5

Global and regional perspective:
making a compelling case for early childhood care and education

Maki Hayashikawa

The purpose of this chapter is to present a global and regional overview of the status and trends in early childhood care and education (ECCE). It summarises the main findings and discussions from the *Global Monitoring Report 2007* (GMR, 2007), pulls out some key issues in ECCE at global and regional levels, and highlights some critical areas that call for urgent action. The chapter is divided into four parts. The first part consists of a brief overview of the global progress towards achieving the *Education for All* (EFA) goals, as assessed in the current GMR, in order to have a better understanding of the broader context in which ECCE is being discussed, promoted and assessed around the world. The second part examines the global and regional status and trends in ECCE as reported in

---

3. This chapter is based on the PowerPoint presentation delivered at the Pacific Regional Workshop on 26 March 2007. The presentation built and expanded on the general presentation prepared by UNESCO Bangkok for the East Asia regional launching of the *EFA Global Monitoring Report 2007* in November 2007 in Bangkok, Thailand.
the GMR 2007. In the third part of this chapter, some key issues and challenges regarding ECCE are discussed, with more specific reference to the Asia-Pacific region context, and in the fourth and last part, some critical actions are suggested for consideration by countries in this region to realise EFA Goal 1 and place ECCE high on the national priority agenda.

**Introduction**

Expanding and improving ECCE is the first goal of the Dakar Framework of Action for Education for All adopted in 2000, with countries pledging their commitment to achieve the target by 2015. Since then, some important steps have been taken by several countries in the Asia-Pacific region towards meeting this goal. However, progress between and within countries in the region has been uneven and the situation continues to show vast diversity and disparities.

ECCE is an area that still lacks much evidence-based research and studies, especially in the developing countries, including the countries in the Asia-Pacific region. Even when studies are available, the scope and coverage are too limited to collectively provide a comprehensive picture on development in ECCE, globally and regionally.

The *Global Monitoring Report* 2007, the fifth in the series, focuses on this first EFA goal, with special attention to equity and inclusion in ECCE. In the absence of comprehensive studies and evidence-based research, this issue of the GMR probably gives us the best overall account of the status and trends in ECCE in the world and by regions today. All statistical data referred to in this chapter come from the *Global Monitoring Report* 2007, accessible on the Internet.

**Overview on global progress in EFA**

**EFA goals and MDGs**

In looking at global progress in EFA, it is worth revisiting the six EFA goals and the four Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) that are typically associated with them in order to keep the focus of the issue and understand better what we are trying to achieve.
Table 1 EFA and MDGs goals

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EFA Goals (abridged)</th>
<th>Corresponding MDGs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Expand and improve comprehensive early childhood care and education.</td>
<td>1. Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Promote learning and life skills programmes for youth and adults.</td>
<td>3. Promote gender equality and empower women.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Increase adult literacy by 50%.</td>
<td>4. Reduce child mortality.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Eliminate gender disparities by 2005 and achieve gender equality in education by</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Improve the quality of education.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Placing the EFA goals and the MDGs side by side shows an important difference between the two sets of goals: the MDGs which make reference to education are more limited in scope and coverage than the EFA goals. For example, with regard to early childhood concerns, the corresponding goal of MDG is Goal 4: ‘Reduce child mortality’. Nowhere do the MDGs address the educational concerns of the child’s early years; the MDG addressing early childhood only partially covers what should be an area that is in fact a more holistic concern. Noticeable also is the fact that there is no goal on literacy in the MDGs.

