International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC)[23]. However, it remains a challenge for most countries to undertake systematic literacy assessments that measure the proficiency levels. There have been some one-off literacy surveys that also tested in a minimal way the literacy and numeracy skills of adults in a few countries but the fact remains that due to lack of a clear methodological framework and lack of funding, measuring literacy among youth and adults remains a big challenge. Currently, there are attempts made at developing new common scales against which the minimum proficiency levels can be measured.

Recent initiatives in the Arab region

One such initiative is the launch of the Literacy and Life Skills Assessment of Syrian Youth (LLASY) by the Syrian Assessment Centre in 2021 with technical support in designing the assessment from UNESCO Beirut office. The results of this assessment are likely to be released in the second half of 2021. Earlier, in 2019, UNESCO Beirut conducted the Syrian Youth Literacy and Life Skills Assessment (SYLAS)[24]. Both these assessments will provide the literacy and life skills profile of Syrian youth refugees and youth in Syria.

21 http://www.oecd.org/education/innovation-education/adultliteracy.htm
22 https://microdata.worldbank.org/index.php/catalog/step/about
23 https://www.oecd.org/skills/piaac/
24 https://en.unesco.org/sites/default/files/sylassummary_report-finalen_2020.08.311_0.pdf
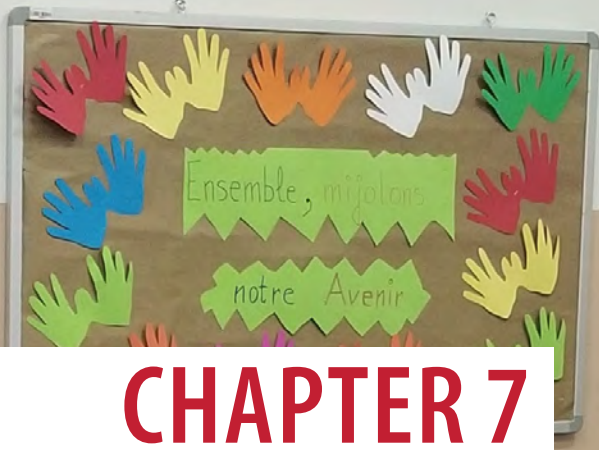
CHAPTER 7

Measuring progress in Education for Sustainable Development and Global Citizenship Education

7. Measuring progress in Education for Sustainable Development and Global Citizenship Education

Measuring achievements in education for sustainable development and global citizenship has posed several challenges, at the both global and country levels, in developing indicators to monitor whether all learners have acquired the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development. Through education for sustainable development (ESD) these include sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship education (GCED) and appreciation of cultural diversity and culture's contribution to sustainable development. As we have already noted, although most countries have expressed their education visions comprising, inter alia, the enabling of all their learners to acquire 21st century skills, there has not been much success in attempts to articulate the indicators, as mentioned above. This situation is true in the case of the Arab region as well. For the purposes of this report, a brief discussion on the salient aspects of these two concepts will help countries develop suitable indicators for measurement.

SDG target 4.7 displays a humanistic vision of the Education 2030 Agenda. It has a wide spectrum focusing on aspects like human rights and dignity, equity, social justice, inclusion, protection, cultural-linguistic and ethnic diversity, shared responsibility and accountability. Education for peace and sustainability is currently the overarching goal of the Education 2030 Agenda and empowered global citizenry is a key objective within this goal.

7.1 Global Citizenship Education (GCED)

The concept of citizenship education overlaps with related concepts such as moral education, character education and/or civic education (Althof and Berkowitz, 2006)[25]. The moral education tradition, in particular, emphasizes 'values' and 'values development', while citizenship education focuses on participation in society. Both traditions, however, pre-suppose developing one's identity, which is by definition a value-loaded endeavour. The main focus of citizenship education is the enhancement of engagement with democratic society and active participation in that society.

Conceptually, GCED identifies three dimensions that influence the learner's thinking and behaviour. These are cognitive, socio-emotional and behavioural dimensions. These three pillars of competencies have been identified by experts as needing to be measured in the context of SDG 4.7. These are illustrated in **Figure 23**.

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25   Althof, W., & Berkowitz, M.W. 2006 Moral Education and Character Education: Their relationship and roles in citizenship education. Journal of Moral Education, 35(4), 495-518

Figure 23. Core Conceptual Dimensions of Global Competencies

Cognitive

To acquire knowledge, understanding and critical thinking about global, regional, national and local issues and the interconnectedness and interdependency of different countries and populations.

Develop skills for critical thinking and analysis

Socio-emotional

To have a sense of belonging to a common humanity, sharing values and responsibilities, empathy.

Solidarity and respect for differences and diversity

Behavioural

To act effectively and responsibly at local, national and global levels for a more peaceful and sustainable world.

Develop motivation and willingness to take necessary actions

At present, there are no systematic data available in the Arab region for GCED. However, it is suggested[26] that data on this issue can be collected through skill assessment surveys such as IEA's International Civic and Citizenship Education Study (ICCS). However, no country from the Arab region has participated in any of the two rounds of ICCS conducted so far[27].

7.2 Education for Sustainable Development (ESD)

Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) may be thought of as an integral part of quality education. ESD may be defined as a process that engages people and social groups in learning to live in sustainable ways. It supports a new vision of education that seeks to empower people of all ages to assume responsibility for creating a sustainable future (Tilbury, 1995;[28] UNESCO, 2002[29]). The role of school in shaping a learner's vision of sustainable development is limited but important and the role of their socio-cultural background in shaping their attitude and behaviour must be considered as critical. It is generally acknowledged that ESD needs to be culturally rooted and locally relevant. It seeks to frame values, worldviews and cultural expressions within a process of participation

and dialogue necessary for working together towards a common future (UNESCO, 2004)[30].

Sustainability competencies, also known as 21st Century competencies, carry aspects like systems thinking, wise decision-taking, the ability to anticipate future events, and strategic and inter-personal competencies (Glasser, 2014)[31]. Besides, Yamaguchi and Chan (2014)[32] have extended their initial list to include media and ICT skills. These were added to the ERI-Net Framework of Transversal Competencies (see Figure 24), calling on individuals also to critically evaluate information and media content, and engage in the ethical use of ICT. However, the authors are of the view that many countries have not yet contextually defined or aligned their sustainability competencies with the above list. Therefore, educational systems are not all imparting the competencies can usher in the paradigm change and revise development patterns.

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26   UIS. 2019. SDG4 Data Digest: How to Produce and Use the Global and Thematic Education Indicators, Montreal, UIS.

27   https://www.iea.nl/studies/iea/iccs/2022#section-704

28   Tilbury, D. and Wortman, D. 2004. Engaging people in sustainability. Commission on Education and Communication, IUCN. Gland, Switzerland and Cambridge, UK.

29   United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). 2002. Education for Sustainability. From Rio to Johannesburg: Lessons Learnt from a decade of commitment. World Summit on Sustainable Development. Johannesburg, 26 August – 4 September 2002.

30   United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). 2004. The UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (2005-2014): International Implementation Scheme. Paris: UNESCO.

31   Glasser, H. (2014). Learning for sustainability core competencies. Workshop Cluster IV-Teaching, Assessing & Promoting 21st Century Competencies, 2014, November 12, UNESCO World Conference on ESD. Aichi-Nagoya, Japan.

32   Yamaguchi, S. Y., & Chang G-C. (2014). Integrating transversal skills in educational policies: Comparative analysis of 10 countries in Asia. Reporting on ERI-Net Study, Tokyo Institute of Technology & Satoko Yano Education Policy and Reform Unit, UNESCO.

Figure 24. Six domains of transversal competencies

Source: ERI-Net Phase III Study-UNESCO, 2016.

It is suggested (UIS, 2019) that data on ESD can be collected through skills assessment surveys including international assessments such as PISA and TIMSS (2015 and 2019) which provide a framework for measuring the indicator.

7.3   Key challenges remain in measuring GCE and ESD

Standards and methodological tools needed for specific knowledge, skills, values and behaviours associated with GCED and ESD and the proficiency levels to be achieved are yet to be globally agreed on and harmonized. The presence or absence of GCED- and ESD-related issues in policies and curricula maybe interpreted in different ways, indicating either official recognition of particular problems or indifference due to perceived nonexistence of problems (UNESCO MGIEP, 2017)[33]. Monitoring and tracking progress on GCED and ESD, therefore, would require common consensus among the countries in the Arab region about the

required competencies and strategies for implementation at all levels, including policy and curricular changes to align with regional standards for measuring ESD and GCED.

7.4   Some initiatives taken by the countries of the region, as revealed in the national reports

The SDG4 national reports indicate that 11 countries (*Bahrain, Egypt, Jordan, KSA, Kuwait, Libya Oman, Qatar, Syria, Tunisia and UAE*) have educational policies that incorporate concepts of global citizenship, sustainable development and human rights.

Similarly, 11 countries (*Bahrain, Egypt, Jordan, KSA, Kuwait, Libya, Oman, Qatar, Syria, Tunisia and UAE*) indicate the existence of such concepts in the curricula. The extent to which such concepts are covered in the curricula is not clear.

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33   UNESCO MGIEP. 2017. Rethinking Schooling for the 21st Century: The State of Education for Peace, Sustainable Development and Global Citizenship in Asia. New Delhi, UNESCO MGIEP.

Lebanon's Initiatives

MEHE has established partnerships with a wide range of institutions with the aim of enriching the school environment through several joint projects with countries of the region. Among these projects, the "Connecting Classrooms" program organized by the British Council aims to help young people develop the knowledge, skills and values necessary to live and work in a globalized world and to exercise responsible citizenship at local and international levels. A number of Lebanese schools have won the "Prestigious International School" award given by the British Council as a result of their efforts to move in this direction.

The ministry is working nowadays on the "Active Citizen" program that is organized by the British Council at the global level and aims to help young people launch a societal initiative within their communities, while bearing in mind that the issue of volunteering and community service are among the topics that Lebanese schools have always focused on, through the Scout Movement, the Red Cross and others.

