

Key barriers to girls' education in the ASEAN and Pacific region

Roz Price

Institute of Development Studies

12 October 2020

Question

- *Who are the girls in the ASEAN and Pacific region that experience marginalisation and are inhibited from completing basic education and transitioning to secondary education? This should highlight the demographic sub-groups of girls, and might include factors such as religion, caste, ethnicity, language, disability, lack of citizenship, extreme poverty, and conflict.*

Connected questions:

- *What are the key trends and gender disparities around access, retention and learning outcomes at primary and lower secondary level?*
- *What are the factors that inhibit gender equality? This might include gender based violence, early marriage and access to skills training and paid work.*

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The K4D helpdesk service provides brief summaries of current research, evidence, and lessons learned. Helpdesk reports are not rigorous or systematic reviews; they are intended to provide an introduction to the most important evidence related to a research question. They draw on a rapid desk-based review of published literature and consultation with subject specialists.

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1. Summary

This rapid review explores the barriers to girls' education, with a focus on the most marginalised and why. The report focuses on the East Asia and Pacific region, with a focus on Cambodia, Fiji, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Papua New Guinea, Philippines, Solomon Islands, Thailand, Vanuatu and Viet Nam. The East Asia and Pacific (EAP) region is extremely diverse, accommodating vast economic differences as well as disparities in geography, gender equality and ethnicity.

The fundamental right to education is clearly acknowledged in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), and education is vital to meeting the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), with SDG4 – ensuring inclusive and equitable education for all by 2030 – recognising its importance. SDG4 emphasises learning outcomes, skills acquisition, and equity in both development and emergency settings.

Education in the EAP region has received a lot of attention in the past 20 years and there is a plethora of information and reports out there, and the evidence base is vast. Hence, given the limited timeframe for this review it was not possible to include all resources identified. The majority of literature used in this report is grey literature, with key resources coming from UNICEF East Asia and Pacific (EAP)¹ and UNESCO Bangkok.² It is important to note that these two organisations cover slightly different regional areas, so where regional information is given, this can include data for different countries. It was not always possible to distinguish exactly which countries were included in regional statistics. Information from the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP)³ is also utilised. There are also a number of data sources for different education indicators (such as out-of-school and education completion rates disaggregated by different factors). A key resource is the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS), which collects education statistics annually from official national statistical authorities.⁴ Many reports use the UIS as their data source. However, it is important to

¹ UNICEF EAP covers: Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia; China; Indonesia; DPR Korea; Lao PDR; Malaysia; Mongolia; Myanmar; Pacific Islands (Cook Islands, Fiji, Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Micronesia, Niue, Nauru, Palau, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tokelau, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu); Papua New Guinea; Philippines; Thailand; Timor-Leste; Viet Nam. UNICEF EAP reports cover a similar area to that which this review is most interested in and so the majority of regional information is taken from its reports, however, information from UNESCO Bangkok, which covers a wider regional area, is also included.

² This includes the Asia and Pacific Regional Bureau for Education and the Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific of the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS), and also works as a Cluster Office in the Asia-Pacific region. UNESCO Bangkok covers: Afghanistan; Australia; Bangladesh; Bhutan; Brunei Darussalam; Cambodia; China; Cook Islands; Democratic People's Republic of Korea; Fiji; India; Indonesia; Iran; Japan; Kazakhstan; Kiribati; Kyrgyzstan; Lao People's Democratic Republic; Malaysia; Maldives; Marshall Islands; Micronesia (Federated States of); Mongolia; Myanmar; Nauru; Nepal; New Zealand; Niue; Pakistan; Palau; Papua New Guinea; Philippines; Republic of Korea; Samoa; Singapore; Solomon Islands; Sri Lanka; Tajikistan; Thailand; Timor-Leste; Tonga; Turkmenistan; Tuvalu; Uzbekistan; Vanuatu; Viet Nam.

³ UNESCAP has 53 member states in the Asia-Pacific region and often refers to "Asia-Pacific" as a whole in its reports.

⁴ The information collected includes data on education programmes, access, participation, progression, completion by all levels of education. There is a focus on data specific to SDG4 targets. However, it should be noted that the data is also based on Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS) and UNICEF's Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys (MICS), which are often out of date. Furthermore, data can be missing for a country or indicator as the database is reliant on self-reporting from countries. Another limitation in the database is the lack of disaggregated data on students with disabilities. See <http://data.uis.unesco.org/>

acknowledge the data limitations, as there is missing or old data and inconsistency across various data sources. A key resource used is a recent extensive UNICEF EAPRO report from 2019 looking at the evidence on out-of-school children and adolescents in the EAP region.

Due to the limitations of this rapid review and broadness of the topics, not all aspects in relation to marginalisation and girls' education in the EAP region could be explored. For example, working girls (child labour) and child mothers were not explored in detail, neither were the connections between religion, gender and exclusion. Some of the issues that were explored were only looked at briefly due to time constraints.

Key findings:

- Gender parity in education has increasingly been achieved across the EAP region. In EAP, boys are just as likely as girls to face obstacles in their educational pathway. In some countries, boys are less likely to be enrolled in certain levels of education than girls, and are less likely to complete their education, especially at the secondary level, regardless of location or household wealth (UNESCO Bangkok Office, UNICEF & UNGEI, 2018b). Across EAP girls made up a larger proportion of out-of-school children at primary level.
- Exclusion can take many forms and have many causes, and is very context specific and complex. Regional and national numbers can mask lower-level trends and exclusions, especially of the most marginalised children. Here, factors of disadvantage often interact with each other in complex ways (especially gender, wealth and location).
- Some of the key characteristics to exclusion in education in the ASEAN region include: extreme poverty; access due to location (households in rural or remote communities and children in urban slums often have less access to education); children with disabilities; indigenous groups, linguistic minorities, orphan and migrant children are also vulnerable to exclusion and discrimination. However, it is important to note that these factors can apply to both girls and boys.
- The most vulnerable populations are usually characterised by several combined factors of disadvantage – such as gender, ethnicity and geographic location – which are not easily separated (e.g. ethnic minority girls from poorest household in remote rural area) (UNICEF EAPRO, 2019, p.8). This highlights the importance of understanding intersectionality (see Herbert, 2019 for example).
- Wealth (i.e. extreme poverty) continuously emerges across surveys and reports as being the most recurrent disadvantage for people in completing education in the Asia-Pacific region (e.g. UNESCO Bangkok Office, UNICEF & UNGEI, 2018a; 2018b; UNESCAP, 2019). Poverty is often the primary driver behind disparities in education access.
- Covid-19 is compounding these existing issues and barriers (through access, quality, equity and gender equality), impacting most on girls in the EAP region. The impact of school closures from Covid-19 will exacerbate the problems of attendance and dropout, increasing inequality across the region (UNESCO Bangkok Office, 2020).
- A key limitation emerging from the literature reviewed is the lack of adequate data in relation to the most marginalised groups in the Asia-Pacific region. Particularly in Pacific countries and least developed countries. In particular, difficult-to-measure characteristics include language, disability and migrant status.

