

Situation Analysis of SDG 4 with a Gender Lens



Target 4.2

By 2030, ensure that all girls and boys have access to quality early childhood development, care and pre-primary education.

Early childhood is a critical phase of human development. Cognitive, social and emotional skills are primed, paving the way for health, wellbeing and lifelong educational achievements. Target 4.2 reaffirms the importance of laying a strong foundation for learning with good quality, inclusive early childhood care and education that helps ensure a child's readiness to learn.

Gender discrimination can limit access to learning opportunities. In early childhood, stereotypical gender roles for girls or boys may restrict a child's opportunities to learn, play or attend school. Children with learning disabilities, or who are in poor mental or physical health may also experience exclusion. Exposing both boys and girls equally to early learning opportunities is still a challenge in many countries in the East Asia and the Pacific region. Lack of public funding and uncoordinated services, as limited community engagement, and more importantly

limited parental involvement¹, may contribute to exclusion from early childhood education and care.

Integrating Target 4.2 into national education sector policies and plans should be a priority for governments in the region, along with ensuring that boys and girls have equal opportunities to participate in high-quality early childhood education programmes, in line with the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED).

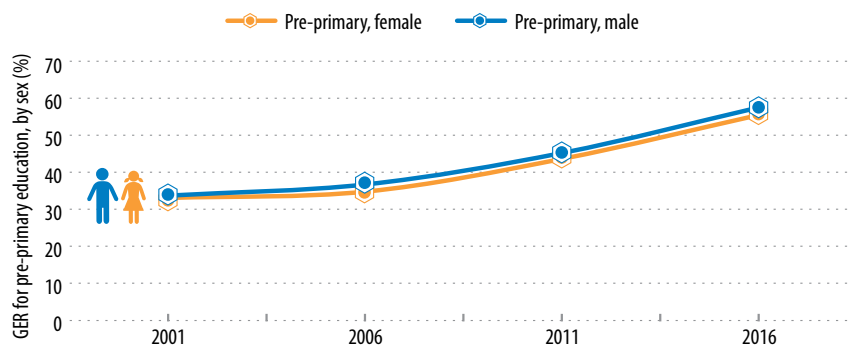
1 Analysis and Overview

Equal participation among boys and girls

Target 4.2 has two global indicators: the participation rate in early childhood education (ECE), and the proportion of the children who are developmentally on track.

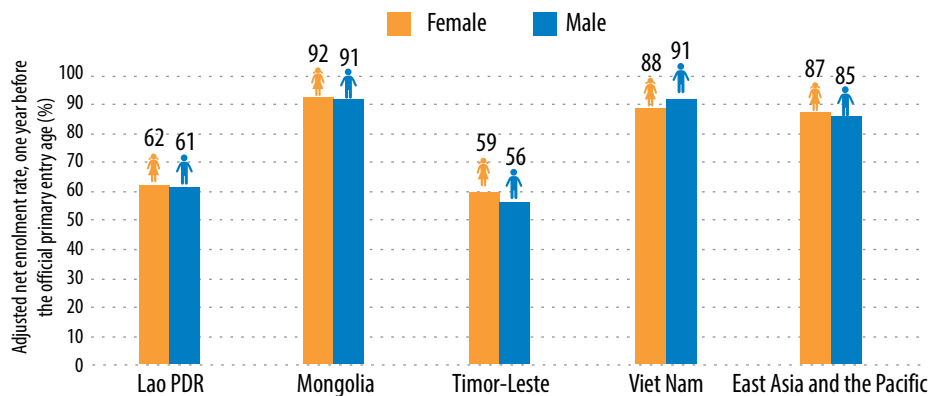
¹ Target 4.2.3 indicator looks at parental care as one of the critical components of (home) learning environments.

Figure 1: Gross enrolment ratio in pre-primary education (ISCED 02), by sex, East Asia and the Pacific, 2001–2016



Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS) database, <http://data.uis.unesco.org>, [April 2018].

Figure 2: Participation rate in organized learning one year before the official primary entrance age, by sex, 2016



Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS) database, <http://data.uis.unesco.org>, [April 2018].

In East Asia and the Pacific, the gross enrolment ratio in pre-primary education grew by 23 percentage points for both boys and girls between 2001 and 2016 (**Figure 1**). In 2016, the gross enrolment ratio in pre-primary education was 57% for boys and 56% for girls. Just over half of all boys and girls between the ages of three and five participated in pre-primary education programmes (ISCED 02²).