Another program in this context is the "Community Service" program for Lebanese schools that aims to instill the values of empathy, respect, humility and community awareness and to enhance leadership, organizational and 21st century skills.

As for sustainable development, the ministry believes that the learning process in classrooms will be enhanced all over the Lebanese territories as a result of infrastructure improvement projects agreed with partners, including the German Corporation for International Cooperation (GIZ), the French, German and Japanese governments and the World Bank. Among these projects, mention may be made of the use of solar energy to generate energy in a number of public schools, with the support of the Japanese government. This project is a first step towards launching a discussion on alternative energy and sustainable development with students in participating schools.

Several concepts such as sustainable development, human rights, sustainable citizenship, as well as the sensitive cultural diversity issue in Lebanon will be introduced through curriculum development projects planned by CERD.

Oman's Initiatives
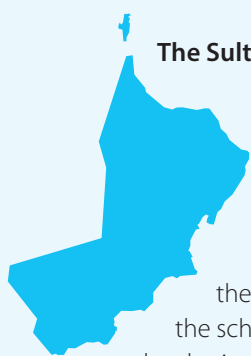
The Sultan Qaboos Award for sustainable development in school environment

This Award stems from Vision 2040:

"A school community which is entrepreneurial, innovative and sustainable"

The Award aims to disseminate the culture of sustainable development and rooting it in the school and local community; promoting the values of sustainable development amongst the members of the school community and developing their orientations towards its issues in the school and local environment; developing the skills of the school community members and developing their competences in order to achieve the goals of education for sustainable development; promoting national identity amongst students; entrenching the values of good citizenship in their minds in order to prepare them for contributing effectively to the journey of building and developing the country; building the students' integrated personality and offering them the 21st century skills to deal positively with the different challenges; developing their leadership and dialogue skills; diversifying their creative capacities; encouraging the school administrations and school community to implement the best practices in the field of education; and invent sustainable projects that serve the teaching and learning programs.

UAE's Initiatives

The tolerance initiative was launched in collaboration with the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Tolerance. The aim is to entrench these principles amongst students. This initiative follows the state's approach, i.e., the Zayed approach that strengthens tolerance and promotes innovative ideas that help with regard to cooperation and communication among different nationalities. It also aims to raise the awareness of children and strengthen the values of tolerance among them within the framework of programs and educational activities implemented by the school to promote the values of tolerance and coexistence in peace, accepting difference, respecting the other and positive communication among students in different stages of education at all public and private schools. Students, thus, learn the values and principles related to tolerance and implement them on the ground through student common activities between public and private schools.

CHAPTER 8
Are teachers trained and qualified to teach?

8. Are teachers trained and qualified to teach?

> We can achieve quality education only if teachers and educators are educated, qualified, motivated, empowered and supported. We equally need school leadership and governance that promotes alignment of curriculum, teacher policies and practice, and learning assessment that allows for focusing on learning and collaboration in the context of conducive learning environments.
>
> (Arab Region Outcome Statement, November 2018)

8.1 Qualified and trained teachers

Monitoring key aspects of the teaching profession from pre-primary to upper secondary education is critical. This target covers training and academic qualifications of teachers, the relative financial attractiveness of the teaching profession and teacher turn-over.

There is a global consensus on the importance of teachers' role in improving the quality of education and of leaning outcomes. Research also shows that the lack of an adequate number of teachers is resulting in an uneven distribution of teachers, which is further exacerbating inequalities. For example, schools in rural and remote areas have more difficulties in attracting qualified teachers than their counterparts in urban areas. Teachers who are deployed to remote or rural areas tend to be less experienced on average and often do not speak or understand the local language of the community. Increasing the supply of teachers also poses a problem of a qualitative nature. SDG4 calls for increasing the supply of 'trained' and 'qualified' teachers. A qualified teacher is one who receives an academic qualification, while a trained teacher is one who has completed the minimum organized teacher training requirements (whether during pre-service training or in-service).

Trained teachers are defined as "those who have fulfilled at least the minimum organized teacher-training requirements (pre-service or in-service) to teach a specific level of education according to the relevant national requirements" (UIS, 2017)[34]. Most countries in the region have a good percentage of teachers in primary and secondary who are trained (see Figure 25). However, there is a need for data on the condition of teachers of marginalized children since research shows that such teachers face several challenges in their professional lives due to the unpredictable circumstances in which they have to teach. Similarly, the impact of COVID-19 has put tremendous pressure on the teaching workforce, including job loss, stress due to personal safety and wellness issues, the psychological trauma of families of children affected by the pandemic, the challenge of adopting to online and remote teaching and assessment of student learning.

8.2 Has teaching capacity grown?

The pupil-qualified teacher ratio (PQTR) is a measure of teaching capacity rather than of actual class size. PQTR refers to the ratio of qualified teachers to students. A trained teacher is one who has received at least the minimum organized pedagogical teacher training pre-service and in-service required for teaching at the relevant level. The PQTR for primary and secondary levels for most countries, except Palestine (West Bank and Gaza) are low, indicating that the teaching capacity has grown. **Figures 26** and **27** show that PQTR for primary level is slightly better than PQTR for secondary level in most countries, indicating a better level of availability of trained teachers at primary level than secondary level.

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[34] UIS, 2017. Metadata for the Global and Thematic indicators for the Follow-up and Review of SDG4 and Education 2030, UIS, Montreal.

Figure 25. Percentage of teachers in primary education in the Arab region, who are trained, both sexes (%)

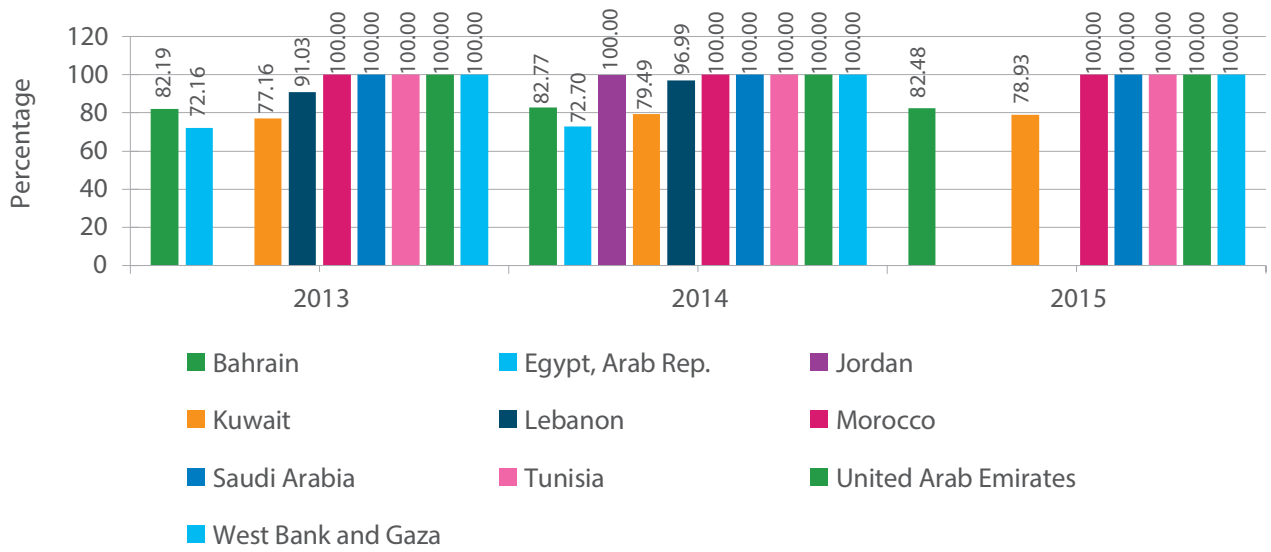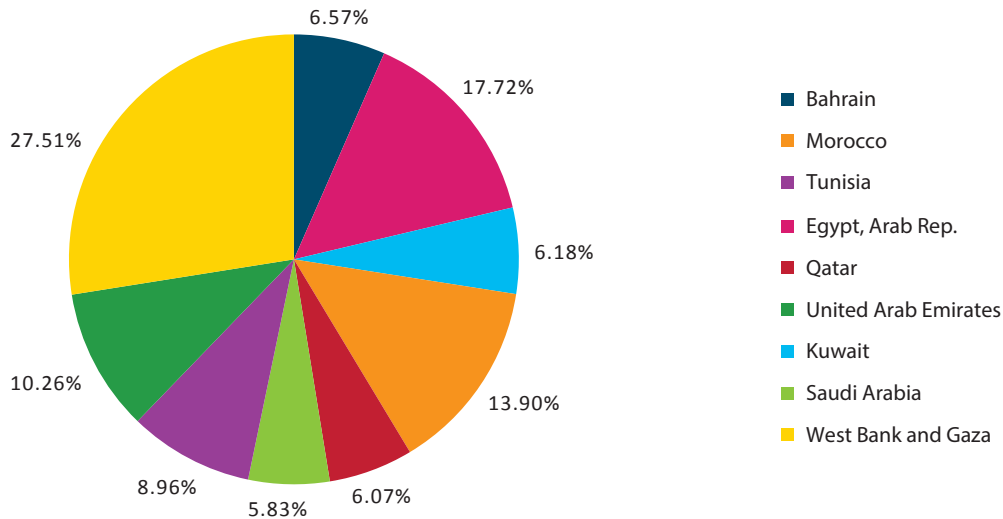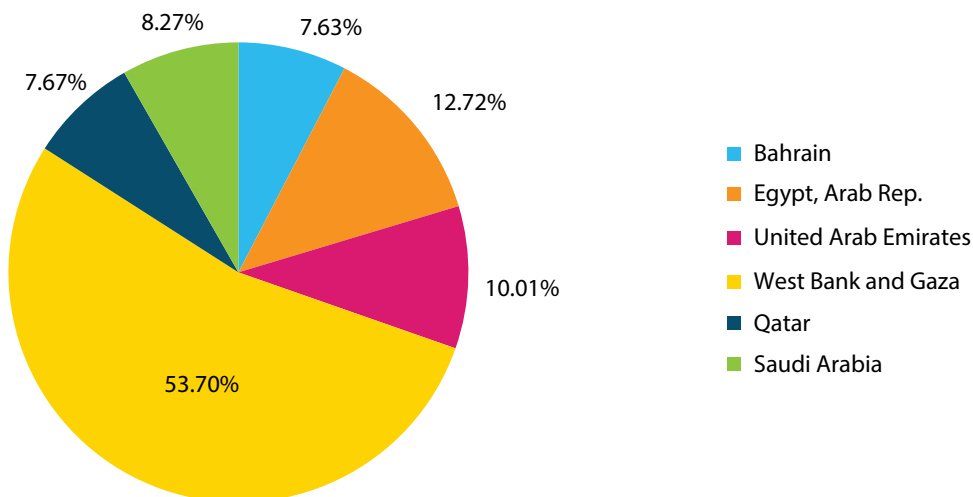
Figure 26. Pupil/ qualified teacher ratio in primary education (head count basis), 2014

Source: UIS Data centre.

