



## The European year for development: Education

Access to quality education is essential for development: estimates suggest global poverty could drop by 12 % if all children in low income countries could read.

The European Parliament has called for gender equality in education and for providing vulnerable groups special attention.

The percentage of aid devoted to education has remained constant. While amounts increased between 2002 and 2010, they have begun to decline since.

Access to quality education is essential for development. Not only does education provide children, youth and adults with the knowledge and skills to be active citizens and to fulfil themselves as individuals, literacy in particular contributes directly to poverty reduction. It has been estimated that global poverty could drop by 12 % if all children in low income countries could read. Education also contributes to sustainable economic growth and to more stable and accountable societies and governments. Yet education cannot be seen in isolation: it is closely related to children's health, gender equality, human rights (particularly those of children and minorities), peace and employment opportunities. The European Parliament (EP) has regularly called for 20 % of EU aid expenditure to be devoted to basic social services – primary health care and basic education. The EP has also insisted on devoting special attention to vulnerable groups and those at risk of social exclusion. In regularly calling for gender equality in education, the Parliament recognises that girls' education yields some of the highest returns of all development investments.

The World Education Forum – organised by UNESCO in Dakar in 2000 – mobilised the international community around a shared development agenda in education. At the meeting 164 countries adopted a framework for action and committed themselves to meet six 'Education For All' (EFA) goals by 2015:

- i) improving early childhood care and education,
- ii) achieving universal primary education,
- iii) meeting the needs and life skills of youth and adults,
- iv) improving adult literacy,
- v) achieving gender equality in education, and
- vi) improving quality of education.

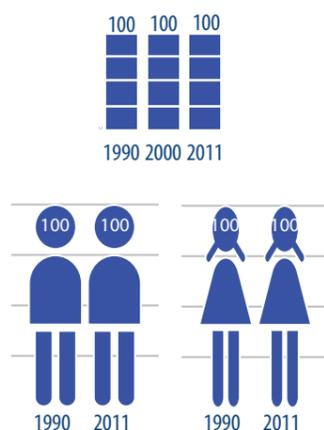
The UN Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) also included goals to 'achieve universal primary education' and 'eliminate gender disparity in education' in order to 'promote gender equality and empower women'. Working towards these goals required the mobilisation of financial resources, although no concrete commitments were made. Global government spending on education increased from 4.6 % to 5.1 % of gross national product (GNP) between 1999 and 2011, but spending as a share of government budget has remained at 15 % since 1999 – despite a widely accepted belief that it should reach 20 %. While the percentage of aid devoted to education has remained constant, overall volumes initially increased, from USD 6.8 billion in 2002 (USD 3 billion for primary education) to USD 14.8 billion in 2010 (USD 6.2 billion for primary education). Since then, the amount of education aid has begun to decline.

The results of a closer focus on education have been substantial, although none of the EFA goals will be achieved globally by 2015. The 2014 MDG Report reflects an increase in the global net enrolment rate for primary education – from 83 % to 90 % – between 2000 and 2012, although 58 million children

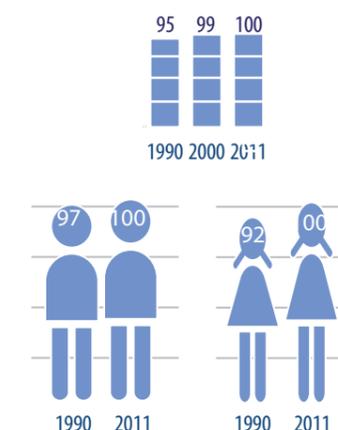
## Literacy rates in developing regions

Percentage of total, male and female population aged 15 to 24 who can read and write