Key barriers that arise due to these characteristics that keep children out-of-school include (UNICEF EAPRO, 2019, pp.10-12):

- Costs related to school fees, uniforms, pre-primary schooling etc.
- Priority of child labour in the poorest households – including agricultural and household work, especially girls.
- Rural-urban migration is linked to absenteeism and being overage in their grade from repetition, increasing risks of dropping out.
- International migrants can struggle to get education due to a lack of access, stigmatisation, documentation, language and cost barriers.
- Children and adolescents from minority groups, often in remote rural areas, are more likely to be over-age in grades and have lower completion rates. Cultural traditions in some ethnic minority communities also negatively impact the educational opportunities of girls. Girls can face issues of early marriage, teenage pregnancy and household obligations which can reduce the duration of their schooling.
- Children whose primary language is not the language of instruction in school are more likely to drop out or fail in early grades.
- Children with disabilities often lack physical access to schools, face stigmatisation and discrimination. The lack of quality data on the incidence of disabilities across countries can also limit the development of adequate policies.
- Physical access to schools in remote areas is a key barrier to girls in rural areas and those with disabilities (e.g. long distances to travel, poor infrastructure, lack of safe sanitation and water spaces, or a lack of full grades being offered are common issues).
- Entry and registration requirements such as birth certificates are a significant administrative barrier to enrolment for many families, especially from the poorest households and migrants.

2. General statistics

There has been much improvement in access to education globally. A recent report by UNICEF, UN Women & Plan International (2020) celebrating 25 years of progress in girl's education, notes that the number of out-of-school girls has dropped by 79 million in the last two decades and girls have become more likely to be in secondary school than boys in the last decade. However, the report emphasises that gains in education have made little headway in helping shape a more equal, less violent environment for girls, with violence against women and girls still common.

Out-of-school estimates

Estimates of the number of out-of-school children can vary due to differences in data sources, countries included in estimates and data gaps. This can add further complexity and confusion to the subject. In general, EAP has made significant progress in sending more children to school. However, UNICEF⁵ East Asia and Pacific Regional Office (2019) estimate that of the 174 million

⁵ UNICEF has pulled together detailed education profiles that summarise data on education systems and education policy implementation across different regions of interest and for individual countries. These profiles

adolescent girls and boys of secondary school age in EAP, 24 million are still out of school. An estimated 1 in 3 children in Eastern and Southeast Asia and 1 in 5 children in the Pacific – over 70 million children – do not obtain the expected minimum proficiency in reading and maths at lower secondary level.

UIS statistics (2019 cited in UNICEF EAPRO, 2019, p.4) puts the number of **out-of-school children and adolescents in EAP in 2017 at 35 million children** (see Figure 1 below). Of these, 4 million were of pre-primary school age (13% of 1 year before the official primary entry age), 7 million were of primary school age (4% of 6 to 11 year old's), 8 million were of lower secondary school age (8% of 12 to 14 year old's), and another 16 million were of upper secondary school age (19% of 15 to 17 year old's). **Girls made up a larger proportion of out-of-school children at primary level, whereas boys dominated in pre-primary, and lower and upper secondary levels.**

A factsheet looking at SDG Target 4.1, finds that girls accounted for 53% of out-of-school children of primary school age in 2016 in the EAP region. In Lao PDR, Mongolia, and Papua New Guinea this was more than 55%. However, boys accounted for 55% of out-of-school adolescents of lower secondary school age in 2016 and 62% for upper secondary schools (UNESCO Bangkok Office, UNICEF & UNGEI, 2018a). Although there are exceptions, for example, boys are more likely to complete upper secondary education than girls in Cambodia, Timor-Leste and Vanuatu (UNESCO Bangkok Office, UNICEF & UNGEI, 2018a, p.2). In many countries, **the gender gap between girls and boys is small up to lower secondary education but widens dramatically at the post-secondary level** (UNESCO Bangkok Office, UNICEF & UNGEI, 2018b, p.2).

UNICEF EAPRO (2019, p.4) emphasise that lower and upper secondary school attendance has seen significant improvements over the past 20 years, especially for girls. However, primary education has seen little improvement over the same timeframe, “indicating that the most vulnerable and excluded children are yet to be reached and included” (UNICEF EAPRO, 2019, p.4). **Although girls face more barriers in accessing primary education in the region, once enrolled they are more likely than boys to progress and complete primary education and higher levels of education** (UNESCO Bangkok Office, UNICEF & UNGEI, 2018a, p.4).

Exploring SDG Target 4.5, a report plots the adjusted parity indices of net school attendance rates in terms of gender (GPIA), location (LPIA) and wealth of households (WPIA), from primary to upper secondary education to demonstrate disparities in access and participation across countries (with data available). See Figure 2 in Annex 1. The report and figure emphasise that **almost all countries that have data available, attendance has reached gender parity in primary education** (Afghanistan and Pakistan demonstrate the largest gender parity in favour of boys). However, in secondary education the disparities become more pronounced, especially in upper secondary education. For example, Thailand maintains parity for gender, location and wealth in primary and lower secondary education, but inequalities emerge in upper secondary education. Significant disparities for gender, location and wealth in lower and upper secondary education come through for Lao PDR, which largely maintained parity in primary education.

are to support UNICEF's Strategic Plan 2018-2021. The country, regional and global profiles include information from a range of internal UNICEF sources and external sources (such as UIS and World Bank). See <https://data.unicef.org/resources/unicef-strategic-plan-education-country-profiles/> [accessed 7/10/2020]

Typology of countries in EAP

UNICEF EAPRO (2019) studied out-of-school children in EAP region using the **Five Dimensions of Exclusion model** of the Global Out-of-School Children Initiative (OOSCI), drawing on qualitative and quantitative information and 10 existing OOSCI national studies (Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Myanmar, Papua New Guinea, the Philippines, Thailand, Timor-Leste and Viet Nam). Overall, they found that the region has succeeded in reducing the proportion of out-of-school children at primary level and secondary level over the past 15 years. Drawing on their data analysis and key findings on out-of-school children and adolescents for each of the five dimensions, the report derives three broad typologies in the EAP region (UNICEF EAPRO, 2019, p.8):

- **“Typology 1: Countries with high out-of-school rates:** Across all education levels throughout many Pacific States, Cambodia, Papua New Guinea and Timor-Leste, more than 10% of children are out of school. Attachment to schooling also tends to be weak for some of these countries (Cambodia, Solomon Islands, Timor-Leste), as indicated by high drop-out rates in primary and/ or lower secondary levels.”
- **“Typology 2: Countries with weak attachment to primary education:** In Cook Islands, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Samoa and Tuvalu, although enrolment in primary education is relatively high (less than 10% out-of-school rates), attachment to school is low with high drop-out rates before completion of the primary education cycle.”
- **“Typology 3: Countries with weak transitions and/or attachment to lower secondary education:** More than 10% of children remain out of school or drop out at lower secondary age and do not finish the compulsory education cycles in Fiji, Indonesia, Malaysia, Niue, Philippines, Thailand, Tonga, and Viet Nam. These countries are nearly all lower-middle income countries but are quite diverse. In some countries, such as Indonesia, Malaysia and Tonga, a significant number of children are not continuing and/or completing lower secondary education after high levels of primary school participation. Some countries could be included in both Typologies 2 and 3 – such as Myanmar and Lao PDR – which face both weak attachment to primary education and weak transitions to lower secondary schools.”