This difference between the two sets of goals that guide our national development policies and strategies, including education, needs to be recognised and understood, as today there is a tendency of national governments to increasingly give more attention to the MDGs, even when making reference to their education sector goals. If progress is to be made in areas such as ECCE, gender parity or literacy, the commitments to achieving education for all by 2015 will need to be respected by countries, and all those engaged in basic education to promote EFA will have to ensure that the EFA goals are not lost sight of but are kept high up on the political agenda.
Progress with a mixed picture – Universal primary education and secondary education

The overall progress in EFA around the world is succinctly captured by the EFA Index (EDI), which was first introduced in the Global Monitoring Report of 2003/4. The EDI is a summary measure of a country’s situation vis-à-vis four EFA goals, namely, universal primary education (UPE) (Goal 2), adult literacy (Goal 4), gender parity (Goal 5) and quality of education (Goal 6). ECCE (Goal 1) and the learning needs of youth and adults (Goal 3) are not included as measures for EDI, as data collected for these two goals are not standardised sufficiently. Each of the four goals (2, 4, 5 and 6) is represented by a proxy indicator 4 and the EDI is a simple average of the four indicators, varying between 0 and 1, with 1 representing EFA achievement.5

The GMR 2007 reports the situation of 125 countries with data for all four indicators. (See Table 2.) Of the 125 countries, 47 countries are reported to have achieved or are very close to achieving, the four common and measurable EFA targets, as shown in the table below.

For the Pacific region, data have been available only for Fiji to measure the EDI, which, with an EDI of 0.966, belongs to one of the 47 countries that have achieved the EFA targets.

With regard to progress in access to primary education (Goal 2), improvements were seen in almost all countries which had a net enrolment ratio (NER) of below 85% in 1999. For the Pacific region, the NER was comparatively high with 90% (2004) in all countries except for Solomon Islands which reported an NER of 80%. In Fiji and Samoa, the NERs were reported as having declined during the period 1999-2004.

4. The four EFA proxy indicators are: the total primary net enrolment ratio (for UPE), the literacy rate for persons aged 15 and over (for adult literacy), the gender-specific EFA index (for gender parity and equality), and the survival rate to grade 5 (for quality of education).

5. GMR 2007, pages 64-65.
Table 2 EDI for 125 countries in nine regions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Regions</th>
<th>Far from EFA (EDI below 0.80)</th>
<th>Intermediate position (EDI between 0.80 and 0.94)</th>
<th>EFA achieved or close (EDI between 0.95 and 1.00)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sub Saharan Africa</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arab States</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central Asia</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East Asia/Pacific</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South and West Asia</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N.America/West Europe</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latin America/Caribbean</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central Europe/East Europe</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>28</strong></td>
<td><strong>50</strong></td>
<td><strong>47</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: GMR 2007

Despite the progress being made in the overall participation of children in primary school, the GMR reports that there are still an estimated 77 million children who are not in school—the so-called ‘out-of-school’ children.\(^6\) Although this is a reduction by 21 million from the 1999 figure, the high number implies that there are too many children who are unreached.

India, Nigeria, Pakistan and Ethiopia combined have the largest share of out-of-school children worldwide, with a total of 22.8 million out-of-school children. At the same time, it is important to note that the significant reduction in India between 2002 and 2004 actually contributed to the overall drop in the global figure. East Asia was the only region in the world where the number of out-of-primary school children increased between 1999 and 2004 from 6.4 million in 1999 to 9.3 million

---

\(^6\) In the GMR 2007, ‘out-of-school children’ is defined as those children who are not enrolled in either primary or secondary school. This is an expansion on the coverage of statistics, as the previous GMRs looked only at ‘out-of-primary-school children’ with corresponding figures.
Early childhood care and education in the Pacific

in 2004. The Pacific region still had approximately 373,000 out-of-primary-school children in 2004, which represents a reduction of 72,000 from the figure in 1999.

The global estimate on out-of-school children understates the problem. Household survey data often show that, even when children are enrolled in school, many of them do not attend regularly, making them de facto out-of-school children who are likely to be missed out from the official data.

Secondary education is also an area that has been rapidly developing during the reported period 1999 and 2004. In the Pacific countries, the pressure on secondary education is greater than in countries in the East Asia and South and West Asia regions. The average gross enrolment ratio (GER) in the Pacific was 104% for 2004, which is substantially higher than the world average of 65% and 59% for developing countries. However, if we look at the individual country level, the GERs vary significantly, ranging from Australia with 149% to Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands that report less than 30%. Furthermore, the overall secondary GER often hides the disparities between the two stages of secondary education, namely lower and upper.