Figure 27. Pupil/ qualified teacher ratio in secondary education (head count basis), 2014

Source: UIS Data centre.

8.3 What the national reports on SDG4 say about teachers

The following points emerge from the national reports.

On teachers

1 Six countries (Bahrain, Jordan, Kuwait, Qatar, Oman and UAE) have reported 100% of teachers in pre-primary, primary and secondary levels are qualified and a few other countries (Lebanon, Syria, Yemen) have around 65–85% qualified teachers

2 Capacity-building strategy developed (Sudan)

3 **Figure 28** is a country example of distribution of teachers by educational qualifications. excerpted from the Lebanon report:

Figure 28. Distribution of teachers by education qualification, Lebanon 2014–2015
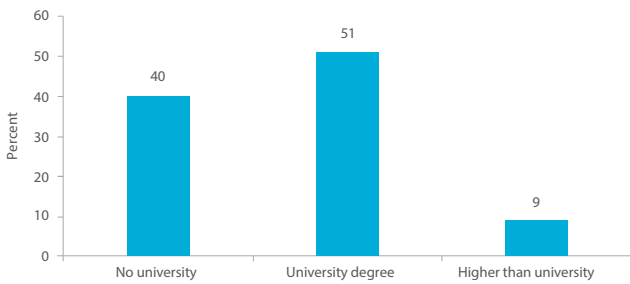
Source: CERD 2015.

Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

The International Teachers Forum aims to integrate international and local educational experiences in building thoughtful pedagogical and educational practices; strengthen the role of teachers in managing classrooms; enhance their relationship with their students; help them understand accurately what their role consists of in the classroom, as well as their role in the transition to student-centered education; and, last but not least, have a better understanding of 21st century skills and ways of applying them in the classroom. Another example on trained teachers' availability:

Figure 29. illustrates Indicator 4.c.2 Pupil:trained teacher ratio in Jordan, by education level, as shown by the Jordan Report.

	Kindergarden	Primary	Lower Secondary	Upper Secondary
2016 - 2017	18	21	13	8.4
2017 - 2018	17.5	18.5	14.5	8.4
2018 - 2019	16.5	16.4	17.9	9
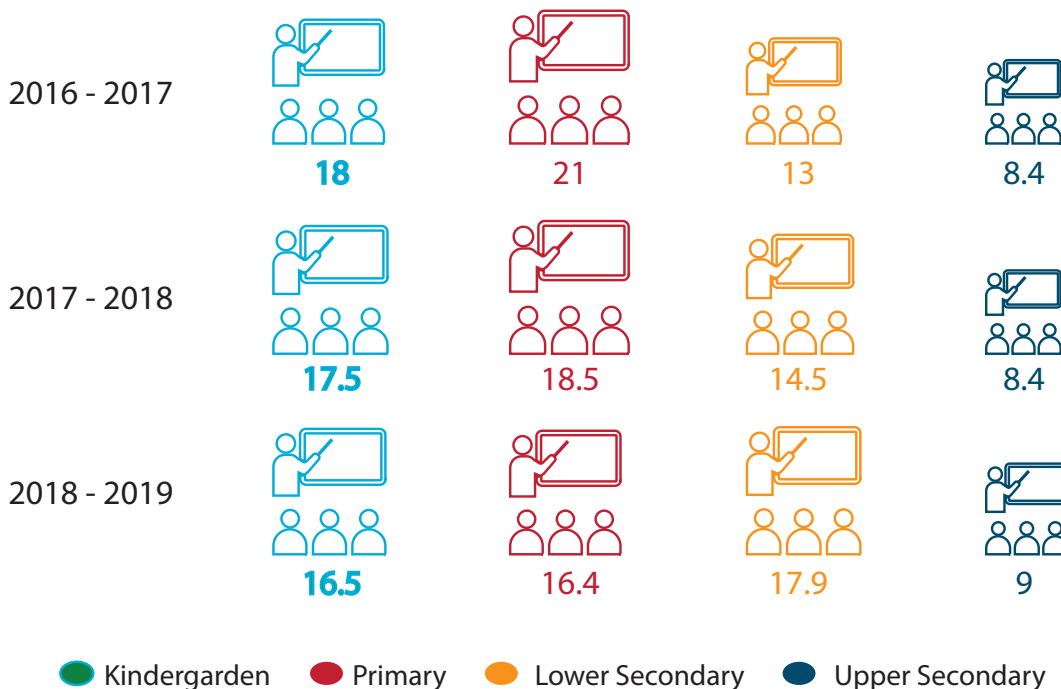
Syria can be cited as another remarkable example of a country that, despite several challenges, has a high percentage of qualified teachers at all levels, especially in vocational secondary schools (see **Figure 30**).

Figure 30. **Percentage of qualified teachers by education level in Syria, 2015–2019**
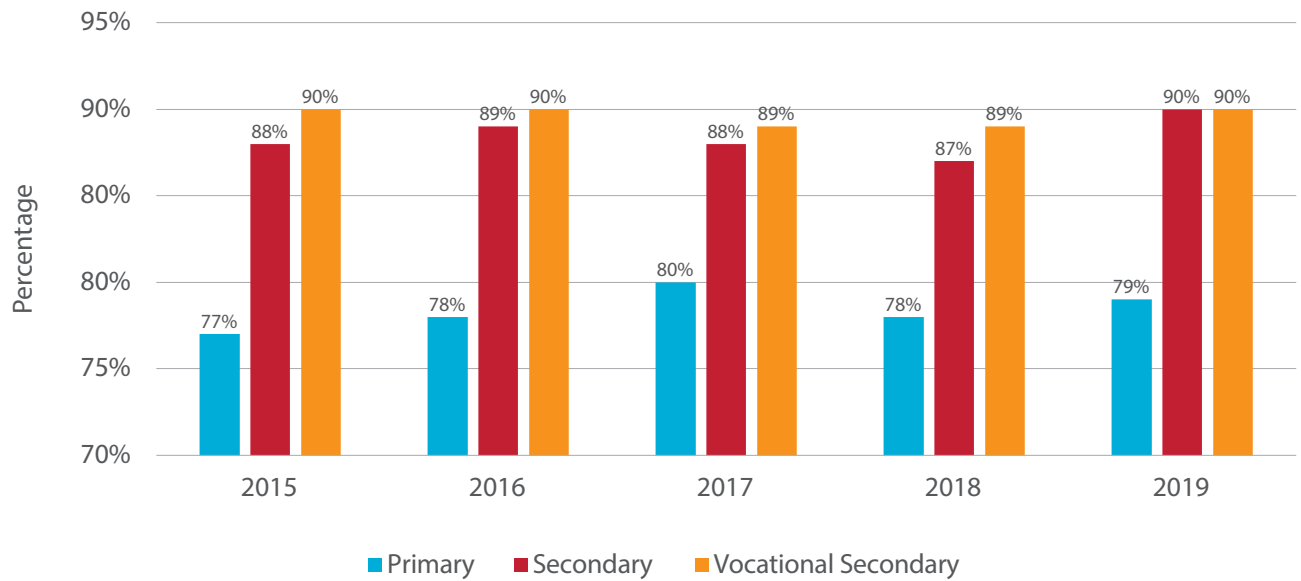
Source: from Syria SDG4 National Report, 2020.
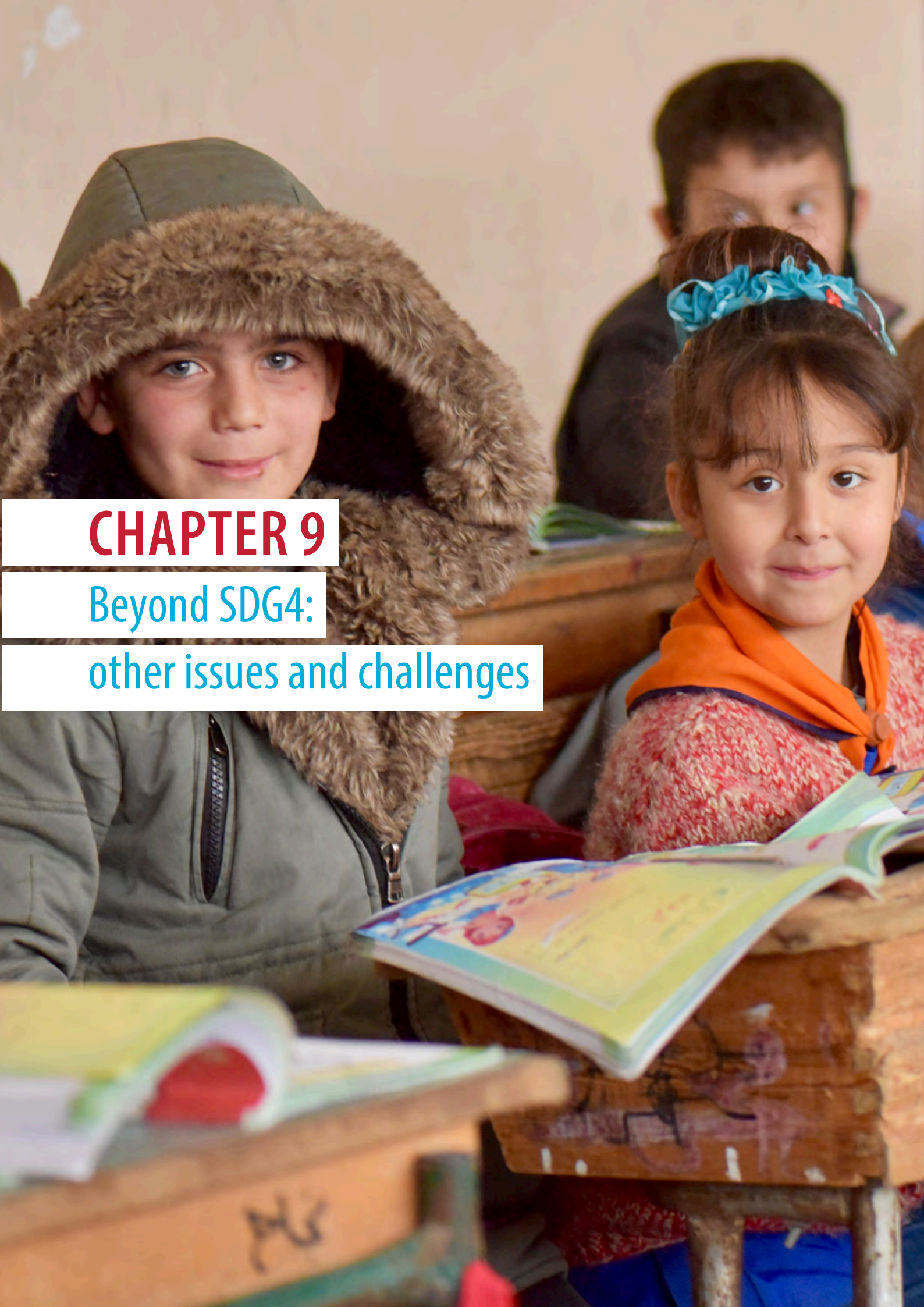
CHAPTER 9
Beyond SDG4:
other issues and challenges