The report also highlights that for some countries girls are less likely to attend or complete schools than boys, however, **gender parity has increasingly been achieved across the region** (see figure 1 below). UNICEF EAPRO (2019, p.9) finds that “Girls are more likely to be out of pre-primary school (Dimension 1) in Micronesia, F.S., Mongolia, Brunei Darussalam, Thailand and Marshall Islands.” In contrast, the report highlights that “The disadvantage for boys (relative to girls) can be observed across all education levels in different countries. For example, boys are less likely to attend pre-primary school in Palau, Nauru, Cook Islands and Malaysia or primary school in Marshall Islands, Timor-Leste, and the Philippines. The scale of the disadvantage tends to grow in lower secondary education.” Boys are also potentially at a higher risk of dropping out in Cambodia, Lao PDR, Marshall Islands, Palau, the Philippines, and Timor-Leste as they are more likely to be overage for their grade.⁶

⁶ Over-age enrolment is highlighted as a drop-out risk factor by UNICEF EAPRO (2019, p.76), as higher proportions of late-entry children are correlated with a larger risk of dropping out from school, although the

See: Figure 1: Overview of out-of-school children and adolescents in EAP region (by sex and level), UNICEF EAPRO (2019, p.5, using UIS data, 2019), <https://www.unicef.org/eap/media/3521/file/Second%20decade%20-%20education%20in%20EAP.pdf>

The report also looks at different factors affecting disadvantage in attending school in the region. **Factors include where children live, their wealth, mother's education, ethnolinguistic association, and gender** (UNICEF EAPRO, 2019, p.66). Other factors that are more difficult to analyse due to a lack of quantitative and qualitative data include **child labour, ethnicity, disability and migrant status**. The factors of disadvantage often interact with each other in a complex way. For example, in Myanmar, being born female and poor in an urban area faces the highest exclusion rate from attending school (at 26% out-of-school), in contrast, boys in the same urban poor family only have a 5% out-of-school rate. Also in Myanmar there are larger gender gaps against girls among the poorest in both rural and urban areas compared to wealthiest households and that the country is near gender parity overall. This demonstrates how national statistics and trends can mask lower level trends. These findings also emphasise the complexity of the issues and data.

3. Trends in marginalisation

Identifying the most marginalised

Regional and national averages can mask disparities within a country; **even when the rates of gender disparity among out-of-school children at the national level is small, girls and boys from the poorest households (both urban and rural) are the most excluded children**. For example, in “Laos girls from the most impoverished households in urban areas were most likely to be excluded among girls of primary school age, with an out-of-school rate of 32%. Similarly, the poorest boys in rural areas had the highest out-of-school rate, at 22%, among boys of the same age group” (UNESCO Bangkok Office, UNICEF & UNGEI, 2018a, p.2). Figure 3 in the Annex demonstrates these disparities, showing completion rates for a selection of East Asia and Pacific countries at primary, lower and upper secondary levels, disaggregated by gender, wealth and location. It highlights the considerable disparities in school completion rates among both girls and boys from the poorest households. Girls, especially from poorer households, are still at risk of being pressured to leave school early due to financial and cultural reasons (UNESCO Bangkok Office, UNICEF & UNGEI, 2018a, p.4). Furthermore, **for both girls and boys, the intersectionality of gender and other characteristics (such as poverty) increase the chance of exclusion from education. Poverty is often the primary driver behind disparities in access** (UNESCO Bangkok Office, UNICEF & UNGEI, 2018a; 2018b). Other factors affecting gender disparity in education include language, disability and migration status, although these characteristics are much more difficult to measure (UNESCO Bangkok Office, UNICEF & UNGEI, 2018b, p.3).

relationship is not easy to establish. For example, in the Philippines, Marshall Islands, Cambodia, Lao PDR, Timor-Leste, Vanuatu, Papua New Guinea, and the Solomon Islands 20% or more of children in lower secondary are at least 2 years over-age.

A 2019 report by UNESCAP⁷ highlights that completion rates in secondary education fluctuate dramatically both across and within countries in the Asia and Pacific region. In general **the report finds that secondary education outcomes became more equal across the Asia and Pacific region between 2009 and 2016; the rural-urban divide has seen a significant reduction in secondary completion; and the gender disparity has broadly converged for secondary education. However, persons with disabilities are more likely to experience exclusion and discrimination that prevent them from completing secondary education, and this has not markedly improved over this time.**

UNESCAP's (2019) analysis of the furthest behind for countries in the region compares two points in time (early-2000s and mid-2010s) using data from DHSs and MICs to identify and then track the groups that are the furthest behind and reflects on the composition of these groups. Their analysis finds:

- Tracking these groups over time has shown that the furthest behind groups in most countries tend to complete secondary education to a much greater extent than was the case 15 years ago. For example, in Indonesia and Thailand the rate of secondary education completion doubled in 10 years. In Viet Nam it increased four-fold.
- However, closing the gap with the population at large is much more difficult, as this requires that the groups left furthest behind be empowered to advance faster than the overall average of the population. This type of convergence has taken place in Thailand.

The report highlights five circumstances, which, in different combinations, restrict the furthest behind groups from completing secondary education, namely, **wealth, gender, place of residence, ethnic or minority status, religion or caste**. Findings include (UNESCAP, 2019):

- **Wealth:** "Across surveys and over time, the most recurrent disadvantage is belonging to the bottom 40 per cent of the national wealth distribution. Bottom 40 learners experience higher dropout rates, especially in secondary education, when income-generating opportunities may become available and the relative investment in education does not seem worthwhile in the short-term. For this economic group, caring responsibilities may also contribute to higher drop-out rates, especially among girls." (p.30)
- **Gender:** "Gender (being a woman in almost all cases) has also remained equally significant over time. For most countries, if the furthest behind group consisted of women in the early 2000s, such is still the case in the mid-2010s. This applies, for example, to Cambodia and Timor-Leste where women, living in the rural areas and belonging to the bottom 40 of the wealth distribution have kept reporting the lowest completion rates. The same holds for men in the Philippines. The persistent importance of gender for the furthest behind groups indicates that the cultural, institutional and social context has not

⁷ The report calculates gaps in secondary education completion rates according to differences in location (urban vs rural), gender and disability. The report recognises that several other factors also shape a child's likelihood of completing secondary education (including ethnicity, income level, and education levels of parents), but does not look into these factors due to data limitations. The report also highlights the difficulties in looking at people with or without disabilities due to a lack of adequate data. The analysis uses the proxy of "having a health problem" to address this gap. The analysis also focuses on completion rates for the 20–35 year age group, an age group that captures the outcomes of education-focused initiatives implemented since the 1990s. The report first looks at gaps in education in general, then looks at the impact of multiple intersecting disadvantages (i.e. gender, location, wealth) on education and creating deeper exclusion.

changed sufficiently to erase gender divides in education completion over the past decade in Asia-Pacific countries.” (p.30)