Literacy—an elusive goal

Compared to the progress being achieved in primary education, little progress has been made in achieving adult literacy. The GMR 2007 concludes that literacy remains an ‘elusive goal’. A total of 778 million adults aged 15 and above are illiterate, with female adults accounting for two-thirds of the total. This translates to one in five adults and one in four for adult women who lack the basic literacy skills of reading, writing and numeracy.

The vast majority of illiterates are found in South and West Asia, Sub-Saharan Africa and East Asia, with four countries—China, Bangladesh, India and Pakistan—being home to more than half of the total adult illiterates in the world. In the Pacific region, the average literacy rate has been high at 93% but, as very few countries report data on adult literacy, the reliability of these data is uncertain. For those Pacific countries submitting data, namely, Papua New Guinea (57%) and Vanuatu (74%), adult literacy remains a challenge.
Gender parity—a missed target

Gender parity is the first target of EFA Goal 5—a target with the earliest deadline of 2005, which the world did not meet. Since then, acceleration in national efforts has been witnessed and progress around the world is reported in the current GMR 2007. However, the achievement of the gender parity target is not a reality even now. Aggregated regional data and even national data continue to hide gender disparities (e.g. comparatively few female teachers at secondary and tertiary levels) that persist in the teaching/learning process in classrooms, in textbooks, and in academic achievements and learning outcomes, as well as in the higher levels of the teaching profession and administration.

For the East Asia and the Pacific countries, the gender parity indices (GPIs) show that gender parity has been achieved on average. However, gender disparities do still remain, even at primary level, in a number of countries where the lowest enrolment rates are also found. Furthermore, the differences between the sexes become greater at higher levels of education, with a rather mixed picture at country level. In East Asia, the GPI for tertiary education on average was 0.88 in 2004, indicating that more males than females were enrolled in the region as a whole. However, in Brunei, Malaysia, the Philippines and Thailand, gender disparities favoured females at tertiary level. In the Pacific countries, some gender disparities are still found in favour of boys, but the contrary is found in the Pacific at secondary and tertiary levels, as the GPI for the Pacific region at the tertiary level was 1.27, indicating that many more females than males were enrolled in tertiary education in all countries except Vanuatu.

Gender equality, which is the ultimate target of EFA Goal 5, is a still more difficult target for countries to meet, not only because it implies the need to challenge persisting gender stereotypes in curriculum and learning materials, but also because it necessarily requires an assessment of elements that are difficult to quantify and measure objectively, such as teachers’ attitudes and expectations, which may differ with respect to girls and boys.
Looking at the exclusive dimension of EFA

The trends in the statistics reported in the *GMR 2007* overall clearly suggest that countries in all regions are making steady progress, with many countries coming increasingly close to achieving enrolment of all children. While this could be something that countries may wish to commend themselves for, they need to realise that trying to reach the remaining 20% or 10% is many times more difficult than what they have achieved so far. In order to strategise efforts in the right direction, national governments will need to identify those who are left out of school or remain outside the education system as a whole, and design policies and measures that specifically target them. Only by identifying those who are out-of-school and unreached by the system and understanding better who they are can governments prepare effective policies and measures to reduce the number of out-of-school children and make education for all a reality. In other words, they need to turn around their perspectives and understand the ‘exclusive’ dimensions in EFA. The *GMR 2007* attempts to highlight this point and examines the key features of those children who remain out-of-school, revealing a clear trend, as shown in Figures 1 and 2.

Figure 1(a) shows that a girl, living in a rural area, from a poor family with a mother who has no education is likely to have the smallest chance of being enrolled in school, whereas a child, girl or boy, from a rich urban family who has a mother with education would rarely be left out. These multiple disadvantages that characterise out-of-school children prevent them from ever reaching the classroom or, even if they do, prevent them from completing the primary cycle, as described in Figure 1(b). This has many implications for the important role that ECCE could have on improving the situation.