9. Beyond SDG4: other issues and challenges

9.1 Introduction

As discussed earlier in this report, there is a need to look at other inter-related issues that are important for understanding and monitoring the progress of the SDG4 targets. Often such related issues are featured in other SDG targets. Three such important issues warrant special focus since they provide additional insights into our understanding of SDG4 from policy and planning perspectives.

The three issues that will be discussed briefly in this section are:

1 Youth not in employment, education or training (NEET) (SDG8)

2 Disability and learning (several SDGs)

3 Improving data, monitoring and accountability (SDG17)

9.2 Youth not in employment, education or training (NEET)

SDG 8.6 talks about "substantially reduce the proportion of youth not in employment, education or training". This target can be achieved only through promoting youth employment through evidence-based policy and planning targeting growth and job creation with targeted employment, training and social protection measures.

In 2015, the youth unemployment rate for the Arab region was estimated to be about 28.6 per cent (ILO, 2015)[35]. According to UNICEF's MENA Generation 2030 report[36], the proportion of youth NEET varies across the region, from 16.1 per cent in Saudi Arabia to 44.8 per cent in Yemen, for example. The proportion of young women NEET is typically close to 30 per cent across the region, but is as high as 69.7 per cent in Yemen.

The share of youth not in employment, education or training (youth NEET rate) provides a measure of youth who are outside the educational system, not in training and not in employment, and thus serves as a broader measure of potential youth labour market entrants than youth unemployment. It includes discouraged worker youth as well as those who are outside the labour force due to disability and engagement in household chores, among other reasons. NEET is also a better measure of the current universe of potential youth labour market entrants as compared with the youth inactivity rate, as the latter includes youth who are outside the labour force and are in education, and thus are furthering their skills and qualifications[37].

9.3 NEET in the Arab region

Figure 31 gives an indication of NEET in the MENA region, by selected countries.

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[35] ILO Research Department: Trends Econometric Models, 2015.

[36] https://www.unicef.org/mena/reports/mena-generation-2030.

[37] https://sdg.tracking-progress.org/indicator/8-6-1-youth-not-in-education-employment-or-training-neet/

Figure 31. Youth not in education, employment or training (NEET) in selected countries (per cent)[38]
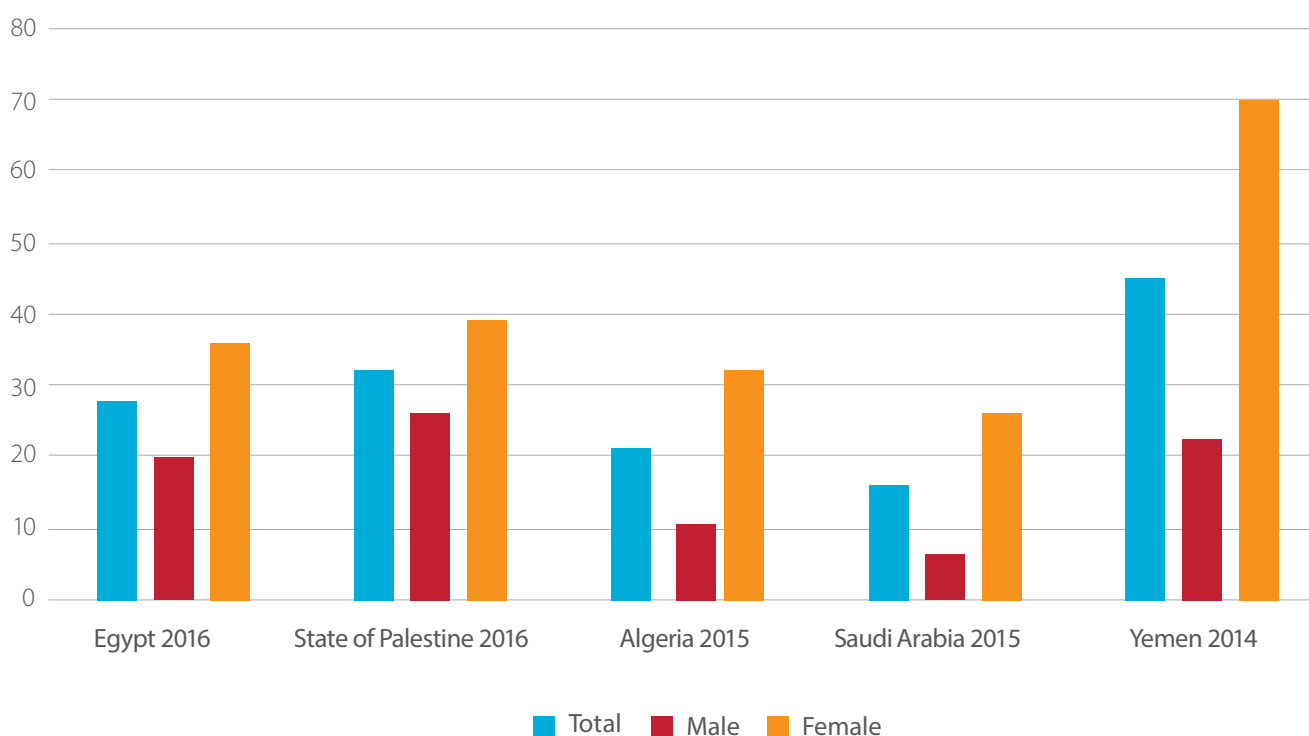
Source: UNICEF analysis based on key indicators of the Labour Market (KILMI, ILOSTAT, 2018)

ILO[39] reports that young women and men aged 15–24 in the Arab region face significant challenges in getting decent and productive jobs. **Table 5** clearly indicates that the proportion of youth not in employment, education or training (NEET) has increased for both young women and men since at least 2012. The rate in the region is estimated at 34.4 per cent in 2021, compared to a global rate of 22.5 per cent. One in two young women in the region is estimated to have NEET status, compared to almost one in five young men. There is a gender gap in the NEET rate of 34 percentage points in the region.

Figure 32 indicates that there are variations among countries with regard to NEET in the region. While NEET for males in Palestine has been increasing from 38.3 percent in 2012 to 40.4 in 2019, it has been almost static for NEET among males in Jordan at 43.8 percent between 2017 and 2019. All the five countries presented in **Figure 32** show a significant gender gap, indicating a worrying trend of women not being engaged in decent and productive jobs.

Table 5. NEET rate for young people, Arab region, 2012, 2018–2021

			2012	2018	2019	2020	2021
	World	Total	21.6	21.9	22.2	22.3	22.5
NEET Rate	Arab States	Total	31.0	33.8	34.0	34.3	34.4
		Male	14.9	17.5	17.7	18.0	18.1
		Female	48.7	51.5	51.8	52.0	52.1

Source: ILO, 2021.

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[38] https://www.unicef.org/mena/reports/mena-generation-2030.

[39] See ILO. 2020. World Employment and Social Outlook : Trends 2020 (Geneva) for a more detailed discussion on different labour market challenges faced by GCC and non-GCC countries.