- **Place of residence:** “The impact of the rural-urban divide is diminishing. Living in rural areas no longer characterizes the furthest behind groups in a number of countries, including the Philippines, Thailand, and Viet Nam. In others, however, such as Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, and Timor-Leste, living in rural areas still impacts the completion of secondary education.” (p.30)
- **Ethnic or minority status:** “The importance of ethnicity and language as a barrier to completing secondary education among the layers of disadvantage has become less prominent. Belonging to ethnic minorities or minor language-speaking groups seems not to influence outcomes in Lao PDR. Education policies protecting against discrimination have contributed to the inclusion of all in education.” (p.30)
- **Religion or caste:** Religion and caste have started to characterise the furthest behind groups, in the later surveys, in India and Viet Nam. (p.31)
- **Change in most disadvantaged group:** The intersections of disadvantage have changed in some countries, leading to the formation of a new furthest behind group. In most of these countries, the change was due to the decreasing importance of rural residence as a factor for disadvantage (e.g. Philippines, Thailand and Viet Nam) (p.33).
 - In **Viet Nam**, the composition of the furthest behind group has changed completely. Whereas the group consisted of women living in rural areas, in households belonging to the bottom 40, now the furthest behind are people in the bottom 40 who are either Buddhist, Christian or from another minority religion. (p.33)
 - In **Lao PDR**, the furthest behind continue to be women, in the bottom 40, living in rural areas. While in 2000, the furthest behind also belonged to an ethnic minority, such as the Hmong or Kammu, this no longer characterises those with the lowest completion rate. At the same time, completion rates dropped from an already very low 2.4 per cent to only 0.8 per cent of rural women in bottom 40 households completing their secondary education. (p.33)
 - In **Cambodia, Indonesia and Timor-Leste**, the furthest behind groups have remained the same since the 2000s. Belonging to a household in the bottom 40 of the wealth distribution, is a key commonality amongst the furthest behind. Being a woman and living in a rural area are other common traits amongst the furthest behind groups. (p.33)

Inequality and education

Inequalities in income and wealth are driven to a large extent by unequal opportunities, such as access to education, thus forming a self-reinforcing circle (UNESCAP, 2017).

Despite the significant socio-economic gains achieved in the Asia-Pacific region since the 1990s, many countries in the region have experienced a widening of existing inequalities. In particular, according to a UNESCAP report (2018), income and wealth inequalities are on the rise and access to basic opportunities are unevenly shared. Although income and wealth inequality vary across sub-regions and countries. For example, income inequality decreased over

the last 20 years in Cambodia, Malaysia and Thailand but increased (sharply) in Indonesia and Papua New Guinea and (to a lesser degree) in Lao PDR and Viet Nam (UNESCAP, 2018, p.20).

Income and wealth inequalities are strongly linked to other dimensions of development, including access to education. Analysis in the report using the D-index⁸ highlights large inequalities in educational attainment and other opportunities. The report explores the drivers of inequality in three key opportunities more deeply, namely: secondary educational attainment, access to adequate nutrition among children and access to decent work. The report highlights Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Timor-Leste and Vanuatu as being particularly unequal in relation to core opportunities. Conversely, Thailand (along with many of the central Asian countries and the Maldives) has on average significantly lower inequalities in access to the same opportunities.

Wealth is a critical factor in accessing secondary education, in over half of the 21 Asian and Pacific countries analysed. The report explains that “The importance of an individual’s wealth level in driving inequality in education also emphasizes the vicious cycle between inequality of outcome and inequality of opportunity, whereby poorer young men and women join the labour force with less formal education and possibly fewer skills” (UNESCAP, 2018, p.32). **Residence in a rural location was found to be the second most prevalent circumstance**, highlighting the urban-rural divide in the availability of quality schools and opportunities. In some South-East Asian countries, including Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar and Timor-Leste, the chances of a rural resident completing a secondary or higher education are up to 80% lower than those of an urban resident. The impact of residence is less pronounced in upper-middle income countries, such as Thailand, but also in Indonesia, a result that “could be attributed to decentralisation and prioritisation of investments in schools in rural areas in that country.” The gender impact is more mixed, with the chances of women completing secondary education typically lower in the less developed South-East Asian countries and in most of South Asia. But in some South-East Asian countries (Myanmar, Philippines and Thailand), women have higher chances of completing secondary and higher education than men, all else being equal.

Figure 4 in the Annex (from UNESCAP, 2017) looks at the attendance gaps in secondary education in relation to a number of different factors – rural vs urban and poorest quintile vs richest quintile. UNESCAP (2017) highlights that **there are greater differences in secondary education attendance rates across the region compared to net primary education enrolment rates, which now average around 95%**. Looking at Figure 4, secondary attendance ratios are particularly low in Vanuatu and Solomon Islands. In poorer countries, the children most likely to attend secondary school are those from richer families. In one-third of the countries analysed, attendance ratios for the poorest wealth quintile are under 30%, while in many of these countries attendance ratios for children from the richest wealth quintile is over 80%. For example, in Vanuatu 6% of children in the poorest wealth quintile attend secondary education compared to 42% in the richest quintile, and in Lao PDR the rates are 11% and 82% respectively. **These differences can be explained by the interplay between inequality of outcomes and inequality of opportunities**. The report (UNESCAP, 2017, p.21) also highlights that the attendance gaps between rich and poor are notably larger than those between urban and rural in (nearly) all countries, indicating that the problem is less accessibility than affordability. In the

⁸ This measures the distribution of access to a certain opportunity across societies.

poorest households, sending a child to school can pose financial hurdles and lose them immediate income.

Education clearly demonstrates the inequalities that the region is facing. As demand for education has risen in South East Asia, governments have struggled to match the supply leading to a massive increase in private education. In 2015, some US\$ 60 billion was spent on private schooling in the region, double the amount spent in South Asia and \$10 billion more than the whole of Africa and the Middle East (Parthenon-EY, 2016). A recent study by Gruijters, Alcott and Rose (2020) looks at the effect of private schooling on learning outcomes in South Asia and East Africa. It highlights how recent growth in private schooling in the global South has been largely driven by 'low-fee' private schools. **Costs for private schools are often prohibitive to poorer households leading to unequal access**, despite demand for private schooling potentially being similar between poorer and wealthier households in many countries. Disparities in access also emerge due to location as urban children in the Global South are generally more likely to live near to a private school than rural children. In their background literature review Gruijters, Alcott and Rose (2020, p.7) find that evidence is inconclusive on the impact of private schooling on learning, and where more robust evidence is available it is often not nationally representative.

4. Key factors in marginalisation

Inclusion is one of the major challenges facing education systems in the ASEAN and Pacific region. Exclusion can take many forms and have many causes, and is very context specific. Some of the key characteristics to exclusion in education in the region include: extreme poverty; access due to location (households in rural or remote communities and children in urban slums often have less access to education); children with disabilities; indigenous groups, linguistic minorities, orphan and migrant children are also vulnerable to exclusion and discrimination. However, it is important to note **that these factors can apply to both girls and boys** in the EAP region. Furthermore, children can belong to several of these vulnerable groups at the same time, which in effect could compound their difficulties in entering or completing schooling. The most vulnerable populations are usually characterised by **several combined factors of disadvantage** – such as gender, ethnicity and geographic location – which are not easily separated (e.g. ethnic minority girls from poorest household in remote rural area) (UNICEF EAPRO, 2019, p.8). Addressing these sources of exclusion is not straightforward, even once out of school children are identified. Furthermore issues of inequality within education itself is also a major issue in the ASEAN region. Covid-19 is compounding these existing issues and barriers.