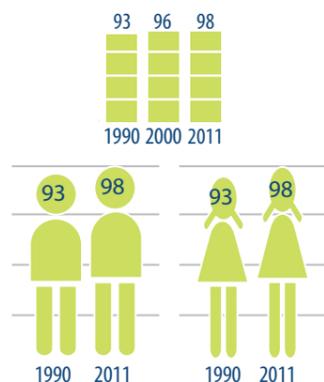
### Caucasus and Central Asia



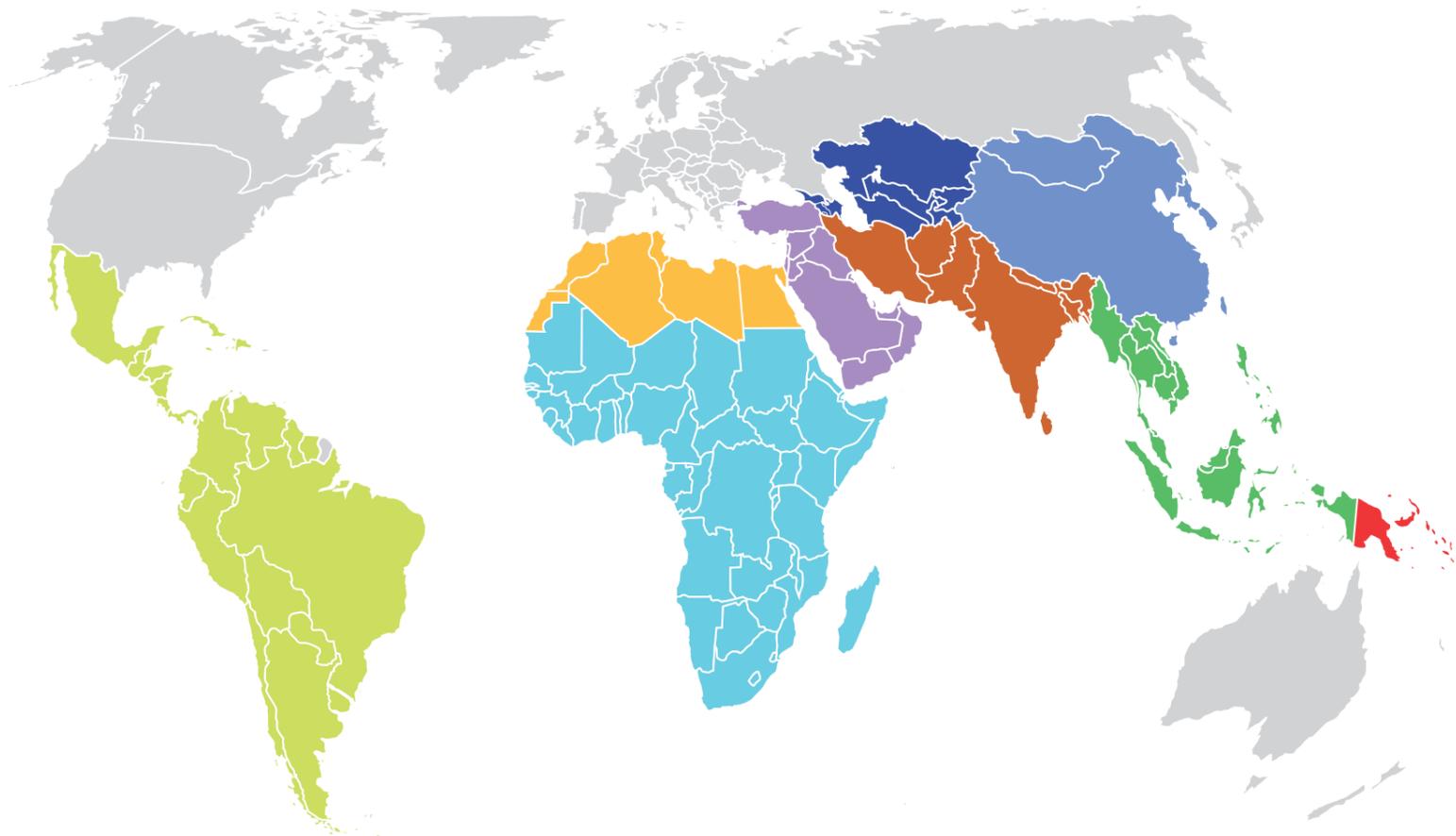
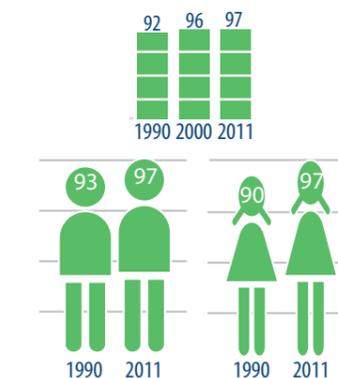
### Eastern Asia