Figure 32. Proportion of NEET 15-24 years, by Sex, (%)
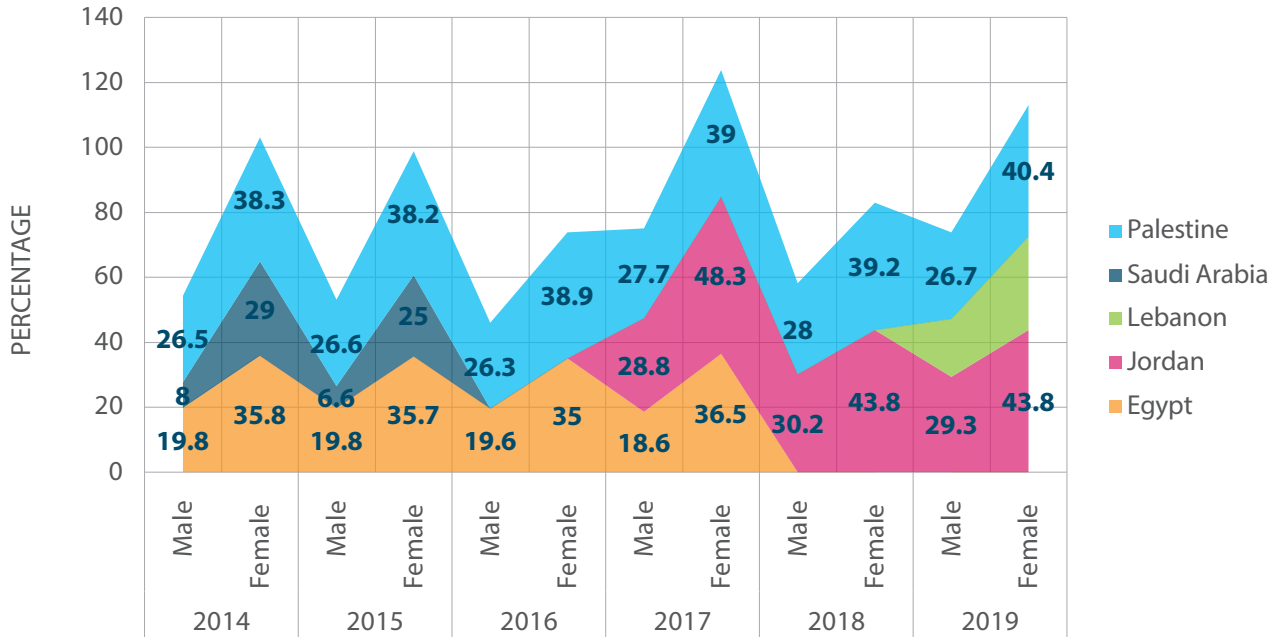
Source: UN Stats, 2021.

9.4 Good practices from the SDG4 national reports

Sudan's E-learning project for Youth NEET contributes to the development and expansion of alternative education programs for out-of-school adolescents and adults; it consists of programming the syllabus for the basic education level and placing it on CDs to facilitate access for out-of-school children and children in remote areas. It has also been tested with nomadic children using computers and solar energy in some areas. The curriculum has been programmed and placed on the ministry's website to facilitate its circulation.

9.5 Disability and education

As early as 1948, the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights was adopted by the General Assembly of the UN and its Article 26 proclaimed that everyone has the right to education, free and compulsory at the "elementary" stages, with technical and professional education made generally available and higher education equally accessible to all on the basis of merit. Article 2 affirmed that everyone was entitled to all rights and freedoms set forth in the Declaration, "without distinction of any kind".

The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) (1989) was the first treaty developed specifically to uphold the rights of children. Ratified by more states than any other convention, it was followed a little more than a decade later by the United Nations General Assembly's Special

Session on Children (2002). A World Fit for Children, the outcome document, extended and expanded the rights covered in the Convention on the Rights of the Child, with increased concern for the specific rights of a wide range of minority groups, including children with disabilities. Articles 1 and 2 of the Convention state that all rights apply "to every human being" under the age of 18 years, and prohibits discrimination on a number of grounds including that of disability. A World Fit for Children expands the proscription on discrimination, with a specific article on children with disabilities.

9.6 Measurement and data availability

There is a challenge in producing internationally comparable data on persons with disability due to the varying definitions and understanding of the term "disability" across the world. Due to the lack of a common definition of "disability", the levels of priority in collecting disability data as well as the methods used for collecting such information have not been consistent, with varying degrees of disaggregation and comprehensiveness across the world (UN, 2015).

Since the understanding of what constitutes disability is varied and complex, different definitions have led to diverging estimates of the number of individuals with a disability.

To address this issue of producing globally comparable data, the Washington Group (WG) on Disability Statistics

was established in 2001. The WG developed a set of questions for use in household surveys and censuses to collect information on persons with a disability. Questions were based on the presence of difficulties in six core functional domains: seeing, hearing, walking, cognition, self-care and communication. During data collection, respondents answer on a four-category scale: no difficulty, some difficulty, a lot of difficulty, cannot do at all (UIS, 2017).

Using this model, a person is considered to have a disability if the respondent is unable to perform or perform with a lot of difficulty at least one of the six functional areas. The WG's suggested questions and categorization helped countries to collect data better and it was also possible to translate into many local languages for better administration of survey questionnaires. One of the most popular surveys that has started using WG questions is the Demographic and Health Survey.

The Demographic and Health Survey (DHS) program collects and disseminates data on population, health, nutrition and other topics in developing countries. DHS surveys contain a module that allows the collection of disability data based on the internationally-comparable short set of questions developed by the WG (USAID, 2016). Introducing such modules in existing household surveys such as DHS and Census can greatly minimize the issue of data gap with regard to disability and make it possible to analyse various aspects of exclusion linked to personal and household characteristics, including those related to disability.

9.7 Disability data in the Arab region

Countries in the Arab region have adopted the methodology and short set of questions developed by the Washington Group Washington Group Short Set—WGSS) to capture data on disability in an effective and efficient manner for household surveys andcensuses **(Table 6).** Jordan, Morocco and Yemen used the methodology exactly as intended by WGSS while Egypt, Iraq, Oman, Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and Tunisia used a variant of the WGSS[40].

Table 6. Questions used to probe disability in surveys and censuses across countries

Country	Survey/Censusand Year	Use of screening question*	Question asks aboutnormal functioning	Question uses the word disability	Levels of difficulty**	Domains of difficulty (WGSS domains or Other)
Bahrain	Census 2010	√	√		Yes/No	WGSS domains, excluding "self-care", adding "multiple" and "other"
Egypt	Labor Force Survey (LFS) 2016	√	√		WGSS	WGSS
Iraq	Poverty and Maternal Mortality Survey (I-PMM) 2013				WGSS	WGSS domains, excluding "self-care"
Jordan	Census 2015				WGSS	WGSS
Morocco	Census 2014				WGSS	WGSS
Oman	Census 2010	√	√		WGSS	WGSS domains, adding "upper body movement"
Palestine	Census 2007				WGSS	WGSS domains, excluding "self-care"

40 UNESCWA. (2017). Strengthening Social Protection for Persons with Disabilities in Arab Countries. E/ESCWA/SDD/2017/2, Beirut.

Qatar	Census 2010				WGSS	WGSS domains, adding "talking" and "other"
Saudi Arabia	Demographic and HealthSurvey (DHS) 2016	√			WGSS	WGSS, adding "other"
Sudan	Census 2008				Yes/No	Not WGSS. Including: "limited use/ loss of leg(s)", "limited use/loss of arm(s)", "difficulty in hearing/deaf", "difficulty in seeing/ blind", "difficulty in speaking/mute", "mental disability"
Syrian Arab Republic	Budget Survey 2007			√	Yes/No	WGSS domains, excluding "self-care", adding "multiple"
Tunisia	Census 2014	√			WGSS	WGSS
Yemen	Household Budget Survey (HBS) 2014				WGSS	WGSS

As an example, the following section discuss how disability affects access to school by looking at school attendance data.

9.8 School attendance

Data on school attendance[41] **(Figure 33)** show a significant disparity between persons with and without disabilities. The attendance of persons with disabilities remains lower than that of persons without disabilities. Importantly, while in all groups there is a significant drop in school attendance from ages 5–14 years to 15–24 years, persons with disabilities are particularly under-represented among students aged 15–24, indicating a higher drop-out rate and lower level of higher educational attainment.
Access to schooling is a major barrier for persons with disabilities. Barriers range from socio-cultural misconceptions and stigma attached by family members about the nature of disability, resulting in neglect or discouragement. At school, students with disabilities face other challenges such as lack of ramps and lack of special toilets for persons with disabilities. Students who are disabled also face bullying and teasing by classmates who may be insensitive and lack proper understanding of disability.

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41 UNESCO, (2015). Regional overview: Arab states. In Education for All Global Monitoring Report 2015. Paris. Available at https://en.unesco.org/gem-report/sites/gem-report/files/regional_overview_AS_en.pdf.

Figure 33. School Attendance (%) of Children with and without Disability

■ With disabilities   ■ Without disabilities

		With disabilities	Without disabilities
Bahrain	Children, 14–5	78.2	97.0
	Persons, 24–15	31.3	56.0
Egypt	Children, 14–6	45.2	94.2
	Persons, 24–15	13.6	53.9
Iraq	Children, 14–6	44.4	89.3
	Persons, 24–15	16.0	40.1
Mauritania	Children, 14–5	37.1	64.6
	Persons, 24–15	13.7	27.2
Morocco	Children, 14–5	57.9	85.5
	Persons, 24–15	18.1	44.6
Oman	Children, 14–5	40.3	92.7
	Persons, 24–15	17.8	51.4
Palestine	Children, 14–5	60.2	90.5
	Persons, 24–15	27.8	55.9
Yemen	Children, 14–5	36.1	66.8
	Persons, 24–15	18.2	36.3

Source: UNESCWA, 2017.