Extreme poverty, gender and location

According to the UNICEF EAPRO (2019, p.9) report, **“children and adolescents from the poorest households (usually defined as the lowest 20% in the income quintile) are much more likely to be out of school at pre-primary, primary or lower secondary levels (in Dimensions 1, 2 or 3) than children from richer families in all countries, where data is available.”** UNICEF EAPRO (2019, p.9) also found that **“the disadvantage of being a girl can often be compounded with being poor or living in rural areas. For example, in Lao PDR and Myanmar, girls are disadvantaged relative to boys among the poorest families, but not among wealthier families.”** Conversely, boys are found to be disadvantaged relative to girls among the poorest families in Cambodia and Viet Nam, but not among wealthier families.

For the poorest households, the **'opportunity cost' of education is often seen as high (i.e. the value that a child's time would have if he or she were not in school but working,** whether in the household or outside of it). UNICEF EAPRO (2019, p.91) explains that "This means that parents face incentives to let children leave school – or at least, reduce the time they spend on school-work – and work instead." Child labour is a significant consequence of poverty which directly impacts education attainment and school retention. In countries such as Cambodia, Viet Nam, and the Solomon Islands, substantial proportions of children are involved in child labour, especially in rural areas. According to UNICEF EAPRO (2019, p.90) "gender differences in child labour are not large, but in the Philippines, Mongolia and Viet Nam, more boys than girls are involved in child labour, while in Solomon Islands and Lao PDR, slightly more girls are involved." Household work by children, which is often disproportionately done by girls, can also affect schooling. For example, in the Philippines in larger, poorer families, older girls are often needed to stay home to look after younger children.

Location can be another factor for children being out-of-school. According to UNICEF EAPRO (2019, p.9): "**Disparities in school attendance can be based on area of residence, creating large rural-urban gaps** (e.g. Cambodia, Lao PDR, Timor-Leste). In some cases, the rural-urban gap may be compounded by differences in poverty incidence, so that the rural poor are worse off than the general rural population, and notably worse off than the urban poor, as is the case in Cambodia, Indonesia, and Viet Nam." The lack of adequate infrastructure, distance from school, and the need or availability of income generating opportunities often prevent rural learners from completing secondary education (UNESCAP, 2019, p.9). However, those that are poor in urban areas are also at risk of educational exclusion. UNICEF EAPRO (2019) found that the urban poor are potentially more disadvantaged than the rural poor in terms of access to primary education in Lao PDR, Myanmar, Thailand, Timor-Leste and Viet Nam. Children from the poorest urban households are unlikely to attend school at all or attend low quality institutions.

Remoteness of location is another facet, for example, small islands or isolated locations in mainland countries, which tend to cause a shortage in the supply of education (e.g. fewer schools, more physical barriers, fewer qualified teachers). This seems to be an issue in the Pacific Islands, especially Solomon Islands, Micronesia, F. S., Palau and Marshall Islands, as well as in remote areas in Cambodia and Myanmar, but data is limited.

In rural and remote areas, **insufficient availability of schools is a key barrier**, with transportation issues often cited by governments as a limiting factor for providing an adequate supply of schools. **When schools are available in rural areas, they are often incomplete only providing certain grades or multi-grade classes.** Poor infrastructure and services, particularly water and sanitation, are likely to deter children from attending, especially girls as security and safety are key concerns (UNICEF EAPRO, 2019, p.99). As well as issues around menstruating, which a lack of infrastructure can compound.

Related to poverty and costs is the **role of exposure to early childcare and education**, which can have lasting effects on children's later school performance and retention. The UNICEF EAPRO (2019, pp.75-6) study highlights this as a key risk factor related to dropping out of school in the EAP region. Generally, children from more disadvantaged backgrounds are least likely to access any form of early childhood learning opportunity.

Disability

Children with disabilities are among the most marginalised and excluded groups of children, and are often denied their right to an education. According to UNESCAP (2017), one in every six persons in Asia and the Pacific has some form of disability (650 million). Although estimates can vary slightly, with UNESCAP (2012 cited in Chakraborty & Kaushik, 2019, p.11) putting this number at 690 million people in Asia-Pacific, accounting for 15% of the total population.

According to UNICEF EAPRO (2019, p.10) **“Children and adolescents with disabilities are much more likely to be disproportionately out of school in all education levels and out-of-school dimensions** than those without disabilities or with partial disabilities.” This is confirmed from studies in Myanmar and Viet Nam, although data on children with disabilities in most countries is limited due to difficulties in measuring it. The 2009 census in Viet Nam asked respondents at the household level for a self-evaluation of disability among its members, including children, based on four factors. 87% of children with disabilities at primary school age were out-of-school, they are 22 times more likely to be out of school than children with no disability. In Myanmar, 47% of children with disabilities are out-of-school at primary age and 39% at lower secondary age, more than 3 times the rate of children who do not have a disability (UNICEF EAPRO, 2019, p.69). UNESCO Bangkok Office (2018, p.69) find that **this trend of exclusion is likely to increase in higher levels of education**. For example, 44% of children with disabilities, aged 14 to 16 years of age, completed primary education, compared to 72% for non-disabled children in Cambodia. Only 4% of disabled young people, aged 17 and 19 years, completed lower secondary education, compared to 41% for their non-disabled equivalents (UNESCO Bangkok Office, 2018, p.69). Furthermore, children with disabilities are not a homogenous group, and school attendance rates can vary by disability type in a country (UNICEF East Asia & Pacific, 2020a).

A Network on Education Quality Monitoring in the Asia-Pacific (NEQMAP) Thematic Review (Chakraborty & Kaushik, 2019) highlights how most countries in the Asia-Pacific region are undergoing a transition from segregated schooling of children with disabilities to inclusive education. However, generally children with disabilities face many barriers to education (Chakraborty & Kaushik, 2019). Previous studies highlighted by Chakraborty and Kaushik (2019, p.3) suggest that children with disabilities do not do as well in large classes (common in Asia) without adequate support. Challenges to disability inclusion in access to education identified in Save the Children projects in Bangladesh and Indonesia include: traditional negative community attitudes towards disability, and therefore parents hiding these children; lack of disability knowledge and experience among parents, teachers, government decision makers and the general public; and poor collaboration and coordination between sectors and key actors leading to limited assessments and support services as well as unnecessary labelling (Grimes & Heijnen-Maathuis, 2018). Chakraborty and Kaushik (2019) emphasise the need for further in-depth country-specific research to highlight national and local challenges in adopting inclusive education. **Especially in relation to understanding issues of intersectionality of disability with gender and ethnic minorities.**

Inequalities in access to education for children with disabilities is **often hard to measure as few countries collect reliable data on disability** (UNESCO Bangkok Office, 2018). The lack of quality data and data collection systems is a real challenge in the EAP region. Some countries have started to include the Washington Group Short Set of Questions on Disability in their latest

census in an effort to increase reliable information (e.g. Fiji, Kiribati, Niue, Palau, Samoa and Tonga). However, few countries have undertaken a comprehensive reform of policy and services.

For example, due to the lack of a data collection system there is limited information on the number and status of children with disability in **Lao PDR**. Children with disabilities in Lao PDR (and in general) are at greater risk of maltreatment, violence, abuse and exploitation than their non-disabled peers (UNICEF, n.d.). **Key barriers to accessing education here include physical inaccessibility of facilities, distance, poverty, gender and ethnicity.** The Laos Government has made efforts to improve the situation of children with disabilities, including ratification of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the promulgation of national laws and legislations in this regard. However, challenges remain in translating policies into practice. Furthermore, due to stigma and discrimination, children with severe disabilities are often kept at home. In 2007-2008 in Lao PDR, only 4% of all school-aged children with disabilities were enrolled in any type of school or educational programme (UNICEF Lao PDR, n.d.).

