Sustainable Development Goal 4
Arab Regional Policy Brief

TARGET 4.1 FREE, EQUITABLE AND QUALITY PRIMARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION FOR ALL

Introduction

The education 2030 agenda was developed through a broad consultative forum and is rights-based reflecting a perspective of equity and inclusion, with particular attention to gender equality. The aim is expanding access to education for all that integrates relevant learning outcomes. In particular, education 2030 calls for the review of learning goals, contents, processes and infrastructure to ensure that learners acquire relevant foundational skills and competences at primary and secondary education.

During the Education for All (EFA) period, globally, countries initiated interventions to achieve universal primary education. Most of the Arab states region performed well enrolling more children in primary education, however, participation and retention faced compounded situations due to demographic pressures, conflict situations and marginalized vulnerable groups (GMR, 2015).

In 2015, there was global recognition in the Incheon declaration on education 2030 agenda, on the need for expanding free and compulsory to the first nine years of formal education. This means that there has to be additional years of public funded schooling for the school ready population, with emphasis on quality access to education. The key aspiration of the Arab states should be to have effective planning and management processes that address policy, participation, completion and learning in primary and secondary education.

In this perspective, the first Target of SDG 4 is that:

> '**By 2030, ensure that all girls and boys complete free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education leading to relevant and effective learning outcomes**'

This requires that countries embrace the right to education of its citizens by having all the children access equitable and quality primary and secondary education. In addition, there should be instruments that guide implementation that address national policy concerns, ensure education for all, improved participation and ascertain relevant learning outcomes.

Context of the Arab Region

The UNESCO Arab state region consists of 19 countries drawn from Northern Africa, the Levant and the Arabian Peninsula that stretches from the Atlantic Ocean to the Indian Ocean. The countries are clustered into four categories: Developed (Saudi Arabia, Qatar, UAE, Bahrain, Kuwait and Oman); Least developing countries (Mauritania, Sudan and Yemen); Mashreq (Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine and Syria); and Maghreb (Algeria, Libya, Morocco, and Tunisia).

According to the UNDP human development report (2014), extreme poverty in the Arab States increased and the rate of reducing undernourishment was below the target by 20%. Some of the countries faced declining economic growth and increase in debt. Most Arab countries are characterized by a youth bulge, a large informal economy, and almost 35-50% of the employed are working in non-agriculture sector. As at 2013, the region experienced the lowest rates of employment of up to 15%. The Arab States Region is the only developing region that reported increase in poverty and hunger between 1990 and 2014.

However, the region faces a significant challenge given the prevailing conflict, which exacerbates inequality, poverty, exclusion and marginalization and in particular access to quality education. A brief situation analysis of the Arab States Region is presented followed by policy recommendations for addressing inclusive access to quality primary and secondary education under the education 2030 agenda.

Situation Analysis of Access and Quality of Education

The key areas of focus in target 1 of education 2030 agenda are provision, participation, completion and learning in the primary and secondary education subsectors. The target requires that countries enact a policy on free and compulsory education at primary and secondary levels for a minimum of 9 years of schooling. The 2015 EFA national review indicated that all the Arab States countries had implemented universal primary education, with majority having a policy of first six years of free and compulsory education. The status of the Arab States Region is in participation rates, completion levels and learning outcomes are presented below.

Participation

Over the MDGs period, the Arab States Region participation rates improved as demonstrated by the proportion of school going age population accessing primary school and lower secondary. In 2013, the primary Adjusted Net Enrollment Rate (ANER) was 88.2 % (boys-89.7% and girls-86.7%) as compared to 87% (boys 89.6%, 84.2% girls) in 2009. However, a substantial proportion of school-going age children (14%) are still out of school. A similar trend was observed in lower secondary education that recorded a Gross Enrolment Rate (GER) of 88.2% (boys 92.4%, girls 83.9%) in 2009 as compared to 89.4 (Boys 93.4%, girls 85.2%) in 2012, dropping to 86.6 % (Boys, 90.3% and Girls, 82.7%) in 2013. The primary and secondary participation levels are illustrated in the figure 1 and 2 below.
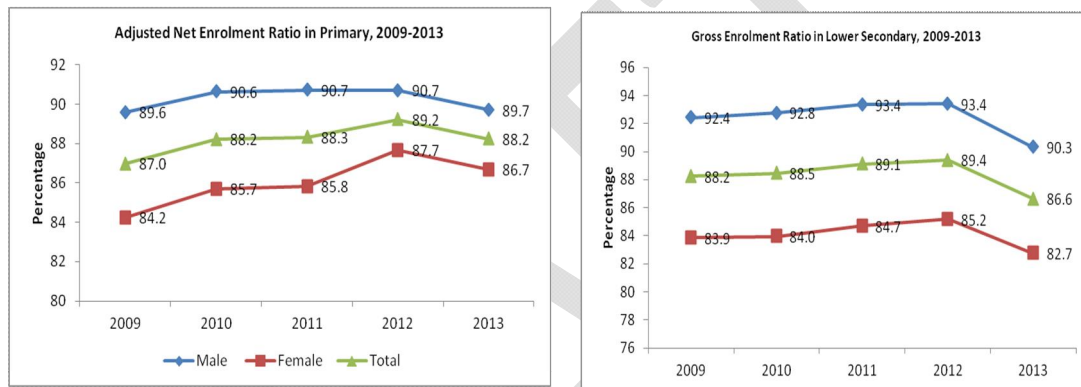
Completion