Another way to help visualise the exclusion dimension of primary school enrolment in the regional countries is to look at the situation of those who are not enrolled, based on the net enrolment rate (NER). By calculating the difference between the full enrolment rate of 100% and the current enrolment status, we can get net non-enrolled rates (NNER), as illustrated in Figure 2. This is essentially looking at the situation of those who are not enrolled, and represents the percentage of those children who will require special attention with specifically targeted policies and measures in order to be reached by the deadline of 2015.
Figure 1 Looking from an exclusive dimension: who are the out-of-school children?

1(a) Distribution of out-of-school children, %, 2001

1(b) Implied importance of the impact of ECCE

Source: GMR 2007

Figure 2 Net non-enrolled rates in primary education (%) in the Pacific, 2004

Source: GMR 2007
Expansion continues at the expense of quality

Expansion of schooling has often occurred at the expense of quality around the world and this continues to be the case, particularly in East Asia, where many children may be enrolling in school today but fail to complete the cycle or reveal poor achievements in literacy and numeracy skills, with high incidence of grade repetition.

The GMR reports that, on the whole, the median of survival rates based on data available was below 80% for developing countries. Even in Latin America and the Caribbean, survival rates were reported to be less than 83% in the majority of the countries, despite the high level of access and school completion demonstrated. Less than two-thirds of students reach the last grade in the majority of the countries of Sub-Saharan Africa and, in South and West Asia, school retention remains low in several of the countries with available data. It was only the Arab States—except Mauritania (69%), Morocco (76%) and Yemen (67%)—that had survival rates close to or above 90%.

The data on survival rates are not only an indication of the internal inefficiency of the education systems in many of the developing countries, but also provide evidence that students are not mastering the curriculum and acquiring and learning the knowledge and skills essential for their life beyond school.

Teachers are crucial to quality, yet...

EFA cannot be achieved if we do not have sufficient numbers of teachers who are qualified, well-trained and motivated. Without good quality teachers, we cannot ensure good quality education for all. Yet the GMR 2007 reports that there had been only a slight improvement in both pupil:teacher ratios (PTR) and the percentage of trained teachers during the reporting period. There continues to be a serious shortage of teachers in rural areas, in the most remote areas and for the most disadvantaged population.

The shortage of female teachers reported by many countries is a major concern as their presence is known to be crucial in promoting increased enrolment and
completion in the education of girls. This is a particular concern for countries in the two regions of Sub-Saharan Africa and South and West Asia, where the percentage of female teachers in primary education in 2004 accounted only for 45% and 44% of the total number of respectively. Numerous studies now show that an increase in the number of female teachers in these regions can have a major impact on girls’ participation, retention and achievement, so urgent measures are called for. Government efforts are needed to recruit and train more female teachers and deploy them through appropriate personnel policies that are gender and culture-sensitive.

In the Pacific, in primary education, women accounted for 60% (2004) of total primary school teachers, but some countries had less than 40%, while in Niue all the primary education teachers were female (100%). The region continues to show a rather mixed situation.

Global and regional status and trends in early childhood care and education

The GMR 2007 focuses on ECCE and attempts to make a compelling case, based on available (official) data, research and studies. It does this by presenting various arguments for investing in ECCE and highlighting its multiple benefits from the perspectives of child development, social and economic development, educational achievements, as well as human rights to ECCE. With these arguments, the GMR brings to us two key messages: (i) ECCE is a strong foundation for life and for learning, and (ii) ECCE has multiple benefits that are not limited to the early years but continue long after.

Why ECCE now?

But why ECCE now? As a way of answering this question, the GMR 2007 first reminds us that, despite the progress reported on the indicators for women and children, as well as by the EFA indicators, young children today are still living under threat.