9.9. What the national reports on SDG4 say

The following are some country examples from the SDG4 national reports

- **UAE:** empowerment of people with disabilities, "As-Hab Al Himma" (people with determination)

- **Palestine/Iraq/Tunisia:** Many interventions to integrate students with disabilities

- **Jordan:** Launched Makani Bainakom (I have a place among you) to raise public awareness of inclusive education

- **Syria:** Upgrading infrastructure of toilets and special halls for integration of students

- **Bahrain:** Inclusion of students with disability

- **Lebanon:** 'Integrated public schools' by MEHE in 2018

- **Sudan:** Development of flexible curricula targeting nomads, PwD, girls

- **Kuwait:** Legislative framework for protection of people with special needs

- **Libya:** Policies for allocation of educational resources for under-privileged population

The following points have been further highlighted in the national reports

- **Providing safe, non-violent inclusive environment**: Awareness-building for parents in Oman on school bullying and community partnership through Ministry of Social Development/Ministry of Endowments and Religious Affairs.

Tunisia's initiative:

Ensuring the effective inclusion of persons with disabilities in education and vocational training:

The Tunisian government has developed a set of legislation, policies and programs to guarantee the rights of persons with disabilities in accordance with the principles of equal opportunities for all (Article 48 of the 2014 Constitution). The ratification of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) and its Optional Protocol in 2008 reaffirm the commitment of the Tunisian state in this field. With regard to education and vocational training for persons with disabilities, it should be noted that Framework Law No. 2005-83 of 15 August 2005 provides for free education and training for persons with disabilities and the promotion and protection of persons with disabilities through Articles 1, 19 and 24.

9.10 SDG4 national reports on infrastructure support in schools

- The SDG4 national reports indicate that most countries have excellent infrastructure with schools having access to electricity, sanitation and drinking water.

- However, provision of facilities for students with disabilities is not seen as adequate in a few countries. Many have schools with access to computers and internet.

- The Kingdom of Bahrain has reported having achieved this indicator; with the proportion having reached 100% during the 2017–2018 school year, as shown in **Figure 34**.

Figure 34. Percentage of school having wash & internet facilities at school in Kingdom of Bahrain, 2017 - 2018

Computers

Electricity

Adapted infrastructure and materials for students with disabilities

Internet

Handwashing facilities

Single- sex sanitation facilities
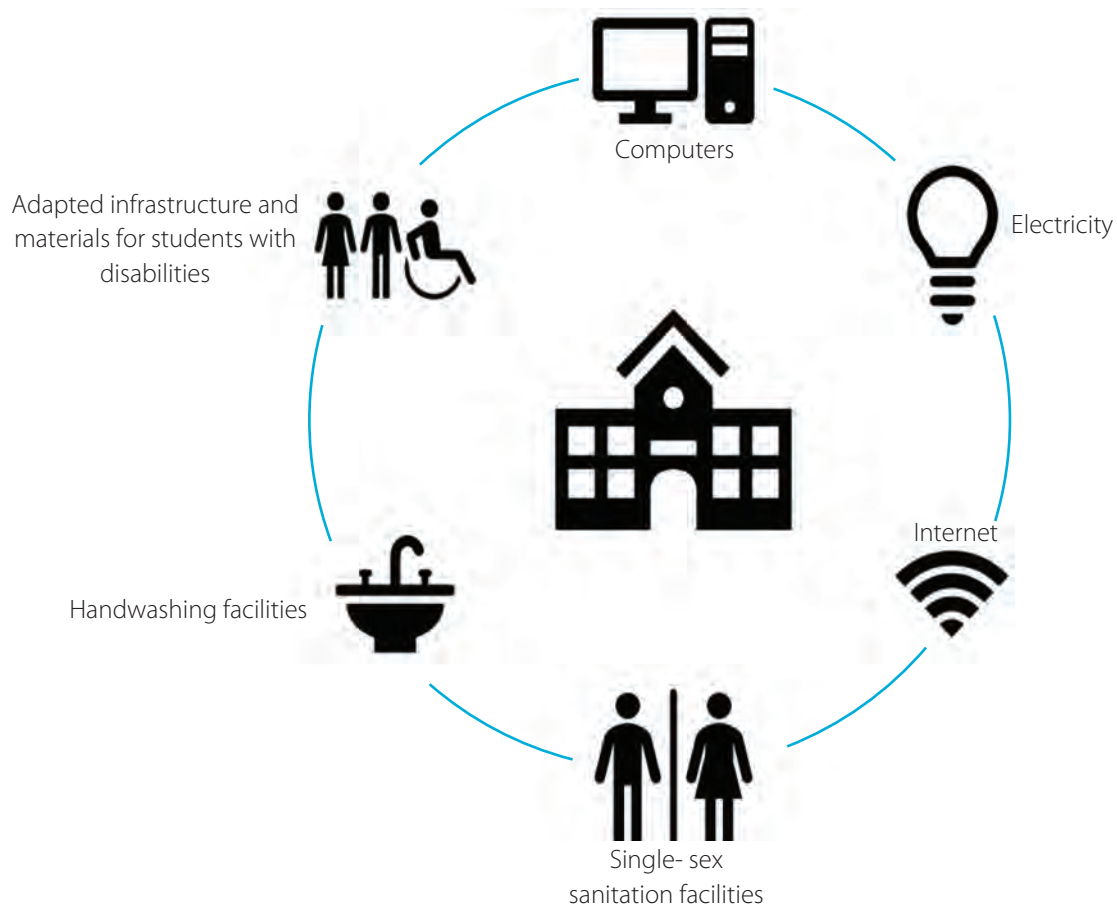
Box 1. Collection of disaggregated data on residual performance abilities to provide assistive devices to facilitate education of the disabled

While collecting data on disability to assess the situation with regard to 'inclusion of all' in the education process, it is important not only to gather data on impairments or difficulties of doing various activities, but also on the barriers in the environment that keep youth and adults with functional difficulties away from attending and succeeding in learning situations. Moreover, when it comes to assessing impairments, it is important to recognize that they are not synonymous with medical diagnoses. What matters in terms of receiving an education is the functioning of the person concerned – that is, what she or he is capable of doing and not what condition she or he may be in. Simply knowing the diagnosis of disability in persons does not provide much information on their capacity to undertake various activities. In other words, information is needed, in this context, but much beyond medical diagnoses, focusing on the nature of impairments, residual performance abilities left and assessment of the difficulties the disabled still have in performing tasks necessary for learning. Equally important is information on the barriers, supports and services in that environment that either impede or facilitate their education. Provision of assistive infrastructure and other devices based on assessment of difficulties in performance of tasks by the disabled will fall under the category of "facilitators of education for the disabled".

The provision of need-based assistive care infrastructure in schools for the benefit of disabled persons will have to be assessed in terms of the type and level of impairment and the matching types and levels of assistive care infrastructure provided. These may relate to impairments in terms of seeing, hearing, walking or climbing steps, remembering or concentrating, self-care (such as washing all over or dressing), and communicating (understanding or being understood by others). Learning difficulties, including psycho-motor (cerebral palsy) and emotional difficulties, may be added to the list. Such an assessment will inform policy makers about the infrastructure needs for creating and maintaining a suitable learning environment for the disabled in educational institutions.

Source: Washington Group, CDC and other works of the author.

## 9.11 SDG4 national reports on safe school environment

Some 'best case' scenarios from the national reports:

■ *Oman's Child Protection Hotline Initiative*

Oman has launched a child protection hotline no. 1100. It is a free phone line available 24 hours a day for receiving reports and complaints relating to abuse and violence against children, with the presence of 16 child protection delegates in all Omani governorates who have the judicial authority for the implementation of the Law on the Child and its provisions and for intervention for the sake of children's protection, based on the case of the abused child.

■ *Jordan's Safe School Initiative*

"Together for a safe school environment" is a program implemented by the Ministry of Education, in cooperation with UNICEF, to reduce the percentage of violence in all its forms. It targets students and aims to prompt teachers to use pedagogical methods to change students' behavior by using a monthly electronic survey of a sample of 10% of students from Grade 4 to Grade 11 in the last week of each month. Plans are then devised, in cooperation with teachers, to undertake a series of activities to reduce violence.
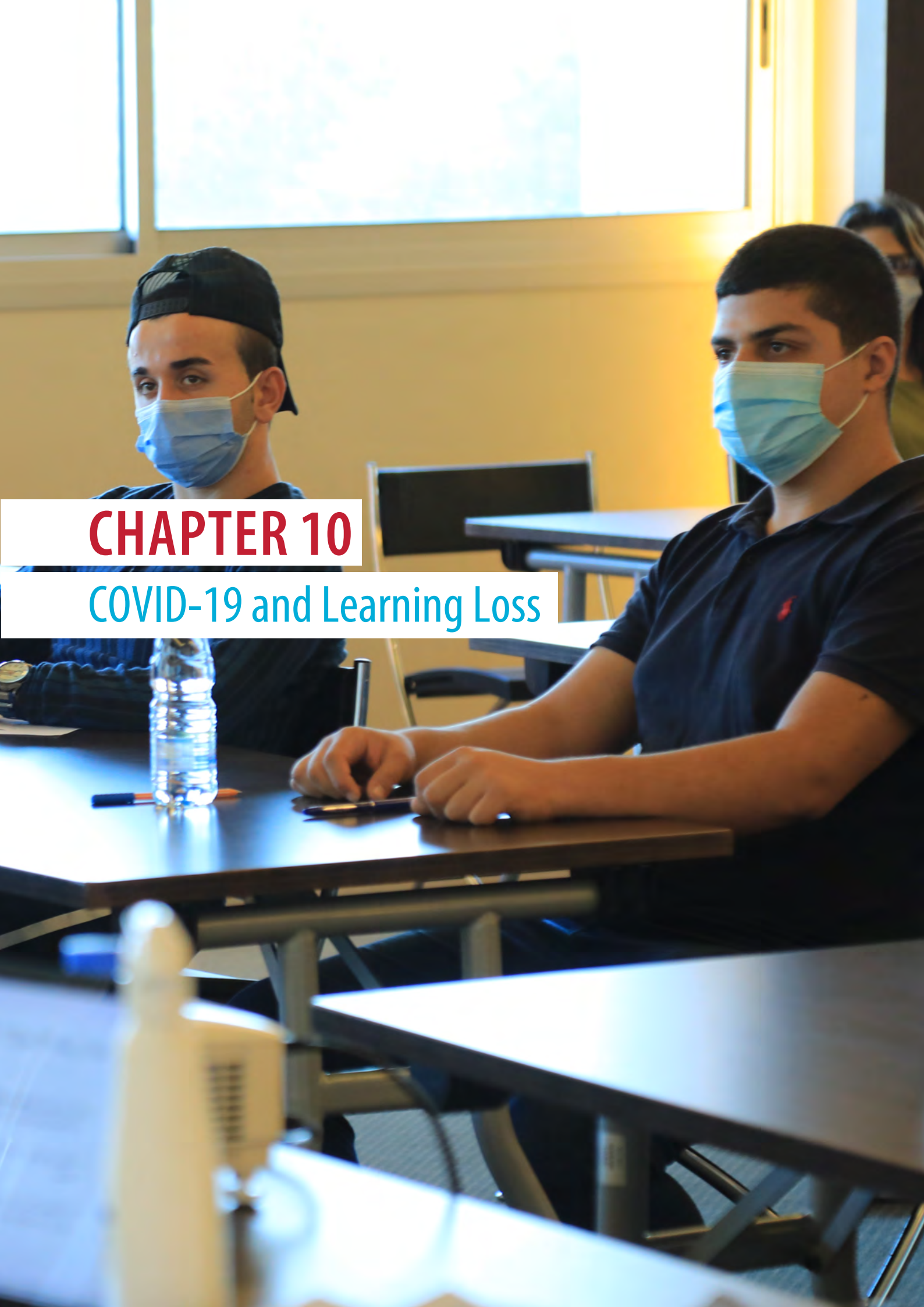
CHAPTER 10
COVID-19 and Learning Loss