Indicator 4.2.2 covers the participation of children in any organized learning programme one year before the primary school entrance age.³ In Timor-Leste, a little more than half of children participate in an organized learning programme the year before entering primary education, while in Lao PDR about two-thirds of children are enrolled in some form of early learning (**Figure 2**). In Mongolia, the

participation rate is above 90%. In Timor-Leste, boys are at a slight disadvantage, lagging behind girls by three percentage points.

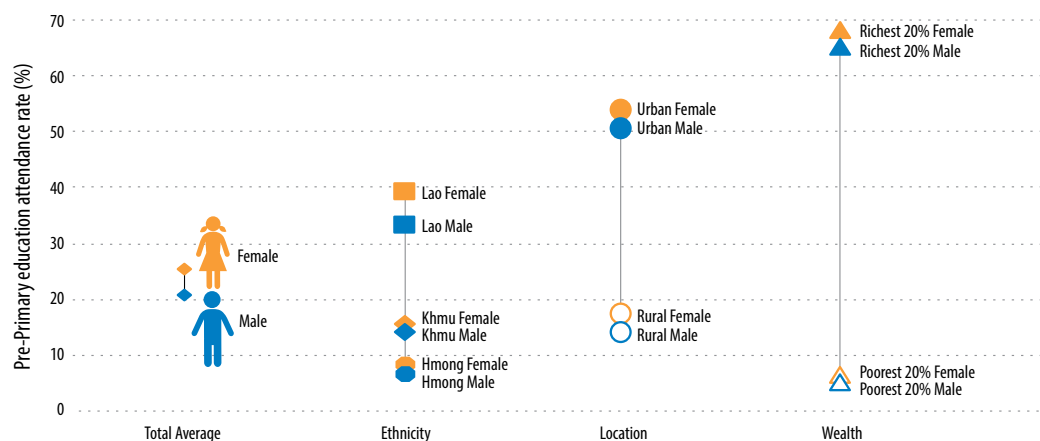
Nested examination of gender in Lao PDR

Aggregated national averages mask many issues specific to different social groups. Disaggregating the pre-primary education attendance rate for children under the age of five in Lao PDR reveals gender disparities entangled with ethnicity, location or household wealth, among factors. Girls of the Lao-Tai ethnic group have a slightly higher attendance rate of 39% compared to boys, at 33%. The rates for males and females belonging to the Khmu or Hmong ethnic groups are even lower. Among both Khmu and Hmong, boys lag behind girls by two percentage points. The same trend can be observed when data are examined by location and wealth. Urban boys and girls are about three times more likely to attend pre-primary school than their rural peers. In urban areas, 50% of boys and 54% of girls are enrolled, compared to 14% of rural boys and 17% of girls. Wealth is the primary

² In the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED), early childhood education (ECE) appears in two sub-levels: ISCED 01 for children from birth up to two years of age, and ISCED 02 for children between three year of age and the legal age for primary school enrolment (UIS, 2012).

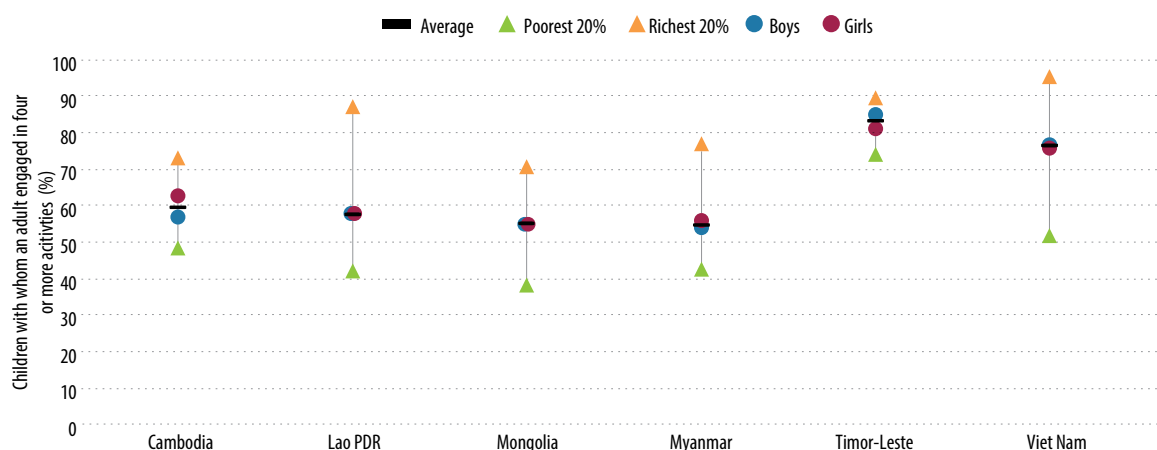
³ Organized learning consists of a coherent set or sequence of educational activities designed with the intention of achieving pre-determined learning outcomes, or the accomplishment of a specific set of educational tasks (UIS, 2017). Organized learning includes programmes that offer a combination of education and care. Participation in early childhood education (ISCED 01 and 02) and in primary education (ISCED 1) are both included.