Completion is analyzed using the gross intake ratio (GIR) to last grade at the level of education and survival rate to last grade at the level of education. The GIR and the survival rate are used to measure the retention capacity and internal efficiency of an education system. The GIR to the last grade of primary rose marginally from 85.3% to 87.6% in 2009 and 2013, respectively as illustrated in figure 3. The survival rate in primary declined from 84.9% in 2010 to 80.6% in 2012 in figure 4. This implies that the Arab States Region systems were not operating at full retention capacity and hence inefficient at primary education.

Primary Education Gross Intake Rate to last Grade by Sex, 2009-2013

Lower secondary Gross Intake Rate to last Grade , 2009-2013

Survival Rate in Primary to the last Grade, 2009-2012

	2009	2010	2011	2012
Male	84.7	85.7	85.0	80.4
Female	83.3	84.0	83.5	80.9
Total	84.0	84.9	84.3	80.6

At lower secondary, as shown in figure 5, the GIR rose from 66.2% in 2009 to 77.4% in 2012, followed by a significant decline to 68.7% in 2013. In overall, the Arab States Region witnessed a decline in completion levels in primary and secondary education. This decline could be attributed to the instability that occurred in some of the Arab states countries.

Learning

Most of the countries in the Arab States Region demonstrated commitment to improving learning outcomes by incorporating national and international assessments including TIMMS, PISA & EGRA/EGMA. The learning assessment outcomes showed that the quality of learning in the Arab regional is far below international averages. For instance, results in reading, of the participating Arab States countries indicate that the average Grade 4 students perform at an average of 100 points lower than the World Average and 150 points below the top 20 countries' average (UNESCO GMR, 2015; PIRLS, 2012). The TIMMS 2011 outcomes indicates that none of the Arab States Region participating countries achieved the average international score of 500 in both Mathematics and Science. Similarly, some of the Arab State Regions countries with the highest scores in PISA tests

were lowest ranking in the World. For instance, UAE and Qatar, highest performing in the region, were ranked 48 and 63 respectively, in the global ranking. Also, in Early Grade Reading Assessment EGRA(year), for grades 2 and 3, results illustrate that children are generally not reading at expected standards and therefore poor foundation in early learning.

Policy Recommendations

Based on the existing data, the Arab States Region require an elaborate strategy and informed actions to deliver quality all-inclusive access in primary and secondary education. To achieve this, requires the following policy recommendations:

i. Enact policy instruments that ensure all-inclusive quality access to primary and secondary education

These will involve review, development and implementation of policies through stakeholder consultations that guarantee a minimum of nine years of free and compulsory primary and secondary education. A legal institutional framework that will be achieved should take into consideration the modalities of financing, monitoring and guaranteeing the rights of quality education to all the citizens.

ii. Implement targeted interventions that address access to education for marginalized and vulnerable population

The region has been faced in a conflict situation that makes young people and communities vulnerable. The proportion of out-of-school children has been on the increase and hence need to look at considerations for alternative flexible learning programmes.

iii. Develop deliberate action that address retention and transition in primary and secondary education

Mechanisms should be in place to address retention and completion, especially given adverse factors that affect the school going age children, by addressing re-entry in school programmes and participation in non-formal and technical and vocation education pathways.

iv. Invest in provision of quality education and monitoring learner achievement

To ensure that learning is taking place and the relevant competencies have been acquired, countries should have national assessment system to assess learning outcomes at the end of education cycles and formative assessments that are directly linked to pedagogy. The assessment framework provides evidence on the relevance of the learning takes place, and conformation of the extent of acquisition of reading, writing and numeracy skills.

References

UNESCO (2015) Education 2030 Incheon declaration and Framework for Action: Towards Inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning for all

UNESCO IBE (2013) Learning in the post-2015 education and development agenda, *Geneva, Switzerland, 25 September 2013*

UNDP (2014) Human Development Report