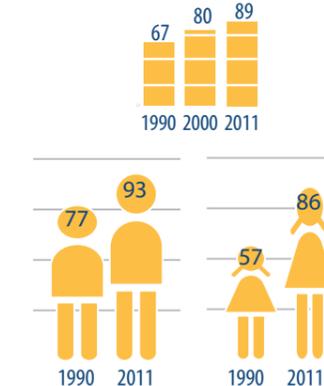
### Latin America and Caribbean



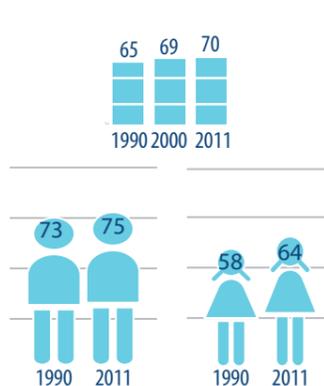
### South-Eastern Asia



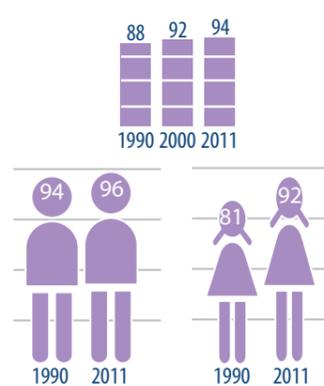
### Northern Africa



### Sub-Saharan Africa



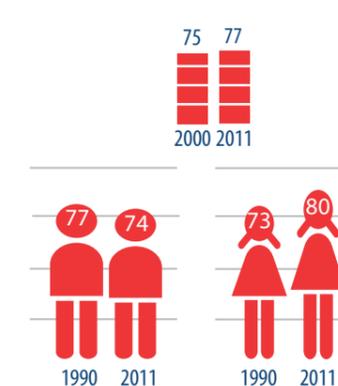
### Western Asia



### Southern Asia



### Oceania



In 2011, youth literacy rate in developing regions was 88% up from 80% in 1990. Developing regions are defined by the [United Nations](#) as presented. The bar charts present for each region the total youth literacy rate in 1990, 2000 and 2011. The icons present the youth literacy rates for each sex in 1990 and in 2011, with the exception of Oceania for which 1990 rates were not available. All icons from the [Noun Project](#).

Global net enrolment for primary education grew from 83 % to 90 % between 2000 and 2012.

But progress is uneven: 58 million children are out of school, often because of poverty, location, gender or conflict. Half the children who do not attend school live in regions affected by conflict.

The EU institutions spent EUR 4.2 billion on education in 2007-2013.

The EP recognises the need to:

- guarantee education for women and girls,
- pay attention to emergency situations, and
- build 'knowledge-based' societies that encourage citizens to participate.

remained out of school. Sub-Saharan Africa has made the greatest progress, but it is also the region where most challenges remain: enrolment rates have increased by 18 % but are still only 78 %. Furthermore, progress in enrolment appears to have halted recently, showing that the last push to achieve universal education is much more difficult. This also reflects the impact of variables such as wealth, location and gender. Children in the poorest 20 % of the population are three times more likely to be out of school than those in the richest 20 %. Children in rural areas are twice as likely to be out of school as children in urban areas. Peace is also a crucial factor for ensuring universal access education: 50 % of the world's out-of-school children live in regions affected by conflict. Yet gender equality in education has advanced, with all developing regions having achieved or being close to achieving gender parity in education. The most remarkable progress has taken place in South Asia, where there are now 100 of girls in school for every 100 boys. In 1990, that number was 74. While that improvement should eventually have an impact on global literacy rates, women and girls still make up 60 % of the world's illiterate population.

The EU is one of the leading promoters of universal primary education. The EU institutions spent EUR 4.2 billion in education between 2007 and 2013 (EUR 2.9 billion for basic and vocational education). This helped to enrol 13.7 million new pupils in primary school and to train 1.2 million primary teachers. Higher education is also supported through programmes such as Erasmus+ or the intra-Africa, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) mobility scheme. The EU is an important contributor to the Global Partnership for Education, a multilateral partnership coordinating the efforts of developing countries, donor countries, civil society and the private sector to support quality education for boys and girls in the world's poorest countries. Because of the particular needs of children in conflict, the EU launched the 'EU Children of Peace' initiative in 2012. This has provided over 108 000 children in 12 conflict-affected countries access to schools to learn in a safe environment, as well as psychological support to surmount their traumatic war experiences.

In 2013 the EU organised a high-level conference on education to debate ongoing challenges and to ensure that education plays a prominent role in the post-2015 development framework. Although intergovernmental negotiations have only just begun, the draft Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) include a goal to 'Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote life-long learning opportunities for all'. This would follow up on the MDG commitment to universal education and gender parity, whilst also emphasising quality education and teacher training, technical skills oriented to employment generation, and lifelong learning. In the post-2015 context, the EP has stressed the need to guarantee access to all levels of quality education, particularly for women and girls; to pay special attention to education in emergency situations; and to build 'knowledge-based and innovative societies' for participatory citizenship.

---

### Disclaimer

The content of this document is the sole responsibility of the author and any opinions expressed therein do not necessarily represent the official position of the European Parliament. It is addressed to the Members and staff of the EP for their parliamentary work. Reproduction and translation for non-commercial purposes are authorised, provided the source is acknowledged and the European Parliament is given prior notice and sent a copy.