

# Situation Analysis of SDG 4 with a Gender Lens

## Target 4.5



By 2030, eliminate gender disparities in education and ensure equal access to all levels of education and vocational training for the vulnerable, including persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples and children in vulnerable situations.

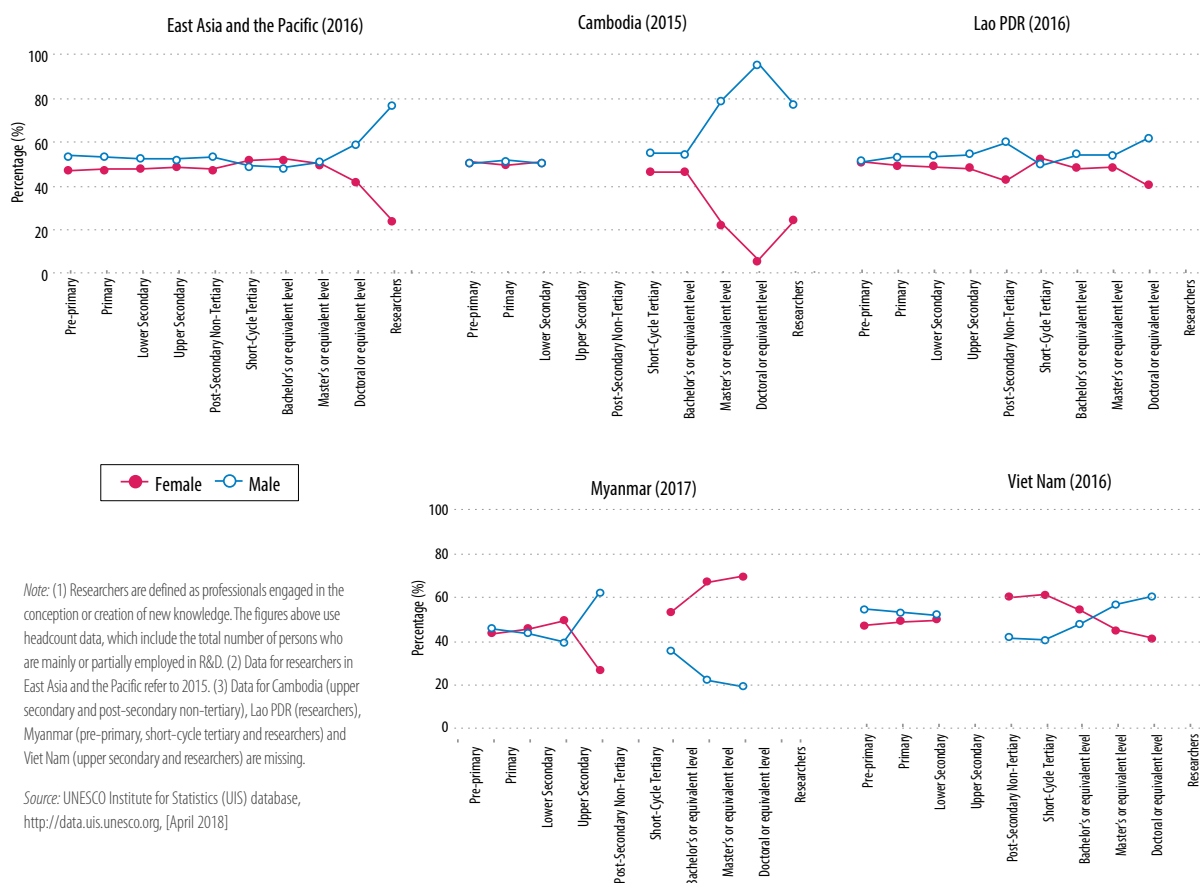
Equity and inclusion are at the heart of the SDG 4-Education 2030 Agenda. Target 4.5 calls for monitoring equity using disaggregated parity indices for all education indicators “by income, sex, age, race, ethnicity, migratory status, disability and geographic location, or other characteristics” (UN, 2016). In East Asia and the Pacific, access to basic education has expanded in recent decades, especially for girls (UNESCO & UNICEF, 2012). Despite these gains, many girls are still denied the right to education in the sub-region, but this should not mask the fact that boys also face barriers to education. As policymakers seek to implement Target 4.5, they must address the multiple, intersecting disadvantages that all children and youth face.

### 1 Analysis and Overview

#### A significant gender gap in enrolment at post-secondary and tertiary education levels

In East Asia and the Pacific, 225 million female students and 244 million male students were enrolled in all levels of education, from pre-primary to tertiary (UIS Data Centre). **Figure 1** compares the share of females and males enrolled in school, illustrating the divergence that occurs at the post-secondary level. Typically, there are small gender gaps in favour of boys up to upper secondary and post-secondary non-tertiary education. In short-cycle tertiary education and Bachelor’s degree programmes, female students slightly outnumber male students. However, the pathways of men and women veer away from each

**Figure 1:** Share of female and male enrollment, from pre-primary to research levels, selected countries, latest year available



other as more men pursue doctoral studies. This trend is behind the gender imbalance among researchers. In East Asia and the Pacific, there are four male researchers for every female researcher.