10. COVID-19 and Learning Loss

COVID-19 has had a devastating impact on teaching and learning the world over. It has led to the worst-ever education crisis in a century. As of March 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic was seen to be causing more than 1.6 billion children and youth to be out of school in 161 countries. This is close to 80% of the world's enrolled students. This was in the nature of further exacerbating the existing global learning crisis, in which many students were in school, but not learning the fundamental skills needed for life. The World Bank's "Learning Poverty" indicator – the proportion of children who cannot read and understand at age 10 – stood at 53% of children in low- and middle-income countries – before the outbreak started. This pandemic has the potential to worsen these outcomes even more if action is not taken fast to arrest this trend.

The World Bank reports (2020)[42] that large-scale school closures and the ensuing economic recession caused by COVID-19 are likely to increase the loss of learning by 63 per cent, with an estimated additional 72 million primary school-age children falling into this category. This is further verified by a recent UNICEF study (2020)[43] which indicates that almost 1.2 billion schoolchildren are affected by the closures of schools. This may put several countries off-track from achieving the SDG4 (quality education) by 2030.

School closures have devastating consequences for children's learning and wellbeing. The uncertainty of school reopening due to new waves of infection and the growing concern of learning loss have had a direct impact on the progress of SDG4. Many countries have rapidly transitioned to remote learning since the outbreak in early 2020.

In the Arab region, the wellbeing of children, parents and teachers and the protection of children have been affected by COVID-19. This ranges from fears around the virus itself, such as getting sick or losing family members, to financial worry, anxiety about learning loss, isolation and protection issues around violence, online bullying and discrimination.

10.1 Effects of COVID-19

Evidence shows that lost opportunities for learning, even for a short period, have long-term impacts on future learning outcomes and earning potential. The effects of school closures on students' learning include a measurable loss in the acquisition of basic skills, particularly for the most disadvantaged children. The most vulnerable are at an increased risk. Poorer households may not be able to provide adequate meals or have the technology required for online learning.

The following were the major challenges that governments in the region had to manage during the COVID-19 pandemic:

1 Ensuring that schools are safe to reopen
2 Delivering equitable and quality distance learning
3 Tackling the existing low levels of learning and the learning divide
4 Ensuring health, wellbeing, and protection
5 Tackling the low prioritisation of pre-primary education

10.2 Assessment of learning loss and the development of 'catch-up' programs

Literacy assessment surveys have been done by several countries in the region by joining one or the other of the leading international assessments even before the advent of COVID-19. However, the latest initiative in this regard is the one taken up by Syria on literacy assessment. But then there is an emergent need to assess learning loss as a result of COVID-19 and the consequent socio-economic and psychological issues. Such assessment will be useful to design programmes that may enable students to 'catch up' with learning loss as well as get out of the other socio-economic and psychological problems.

10.2.1 Need for collection of data disaggregated by those already in disadvantaged or vulnerable situations

Though the COVID-19 pandemic has affected all learners, its impact on those already in disadvantaged or vulnerable situations can be much worse. As the UN Policy Brief on the impact of COVID-19 on children has rightly pointed out "the harmful effects of this pandemic will not be distributed equally. They are expected to be most damaging for children in the poorest countries, and in the poorest neighbourhoods, and for those in already disadvantaged or vulnerable situations." Therefore, there is a need to collect such information at the micro level for more effective program planning.

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[42] World Bank. 2020. Learning Poverty In The Time of Covid-19: A Crisis Within A Crisis.
[43] World Bank. 2020. Learning Poverty In The Time of Covid-19: A Crisis Within A Crisis.

CHAPTER 11
Building statistical capacity for quality, timely and reliable data in the Arab region

11. Building statistical capacity for quality, timely and reliable data in the Arab region

11.1 Data coverage and measurement challenges

The analysis of data issues presented for all SDGs clearly shows the challenges that exist with regard to data coverage and measurement challenges for each of the goals of the Education 2030 Agenda. A few countries, however, are able to produce the data and statistics that are required for monitoring progress in the attainment of all the 17 goals and 169 targets of the 2030 Agenda, including countries with the strongest statistical systems. As several publications of UIS and UNESCO discussed in this report have shown, there are data gaps for several SDG4 indicators for countries in the Arab region. **Figure 35** shows that except for SDG3 (Health) and SDG9 (industry, innovation and infrastructure) data availability for SDG indicators is low, with SDG12 (responsible consumption and production), SDG13 (climate action), and SDG14 (life below water) being the worst, with very low availability of data.

This calls for more coordinated efforts to strengthen the capacity of national statistical systems which will be critical to the measurement of progress towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals and for informed decision-making and strong accountability, particularly in the least developed countries.

11.2 Strengthening statistical systems at national level

A recent ESCWA report (2021)[44] talks about how many national statistical offices are often trapped in a vicious cycle of statistical underdevelopment, where limited awareness and appreciation of the importance of data have led to sustained underfunding for statistics. The report also warns that there is an urgent need to intensify efforts to develop national statistical plans, increase government funding and modernize national statistical legislation in line with the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics. Also, the statistical community will need to develop new methodologies, as currently there are no internationally agreed statistical definitions and guidelines for some indicators.

The above observation holds good for the education sector which also is in great need of statistical capacity-building relating to SDG4 indicator development, data quality, availability of an Education Management Information System (EMIS) policy and the ability to use wide sets of data sources for monitoring progress of SDG4, including household surveys and assessment data.

Figure 35. SDG indicators data availability in the Arab region by SDG
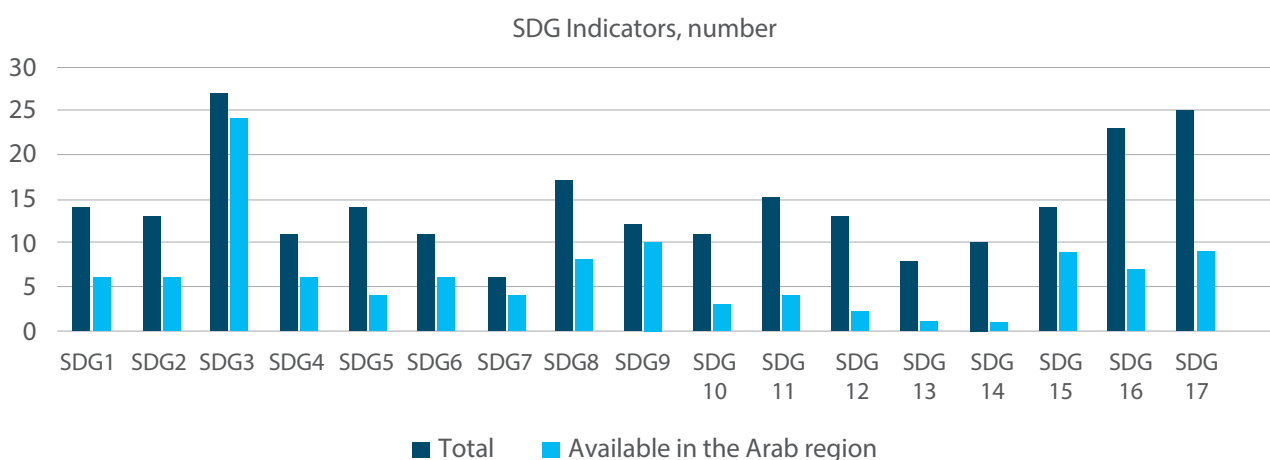
Source: UNESCWA, 2019.

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44 ESCWA 2021. Between Now and 2030: A statistical overview of progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals in the Arab region, Lebanon, ESCWA.

For successful implementation of the 2030 Agenda and to address the need to strengthen statistical capacity and data quality for monitoring, there are two SDG17 targets which will need closer scrutiny on advocacy for greater political will to give more importance to data quality and access; for strong partnerships being forged between statistical divisions/national statistical offices and regional/global organizations responsible for statistical capacity building; for strategic planning to implement new statistical standards and procedures; and for fund allocation to ensure that the SDG17 targets are achieved.

The two SDG17 targets referred to above, are as follows:

17.18 By 2020, enhance capacity-building support to developing countries, including for least developed countries and small island developing states, to increase significantly the availability of high-quality, timely and reliable data disaggregated by income, gender, age, race, ethnicity, migratory status, disability, geographic location and other characteristics relevant in national contexts.