A situational analysis for USAID of the education of children with disabilities in **Cambodia** found that according to parents surveyed in 2017 (54 were surveyed), 52% of children with disabilities are either not enrolled in school or have dropped out of school (Hayes & Bulat, 2018, p.3). The most common reasons given by parents for non-enrolment are concern for the child's safety and concern that the school is not accessible for students with disabilities. Children with more severe disabilities, especially those with intellectual disabilities or multiple disabilities, are most likely to not enrol in school (Hayes & Bulat, 2018, p.3). Previous estimations of enrolment rates of children with disabilities highlighted in the analysis include:

A 2010 UNESCO study, however, estimated that 68 percent of children with disabilities in Cambodia are out of school (UNESCO, 2017), whereas Handicap International estimated that 90 percent of children with disabilities in Cambodia have little or no access to any form of education (Handicap International, 2009). One 2007 study of 500 households found that only 55 percent of children with disabilities have ever been enrolled in school and that many drop out of school in Grades 1–4 (VanLeit et al., 2007). (Hayes & Bulat, 2018, p.24)

These demonstrate the difficulties that exist in making estimates around children with disabilities in Cambodia and reliability of data (which is widely reflective of the region as a whole).

Ethnicity

Data is limited on ethnicity and language in many EAP countries as these are not always measured (consistently) in surveys, making it difficult to draw clear perspectives on how this affects out-of-school profiles (UNICEF EAPRO, 2019). However, it is generally agreed that **ethnic minority children, particularly girls, are often forced to drop out of school or never attend one due to language and cultural barriers, discriminatory practices and remoteness.** Disadvantages in education opportunities due to ethnicity can be compounded with geographic isolation. According to UNICEF EAPRO (2019, p.10) children and adolescents from ethnic minorities are over-represented in the out-of-school population in countries such as Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Thailand, Timor-Leste and Viet Nam. The degree of educational exclusion can vary among different minority groups in each country context. For example in Viet

Nam, out-of-school rates are much higher among the minority Khmer and Mong ethnic groups than among the majority Kinh (UNICEF EAPRO, 2019, p.69). In Thailand it was found that 26% of children with non-Thai citizenship were out-of-school compared to 5% of Thai children. In Cambodia, indigenous children live in areas where 47% of primary schools are incomplete compared to the national average of 12%.

Some ethnic minorities have cultural traditions that can negatively impact the educational opportunities of children, in particular those of girls. UNICEF EAPRO (2019, p.94) highlights **early marriage, teenage pregnancy, household obligations** and a **negative education bias as factors that “are perceived to reduce the duration of schooling for girls** in the EAP region, although there is little data on the incidence of these.” For example, the majority of Indonesian girls (87%) who married early stopped going to school upon marriage (UNESCO, 2017 cited in UNICEF EAPRO, 2019, p.95). It was found in Viet Nam that girls from ethnic minorities and whose mothers were illiterate are at greater risk of being out of school, and this was seen as reflecting cultural values and differences such as early marriage. Having to travel large distances or having to board was also linked with girls tending to drop out during the transition to lower secondary school in Indonesia, as these factors could “taint their reputation as a future bride” (UNICEF EAPRO, 2019, p.95). In Papua New Guinea, legal norms for early marriage (legal age is 16 for women and 18 for men, although recent legislation aims to set the age to 18 for all) reinforce the marginalised role of women and girls, who also suffer from widespread sexual violence (UNICEF EAPRO, 2019, p.95).

Example - Asian Development Bank (ADB) project in Viet Nam

The ADB previously funded a project in Viet Nam aimed at boosting enrolment and retention of girls and ethnic minorities in lower secondary schools, it ran 2007 to 2015. In Viet Nam, about 14% of the population is made up of ethnic minorities, who are some of the most vulnerable and poorest people in the country, often living in remote mountainous areas or on lowland river deltas with very limited access to government services and education (ADB, 2019). Despite Viet Nam making considerable progress towards improving girls’ access to education, disparities in the quality and accessibility of schooling persist in these areas and especially among ethnic minority girls and women, who often face discriminatory practices and traditions (such as marrying young) and language barriers (ADB, 2019).

The ADB’s Lower Secondary Education for the Most Disadvantaged Regions Project aimed to achieve universal lower secondary education and, hence, greater social and economic inclusion for Viet Nam’s disadvantaged groups. The project constructed schools and classrooms in remote areas, providing opportunities for girls and minorities to enrol in secondary schools without having to travel far and worry about their safety. In more remote areas, boarding facilities (with safe, private sanitation facilities for girls) were established. Scholarships were also awarded to help overcome financial barriers in transitioning from primary to lower secondary education that many minorities living in poverty face (ADB, 2019). A school feeding programme also provided an important incentive for parents to send their children to school. Public awareness campaigns were also utilised to challenge social norms and perceptions around girls’ education. The project helped contribute to the following outcomes (ADB, 2018):

Net enrolment rate in lower secondary in 103 disadvantaged districts in Viet Nam in 2014 increased to 81.6%, from 76.4% in 2006. A 7.9% increase in ethnic minority student enrolment. Female dropout rate decreased by 50%, female ethnic minority dropout rate decreased by 44%.

Conflict, migration and refugees

Conflict can seriously impact girls' education; it is estimated that **globally “young women living in conflict-affected areas are 90 per cent more likely to be out of secondary school than elsewhere (UNESCO, 2015)”** (Salem, 2018, p.5). Commuting to school within conflict-affected countries can also pose dangers that threaten the safety of adolescent girls.

Educational efforts for refugees are often seen as a temporary response to emergencies. However, given that it is estimated that as of end-2018, the median duration of exile stands at 5 years,⁹ education can easily be disrupted during this time. There are significant barriers in the way of refugee children attending school. Globally, refugees remain five times more likely to be out of school than their non-refugee peers (UNHCR, 2017). An estimated 61% of refugee children globally having access to primary education, compared to an international average of 91%, and only 23% at secondary level, compared to 84% globally. These numbers are much lower when looking at **refugees hosted in low income countries, where less than 50% access primary education, and only 9% access secondary education**. These figures are worse for **refugee girls, who are particularly disadvantaged**. UNHCR (2017, p.9) estimate that for every ten refugee boys accessing primary school, there are fewer than eight refugee girls; for every 10 refugee boys at secondary school, there are fewer than seven refugee girls. Barriers to attendance include (UNHCR, n.d.):

- **Cost** remains a significant barrier for both refugee girls and boys. These include school fees, the price of uniforms, books and other learning materials and transportation.
- Refugee girls are often at an even greater disadvantage in terms of **“opportunity costs”** – i.e. losses in terms of income and of domestic duties, as they are often responsible for collecting water or fuel, have responsibilities for caring and household chores. As girls get older and are ready to transition to secondary school these factors are amplified. Refugee families often have limited resources and boys in families are often prioritised for education because they are seen as having greater future earning potential.
- **Social and cultural norms** can also influence refugee girls' education access. Some communities believe there is no need to educate girls, especially in places where child marriage and teenage pregnancy are the norm.
- Lack of access to **sanitation, private toilets and clean water** at schools are further problems that reduce school attendance for girls (both refugee and host community), especially due to menstruation.