Figure 3: Pre-primary education attendance for boys and girls aged 3 to 5 years old in Lao PDR, by total average, ethnicity, location and wealth, 2011



Source: World Inequalities Database on Education (WIDE), www.education-inequalities.org, based on MICS 2011.

Figure 4: Percentage of children between the ages of 3 and 5 with whom an adult has reported engaging in four or more activities in the past 3 days



Source: Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS): Viet Nam 2014, Mongolia 2014, Lao PDR 2011; Demographic and Health Survey (DHS): Cambodia 2014, Myanmar 2016, Timor-Leste 2016.

factor driving attendance in pre-primary education among both boys and girls. Boys and girls from the wealthiest 20% are 60 percentage points above the most impoverished boys and girls when it comes to attendance in pre-primary education.

More intellectual stimulation in wealthier homes

The second indicator under Target 4.2 covers the *percentage of children under five years of age who are experiencing positive and stimulating home learning environments*. The home is the primary environment where meaningful interaction takes place, and where children can experience learning in a safe and protected setting. In the selected countries (Figure 4), between half and three-fourths of boys and girls were found to have recently engaged in meaningful activities with an adult at home. In Mongolia, 55% of children experience learning in

safe and protected settings, which in Viet Nam the rate was 76%. However, there are gender disparities in some countries. Girls are favoured in Cambodia and Timor-Leste by 5% and 4%, respectively.

Household wealth -- or the absence of it -- has an impact on whether adults engage in nurturing activities with their children (UNESCO, forthcoming). Children from the poorest 20% of households are almost twice as likely to miss out on educational activities at home compared to the richest 20%. In Viet Nam, 96% of children from the wealthiest families were engaged in learning activities, compared to 52% of children from impoverished households. In Mongolia, only 38% of children from poor households experienced nurturing activities. While poverty is a dominant factor, it is clear that more attention is needed to the intersection between poverty, gender and ethnicity.

2 Issues and Challenges

ECE participation is entangled with socio-economic circumstances

Boys and girls who do not or cannot attend ECE programmes usually come from disadvantaged backgrounds (e.g., poor families, children with disabilities, ethnic minorities) (Plan International, 2017). Also, the mother's circumstances may dictate whether a child participates in ECE programmes. For instance, a mother bound by work may not have the time to send her child to school (ibid).

Poorer families are less prepared to support early learning at home

Participation rates in ECE programmes are comparatively low in countries where families tend not to adequately engage with their children at home, especially among poorer households (UNESCO, forthcoming). As a consequence, it is these children who need organized learning the most.

Lack of adequate ECE data hinders tracking progress

In many countries from Asia-Pacific, ECE is not part of basic education, which means administrative data are not collected on these levels of education.

3 Recommendations

Identify the marginalized

Improve participation in organized learning among marginalized populations by identifying boys and

girls by their socio-economic background. Disability, wealth, ethnicity, language or migratory statuses, as well as the education levels of parents, can influence whether and which children participate in early learning programmes.

Develop strategic community models for learning

In addition to public financing models, provide community-financed kindergarten or preschool alternatives to expose boys and girls to otherwise unavailable toys, learning opportunities and nutritious meals.

Collaborate with parents and caregivers as partners

Build on parents' knowledge, encourage fathers to be active partners, and advocate for policies and plans (including paid parental leave for both parents) that promote macro-level gender equality. Parents should be encouraged to participate in community groups where they can share, discuss and plan for their children's education.

Use tools to investigate needed interventions

Culturally relevant tools such as The East Asia-Pacific Early Child Development Scales (EAP-ECDS) can be used to understand the status of early childhood education in a given population, to compare development outcomes between groups and to inform evidence-based, gender-responsive policy-making for services and programmes (Rao et al., 2014).

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.