17.19 By 2030, build on existing initiatives to develop measurements of progress on sustainable development that complement gross domestic product and support statistical capacity-building in developing countries.

Furthermore, efforts to strengthen data and statistics at country level can consider the data revolution through the use of new technologies such as big data, citizen-generated data and geospatial and Earth observation data to make official statistics more robust and accessible for public good.

Yet another aspect would be to strengthen the capacity of design and the conduct of learning assessments by all the countries of the region so that action could be initiated to strengthen curricula to achieve 'quality education for all' by 2030.

CHAPTER 12

The way forward: Issues that matter for accelerating the Education 2030 Agenda

12. The way forward: Issues that matter for accelerating the Education 2030 Agenda

12.1 What is needed to achieve the SDG4 targets?

The Arab region's overall progress in SDG4 is mixed. There has been good progress with regard to some of the targets. For some countries, progress is mostly limited due to several constraints such as inadequate financial resources, lack of needed internal capacity, lack of focused policy, lack of coordination across relevant ministries, lack of standards and baselines to measure progress, limited or no quality, timely and disaggregated data availability. All these pose enormous challenges when it comes to assessing the progress of each SDG4 target in its truest sense- "leave no one behind".

12.2 Sustaining the momentum and achieving the goal

The momentum gained with the educational reforms must be sustained and implemented well to ensure that the Education 2030 Agenda is attained by the target year. Progress towards achieving the targets can happen when the needed policy commitment, institutional arrangements, resource allocation and partnerships are in place and working in tandem.

12.3 SDG4 progress: issues to focus on:

i. Having necessary policies, frameworks and standards

Any national education system is guided by the National Education Policy which may include the right of all citizens to free, compulsory education at primary level; and the establishment of an education quality assurance system. In a way, this vision sets the benchmark against which the future progress has to be measured. Many countries do not have clear policies for targets relating to early childhood development and care (ECCD), TVET, as well as National Curriculum Framework and Teacher Standards Framework, which are critical for developing the necessary programs and initiatives.

SDG4 has new and emerging areas in education that are considered critical for the future of children and youth. These include citizenship education and education for sustainable development; youth and adult ICT skills need; and specific standards and frameworks to guide the alignment of these concepts in the education process as well as measure the impact of initiatives taken in this regard.

ii. Strengthening coordination and participation

There are two aspects to coordination – one is at the level of coordination between the ministries and departments and the other through participation and cooperation with other stakeholders.

There is a great need to strengthen the coordination between the Ministries, especially for targets that fall between more than one ministry such as SDG 4.2 (Early Childhood Care and Education), 4.3 (equal access to TVET and Higher Education), 4.4 (ICT skills), 4.7 (GCED and ESD) and 4a (inclusive and safe schools).

Coordinating data across different ministries and departments:
Monitoring progress in SDG4 requires wide-ranging evidence. As we have seen earlier, the assessment of progress in some of the targets would require wide-ranging data that may not necessarily be collected only by Ministries of Education, as for targets 4.2 (Early Childhood Care and Education), 4.4 (ICT skills), 4.7 (GCED and ESD) and 4a (inclusive and safe schools). Effective inter-sectoral coordination is required across different ministries and departments to access the datasets needed for such targets.

Effective multi-stakeholder partnerships

Similarly, partnerships and collaboration are needed between stakeholders more widely, including industry, civil society, philanthropic organizations, organizations working with marginalized and vulnerable populations and ethnic groups. Many of these stakeholders play important roles in advocacy, awareness-building, resource mobilization and monitoring. Since lack of information is cited in this report as one of the major challenges in assessing progress in SDG4, such grassroots organizations and those working with diverse population groups can provide the much-needed information on success stories, good practices and research reports concerning the target groups.

iii. Improving quality, availability and use of data

The core tenet of the 2030 Agenda is the concept of 'no one left behind' – the principle that sustainable development must include all people regardless of sex, gender, race, ethnicity, migratory status, income, disability or geographical location[45].

Disaggregated data is critical for monitoring SDG4

To achieve this, as pointed out in several documents and this review, there is a need for data that is disaggregated by variables of interest or concern. Disaggregated, quality, relevant and timely data play a critical role in assessing the status of progress of the goal which in turn will help better planning to accelerate progress and ensure that 'no one is left behind'. This is particularly relevant for designing interventions to include those already in disadvantaged or vulnerable situations.

For example, there has been progress with regard to expansion and access to basic education, with increasing enrolments at primary level. This trend drops as one moves to secondary and tertiary levels. While the limited data available from different sources suggest that physical access and socio-economic context issues can be the major reasons, there is still a need for more in-depth analyses to understand the patterns emerging at sub-national level. The available disaggregated data are mainly disaggregated by sex and geographical region (rural-urban), which may not be enough to understand the reasons for poor transition between Grades. However, the fact remains that the needed disaggregated data for many indicators are not collected or readily available.

Need for timely and periodical data

Timely release of data is critical for decision-makers. Most data needed for monitoring SDG4 progress are provided on an annual basis or over longer time periods when it comes to household surveys such as DHS, Population Census and LFS. EMISs in many countries have expanded the list of indicators; and much critical information for several SDG4 indicators should be available, but there are countries where there is no clear EMIS policy available to guide the strengthening of data collection and upgrading of software and IT infrastructure to match the growing demand for more timely, comprehensive and reliable data. However, household surveys such as MICS and DHS in some countries have not been repeated since the time they were collected. The periodicity of such surveys is also a critical factor, as regularly conducted will provide data that can be used for analyzing progress of specific targets or indicators.

Strengthening capacity of statistical units/focal persons

Capacity development in data quality and use of data for planning and monitoring for all concerned units or focal persons in ministries of education and other departments dealing with education (for example, EMIS/monitoring unit, adult literacy/NFE, TVET, Higher Education) will help to accelerate progress in this goal.

iv. Address the learning crisis and underpin the importance of learning assessments

Good quality education has been recognized as a powerful driver of economic growth. Particularly, good quality basic education is associated with more inclusive and equitable forms of growth. However, research on learning outcomes indicates[46] that the learning crisis aggravates, and is aggravated by, social and economic inequalities. The COVID-19 crisis has further aggravated such inequalities. This is quite evident in many countries in the Arab region with regard to learning attainment, which shows huge differences between urban and rural populations. Achievement data show differences between rural students and urban students, with the latter generally doing well.

Learning assessments

Learning assessments are important in understanding this learning crisis and help to address the issue in a more targeted manner with specific remedial actions. Cross-national assessments such as TIMSS, PISA and PIRLS can help greatly in addressing this issue. However, not many countries in the region have participated in such assessments, which raises the importance of having national assessments conducted regularly with clearly defined benchmarks for proficiency levels for regional comparison and to track progress of learning outcomes at country level. Such assessments must be conducted periodically to monitor the learning outcomes of those who are likely to be left behind.

Suitable capacity-building may be needed to enable the countries to do this effectively.

v. Localization of SDG4

Local state/regional level integration of the SDGs in their planning and monitoring process needs to be institutionalized for better reporting on the impact and progress of specific programs and initiatives targeting marginalized and vulnerable children and youth. Through

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45 United Nations Statistics Division. 2016. The Sustainable Development Goals Report. 2016. UNSD. (https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2016/leaving-no-one-behind).
46 World Bank. 2017. 'World Development Report 2018: Learning to Realize Education's Promise'. Washington, DC: World Bank.

capacity development and awareness-raising, the localization of SDG4 can be achieved.

There is a need at country level for more discussions based on each country's own national contexts and priorities and for developing as many localized and disaggregated indicators as possible that can be measured. The development of national indicators frameworks may be a task worth pursuing in this connection.

vi. Issues that matter for accelerating Education Agenda 2030

The following issues are especially flagged for consideration at the overall country levels in order to accelerate the pace of implementation of the Education Agenda so that they can be achieved by 2030.

1. **Having necessary policies, frameworks and standards**: It is critical to have clear policies for targets relating to early childhood care and development, TVET, ICT skills for youth and adults, as well as a National Curriculum Framework and a Teacher Standards Framework, to accelerate progress in such important issues.

2. **SDG4 has new and emerging areas in education that are considered critical** for the future of children and youth. Areas such as citizenship education and ESD, youth and adult ICT skills need specific standards and frameworks to guide the alignment of these concepts in the education process. (Refer: Section 1.2.(earlier in this report) on **interconnectedness of SDGs**

3. **Strengthening coordination and participation**: There are two aspects to coordination – one is at

the level of coordination between the ministries and departments and the other through participation and cooperation with other stakeholders.

4. **Coordinating data** (collection and sharing) across different ministries and departments and effective multi-stakeholder partnerships.

5. **improving the quality, availability and use of data**: The core tenet of the 2030 Agenda is the concept of 'no one left behind' – the principle that sustainable development must include all people regardless of sex, gender, race, ethnicity, migratory status, income, disability or geographical location.

6. Disaggregated, quality, relevant and timely data play a critical role in assessing the status of progress of the goal, which in turn will help better planning to accelerate progress and ensure that 'no one is left behind'.

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47 World Bank. 2017. 'World Development Report 2018: Learning to Realize Education's Promise'. Washington, DC: World Bank.

Progress of SDG4 in the Arab Region

A Summary Review

This report is a snapshot review of the progress of SDG 4 in the Arab region, based upon the national reports of the countries of the region and the valuable inputs from the regional education institutes of the region. In this review, SDG 4 is looked at as an essential part of an interconnected whole of all SDGs. However, it focuses on selected targets and indicators of SDG 4 because of difficulties of accessing consistent data pertaining to the region covering the period from 2010 to 2020. Therefore, internationally comparable data from various sources have been taken into consideration, highlighting at the same time the overall pictures as revealed by the country reports and flagging their selected best practices.