According to a literature review by Salem for the Research for Equitable Access and Learning (REAL) Centre looking at education in crises, refugees face different educational experiences in different settings and due to different issues – **such as accreditation (due to the number of schooling months or years missed due to conflict and asylum-seeking process), distance**

⁹ Statistics taken from World Bank blog <https://blogs.worldbank.org/dev4peace/2019-update-how-long-do-refugees-stay-exile-find-out-beware-averages> [accessed 06/10/2020]

to travel, poverty, safety, and cost (reflecting the barriers highlighted above) (Salem, 2018). The review emphasises the role that poverty and distance to school can play in amplifying negative coping strategies and cultural gender norms. It finds strong evidence for “the increased dropout rates, child marriage, and sexual exploitation among adolescent refugee girls” (Salem, 2018, p.8). Further challenges to education for refugee girls include language barriers within the new educational system and also non-verbal practices that enable understanding of host country social norms (UNESCO, 2019, p.67). The quality of the education provided for refugees can also vary. Concerns about quality and accreditation/transferability of these educational attainments to home countries, “may limit parents’ determination to send their girls to school as the return on investment may be perceived as low (UNHCR, 2016)” (Salem, 2018, p.8). The lack of documentation (such as birth certificates, and schooling certificates and records) for many refugees can further complicate inclusion in national education systems (UNESCO, 2019). The literature review by Salem (2018) also highlights the urgent need for further research into education in conflict-affected situations and specifically gender needs and experiences of adolescent girls, as research in the field is scarce.

Rural-urban migration is an important phenomenon in many countries in the EAP region, including Cambodia and the Philippines, but it can cause major disruptions in schooling. UNICEF EAPRO (2019, p.9) find that **rural-urban migrants are more likely to be out of school than non-migrants across all education levels**. For example, in Viet Nam internal migrants experience this, as well as in Thailand, where children of international immigrants often drop out after completing primary education.

Language is a key issue in relation to refugees and migrants and education. The Asia-Pacific region hosts the largest number of refugees and displaced people in the world. The unique language-in-education needs of migrant and refugee children in the region are little-understood, although some countries in the region have started establishing evidence-based language-in-education policies and practices for children from ethnolinguistic minority communities (UNESCO Bangkok Office & UNICEF EAPRO, 2020, p.23). (See next section on Language for more details).

Language

The link between language and marginalisation in education is well established (UNESCO Bangkok Office, 2018, p.70). About 40% of the global population has limited access to education delivered in their mother tongue. It is recognised that language poses a significant barrier to equitable education in the Asia-Pacific region, which has a high diversity of languages. Language policy and inclusive education policy varies drastically across countries. A report on SDG4 by UNESCO Bangkok Office (2018, p.70) highlight a study that 11 South East Asian countries took part in to support the SDG4 monitoring Indicator 4.5.2 to estimate the percentage of children who have access to education in their first or home language, conducted for the 2017/8 Global Education Monitoring Report (see Kosonen, 2017 cited in UNESCO Bangkok Office, 2018, p.70). The study estimated that:

- About **90%** of students in **Cambodia** and **Viet Nam** attended primary education in their first languages.
- Approximately **60%** studied in their mother tongue in the **Philippines, Malaysia and Myanmar**.

- Between **30% and 50%** of students in primary school were taught in their first language in **Lao PDR, Singapore, Thailand and Timor-Leste**.
- Only **25%** of students in primary school were taught in their first language in **Brunei Darussalam and Indonesia**.

According to UNICEF EAPRO (2019, p.69) children who cannot speak Tetum, the official language in Timor-Leste, are more than 3 times as likely to be out-of-school as those who can.

Students whose mother tongue is not the same as the language of instruction may face barriers to learning, and are more likely to leave school early (UNESCO Bangkok Office, 2018, p.70). **Ethnolinguistic minority children often come from poorer households, and are among the lowest performers, leading to the risk of dropping out of school or not progressing** (UNESCO, 2019). Furthermore, **girls from language minority communities are the most disadvantaged of all** (Malone & UNESCO, 2018).

A resource kit for Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education (MTB MLE) by Malone and UNESCO (2018) highlights a number of significant barriers that children from minority language communities often face in education (Malone & UNEACO, 2018, p.3):

- They are not able to use their mother tongue in the classroom or on school grounds, and their teachers use a different language (if they even have access to a school).
- Textbooks are written in official school language and focus on dominant culture (if the school even has textbooks), excluding their own culture and traditional knowledge learnt at home and in their community.
- They are expected to learn to read and write in a language they do not yet understand.
- They are expected to learn new maths, science and other concepts in a language they do not understand or are in the process of learning.

Teachers may struggle to support the students or think they are “slow” because they do not understand the lessons, and without support from their teachers many students become frustrated and discouraged (Malone & UNESCO, 2018).

Covid-19

Evidence tells us that **public health outbreaks have distinct gendered impacts**. Emergencies exacerbate and entrench gender inequalities that existed before a crisis. With education during a crisis, girls are more vulnerable to certain types of harms and exploitation (such as trafficking, labour, early marriage and early pregnancy), violence, and marginalisation (Theirworld, 2016). During a crisis, girls are most likely to drop out of school and least likely to return. In the Ebola epidemic in West Africa, which forced more than five million children out of school for nine months, it was seen that girls faced more challenges to going back to education. For example, in Liberia, many girls were put to work doing domestic chores because their parents needed them to earn money (Theirworld, 2016). The Covid-19 crises is underlining existing challenges.

One of the responses in EAP to containing the spread of the Covid-19 pandemic and keeping communities free from infection has been to close schools. All countries in the region took this action for at least two months and many for longer. It is thought that the impact of school closures from Covid-19 will exacerbate the problems of attendance and dropout, increasing

inequality across the region. UNICEF East Asia & Pacific (2020b, p.17) put the number of children affected by school closures across **East Asia and the Pacific** to help stop the spread of COVID-19 at more than **325 million**. Alternative forms of home-based learning were introduced for perhaps 50% of the region's students with the help of governments and numerous stakeholders. Governments are responding in various ways, from contingency planning to adapting curricular and providing financial support for families. Every country in the region has provided alternative methods of study for learners, however, these are not necessarily reaching the most marginalised and needy. UNICEF East Asia & Pacific (2020b, p.35) highlights how **women and girls are commonly burdened with unpaid and invisible care work** during crises. In previous health emergencies, school closures have led to millions of adolescent girls dropping out of school to help at home, one factor perpetuating the cycle of poverty. **Children with disabilities also face big barriers to remote learning**; the pandemic is likely to increase the exclusion of children with disabilities from education and learning, especially dropout rates (UNICEF East Asia & Pacific, 2020a). In addition, **girls with disabilities face increased risks of physical, sexual and emotional violence**, abuse and exploitation compared to their peers without disabilities, and the pandemic is compounding this (UNICEF East Asia & Pacific, 2020c). More generally, unequal access to the internet has exposed a huge digital divide across the region, especially in the poorest areas and countries.