The sub-regional gender imbalance obscures significant differences at the national level. In many countries, the gender gap between girls and boys is small up to lower secondary education. The gap widens dramatically at the post-secondary level. In Cambodia and Lao PDR, more male students are enrolled at the tertiary level, and in Myanmar, female students are in the majority. As illustrated in Figure 1, the gender gap in enrolment at the doctoral level is striking, and mainly favours men. At the researcher level, data from Cambodia follow the sub-regional pattern – a large share of male researchers. More data about researchers are required from other countries to confirm a region level pattern at this level.

**Girls and boys from rural areas and the poorest families do not have an equal opportunity to complete their education**

Factors such as location and wealth often shape gender disparities at the country level. **Figure 2** compares the gender parity index of a completion

rate for the selected countries, as well as the indices for location and household wealth, from primary to tertiary education. National averages show small gaps between boys and girls completing primary school, but the differences become more pronounced at higher levels. In tertiary education, the gaps are widest as either women or men complete this level of education. For example, in Mongolia, women are more likely to complete tertiary education, regardless of their area of residence or level of wealth, while in Timor-Leste, men more likely to achieve this level.

A different picture emerges in urban and rural areas. Girls and boys in urban areas and those from the wealthiest households are close to parity. For instance, in 3 out of 5 countries in Figure 2, both girls and boys complete primary education. In contrast, children from rural areas and the poorest families are much less likely to complete their schooling. Poverty is the primary driver behind these disparities. In Cambodia, 168 adolescent girls complete upper secondary education for every 100 boys. In Lao PDR, only 28 adolescent girls from poor families graduate from upper secondary school for every 100 boys.

**Figure 2:** Gender parity index of completion rates by level of education, national average, location and wealth in selected countries, latest year available



### In Cambodia, women and men with disabilities are less likely to reap the benefits of formal education

Gender equity in education is also shaped by language, disability and migration status, although these characteristics are difficult to measure. However, some countries collect relevant data. For instance, in Cambodia, 57% of primary-school-age children with disabilities<sup>1</sup> were out of school in 2014, compared to 7% of their peers without disabilities (UIS, 2018). This rate was higher among disabled boys (72%) than disabled girls (40%). Even among those attending school, disabled children were less likely to complete primary education than non-disabled children. The primary completion rate was 73% for children without disabilities and 44% for children with disabilities. As a result, disabled adults (aged 25+) spent on average three years in school whereas adults without a disability stayed in school for 4.4 years. Disabled women attended school for 1.9 years, while disabled men spent 4 years in school.

<sup>1</sup> For the definition of disabilities, refer to UIS, 2018

## 2 Issue and Challenges

### Gender equality must include men and boys

Gender equality, required for the fulfillment of the Sustainable Goals, will remain out of reach without the full involvement and engagement of all. In East Asia and the Pacific, it is essential to acknowledge that boys are just as likely as girls to face obstacles in their educational pathway. Data show that in some countries girls are more likely to be enrolled in certain levels of education than boys, which leads to gender disparities in the subsequent levels of education. Furthermore, in many countries, boys are less likely to complete their education, especially at the secondary level, regardless of location or household wealth.

### More disaggregated indicators are needed to monitor gender equity

Children often face a complex web of disadvantages that combine and compound to exclude the most vulnerable. Moreover, the intersection of gender and other characteristics may enhance or exacerbate the obstacles that girls and boys face. (UIS, 2018). Currently, available indices can capture

only a partial picture of gender equity in education. While countries have made progress to improve the measurement of disparities using parity indices for gender, wealth and location, more work needs to be done to assess difficult-to-measure characteristics, such as language, disability and migrant status. Without more disaggregated data, policymakers will find it challenging to develop targeted interventions or invest in appropriate education plans for children who have complex individual needs.

### 3 Recommendations

#### Make a gender-responsive education sector plan for equitable quality education for all

Under the Education For All Agenda (EFA), countries made steady progress on the right to education for more children, youth and adults, but significant gender and other disparities remain. To bridge these gaps, the Education 2030 Agenda compels governments to transform education systems, and put in place gender-sensitive policies and plans.

A gender-responsive Education Sector Plan (ESP) can provide a framework to help fulfill SDG 4 in an equitable manner, and, as the Global Partnership for Education (GPE) points out, sex-disaggregated data will be the key to this process (GPE, 2017). A proper gender-responsive planning process will identify which girls and boys are most excluded from education, regarding ethnicity, disability household wealth or location.

To assist countries in this process, the GPE and UNICEF published a guide to developing gender-responsive ESPs (UNGEI & GPE, 2017). The guide provides information and tools for planners and practitioners to take a fresh look at gender equality, and suggests the following steps (**Figure 3**): (1) identify critical gender disparities and inequalities, and the factors contributing to them, (2) devise strategies and interventions to address gender disparities and inequalities, and (3) evaluate the extent to which gender equality issues are understood and addressed in the ESP.

**Figure 3:** Key steps in developing a gender-responsive education sector plan



Source: Adapted from UNGEI & GPE, 2017

### References

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These data sheets are a first step in strengthening the gender lens in analyses of data. More disaggregated and nested analyses can result in more specific and nuanced recommendations.