A rapid literature review by Naylor and Gorgen (2020, p.4) highlights a number of reasons that crises put girls (especially the most marginalised) at increased risk of falling further behind in their education or dropping out completely:

- School closures increase the burden of household chores and childcare, leaving girls less time available to study.
- School closures limit girls' access to social and nutritional support, further impacting on their wellbeing and capacity to learn.
- Child marriage and transactional sex may be adopted in attempts to deal with the economic shocks caused by emergencies.
- Girls in emergencies are at increased risk of gender-based violence (GBV). There is evidence that Covid-19 has led to a sharp rise in such violence.
- Emergencies limit girls' access to Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) information and services, which can further contribute to an increase in adolescent pregnancy. In the most disrupted areas in Sierra Leone during the Ebola crisis, adolescent pregnancy increased by up to 65%.

There are four key ways that Covid-19 is impacting on education in the EAP region (and globally): **access; quality; equity; and gender equality** (UNESCO Bangkok Office, 2020).

- **Access:** UNESCO Bangkok Office highlight that people living in lower socio-economic and remote areas and those who are more vulnerable are disproportionately affected by the pandemic and face challenges in accessing alternative or distance modes of education, which often rely on computers and mobile phones with internet connection. Long-distance learning solutions often overlook people with disabilities, migrants, ethno-linguistic minorities, and other vulnerable groups, not catering for their needs. It is feared that Covid-19 will compound the significant access to education challenges already facing these vulnerable groups. UNESCO highlight that the Covid-19 pandemic also

“serves as an opportunity to re-think education access and to commit to enable vulnerable groups in accessing education through low-tech and no-tech learning solutions” (UNESCO Bangkok Office, 2020, p.6).

- **Quality:** Although schools and educators are developing innovative ways to teach children outside of school and remotely, these innovations do not always guarantee quality teaching. Those leading the efforts do not always have the digital skills and understanding of the gaps and challenges that come with using distance learning technology effectively.
- **Equity:** The alternative methods of learning that have had to be developed and employed due to Covid-19 have exacerbated existing challenges concerning educational equity, with school closures disproportionately affecting girls, ethnic minorities, people with disabilities, and other vulnerable and disadvantaged students. In many cases, education provides a protective influence for learners against harm such as early marriage, unintended pregnancy, violence and sexual exploitation, and child labour. Extended school closures have removed this protective influence in many cases.
- **Gender Equality:** Women and girls are disproportionately affected by the additional barriers to education and risks created by the Covid-19 pandemic. Closure of schools exacerbates their traditional roles in unpaid care work and vulnerability to gender-based violence and sexual exploitation. It is also thought the pandemic may widen existing gender digital divides in the region (UNESCO Bangkok Office, 2020, p.7).

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Acknowledgements

We thank the following experts who voluntarily provided suggestions for relevant literature or other advice to the author to support the preparation of this report. The content of the report does not necessarily reflect the opinions of any of the experts consulted.

- Kate Sims, Education Development Trust
- Ruth Naylor, Education Development Trust

Suggested citation

Price, R.A. (2020). *Key barriers to girls' education in the ASEAN and Pacific region*. K4D Helpdesk Report 899. Brighton, UK: Institute of Development Studies.

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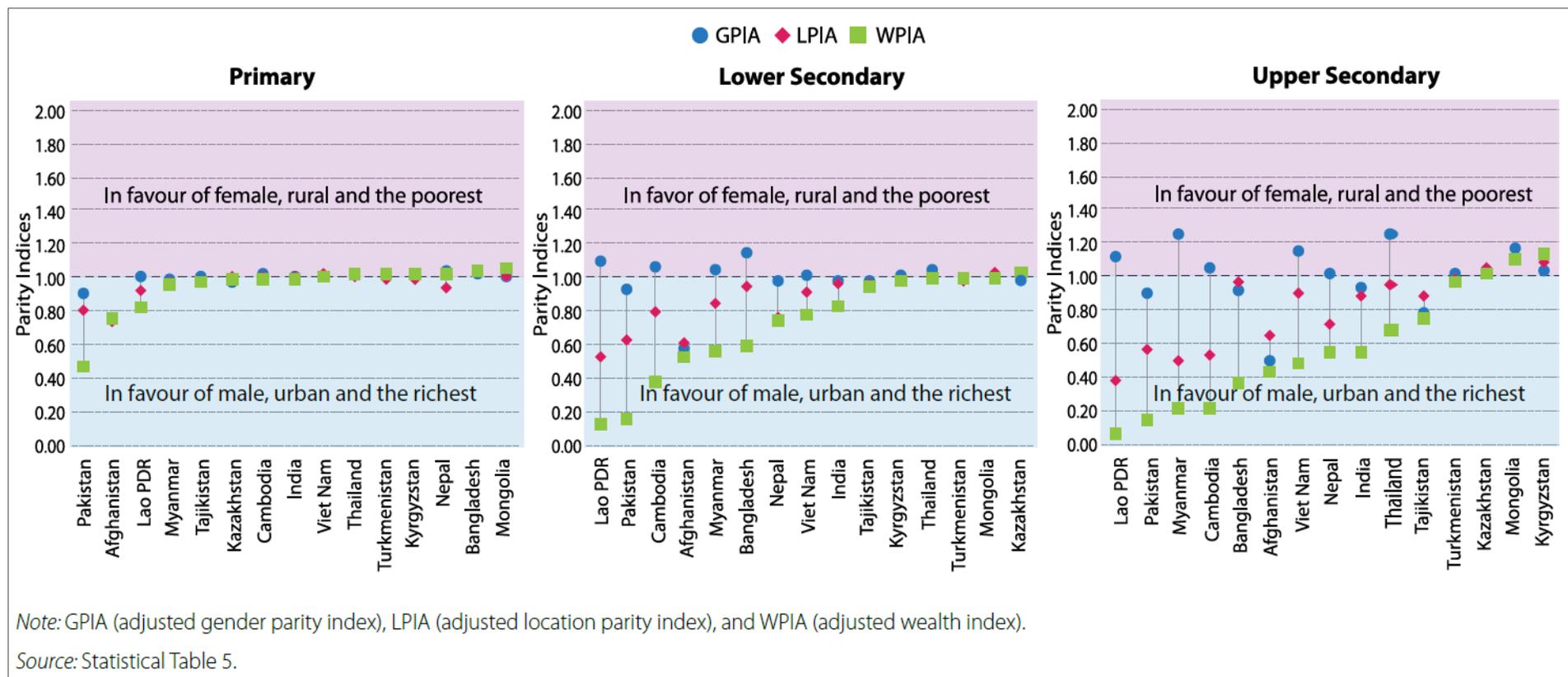
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6. Annex

Figure 2: Adjusted parity indices of net attendance rate by education level based on household survey data, 2016 or latest year available



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See: Figure 3: Completion rates at primary, lower secondary and upper secondary levels, disaggregated by sex, location and wealth in selected countries, latest year available, **Source: UNESCO Bangkok Office, UNICEF & UNGEI (2018a, p.3 [data from UIS database accessed March 2018])**, <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000371229?posInSet=1&queryId=8591eb9a-8991-4372-bf2d-1983a774db70>

See: Figure 4: Attendance gaps in secondary education, latest years, UNESCAP (2017, p.21), based on UNICEF online statistical database. Secondary net attendance ratio data were disaggregated by wealth quintile and location of residence, <https://www.unescap.org/sites/default/files/publications/Sustainable%20Social%20Development%20in%20A-P.pdf>