- A child born in the developing world today has a 40% chance of living in extreme poverty.
Early childhood care and education in the Pacific

- Each year, 10.5 million under-5 children die, most of them from preventable diseases.
- High under-5 mortality rates persist in Sub-Saharan Africa and South and West Asia.
- In developing countries, 31% of children are moderately or severely stunted.
- Each day 1,800 children are infected with HIV.
- More and more children are found to be living in situations of emergency, conflict and post-conflict, making them highly vulnerable.

(PowerPoint presentation, UNESCO Bangkok)

Many of the risks could be prevented if adequate measures and actions were taken by governments in a timely manner. If no action is taken now, a huge potential and golden opportunity for reducing poverty and achieving the MDG health and education goals as well as the EFA goals will be lost.

**ECCE is a human right**

Care and education of the young child is an international obligation, not just a family affair or the concern of social workers or pre-school educators. This international obligation is enshrined in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, which is today the most widely ratified human rights treaty that commits countries to guarantee the survival, protection and care of children. Governments signing to this Convention are the first and foremost duty bearers with the responsibility to ensure the provision of adequate and quality early childhood care and education for their young children, and especially for those disadvantaged and vulnerable children, who are essentially the holders of the right to receive such care and education and to benefit from quality ECCE services.

7. In line with the GMR 2007, ‘disadvantaged and vulnerable children’ referred to in this chapter includes children with physical, emotional and learning disabilities; children in emergencies; working children in exploitative conditions; malnourished and undernourished children; street children, orphans, children in institutions; children affected by HIV/AIDS; children in linguistic, ethnic, cultural minorities and indigenous children; migrant and nomad children; and unregistered children. However, countries may define these groups of children in different ways, and may not necessarily cover all of these categories, or may include more.
ECCE is certainly important in itself; as studies have shown, the early years are critical in the formation of intelligence, personality and social behaviours. They are also the most vulnerable time, and the effects of early neglect can be cumulative. The GMR 2007 highlights the close relationship between nutrition and education, and argues that combined interventions can have a strong impact on improving the chances of participation, retention and learning achievements of a child in later education. This clearly implies that achieving EFA Goal 1 on ECCE is a necessary condition for achieving the rest of the EFA goals, having the most direct impact on the goal of achieving universal primary education.

Taking a holistic approach to ECCE

Thus, the GMR 2007 adopts a holistic definition of ECCE, whereby ECCE is understood as covering care, health and nutrition; education to support children’s survival, growth and learning; and cognitive, social, physical and emotional development. Taking this comprehensive, holistic approach draws attention to the facts that learning begins at birth and the early years continue into the initial years of primary education (hence covering the age group of 0-8 years old).

This holistic definition of ECCE also implies that ECCE is not just a right recognised in the Convention on the Rights of the Child but is also an instrument for guaranteeing other rights of children, including the right to education; the right to protection and security; cultural, political and economic rights; and the right to be free from social and economic exclusion and inequality.

From an economic point of view, many studies—mostly carried out in developed countries—have shown that investment in ECCE programmes offers a payoff in terms of human capital. The GMR 2007 cites one of the most famous studies in this respect, the High/Scope Perry study\(^8\) that was carried out in the 1960s in the United States. The study was undertaken in order to illustrate that investment in ECCE has positive economic returns and, consequently, may reduce social inequality and compensate for the vulnerability and disadvantage resulting from

---

8. ‘High/Scope Perry Preschool programme 1962-1967’: A longitudinal study that followed participants and a control group from the age of 3 and 4 through to age 40 to assess the returns to investment in ECCE. GMR 2007, p.112, Box. 5.3 for further details.
Early childhood care and education in the Pacific

poverty, as well as for discrimination stemming from gender, race, ethnicity, caste or religion. These studies have been convincing enough to lead a Nobel economics prizewinner, James Heckman, to observe that:

[I]t is a rare public policy initiative that promotes fairness and social justice and at the same time promotes productivity in the economy and in society at large. Investing in disadvantaged young children is such a policy (Heckman, 2006, cited in GMR 2007: 114).

Progress in EFA Goal 1: ECCE

Today, there are 738 million children (approximately 11% of the total world population) that belong to the 0 – 5 age group, and this number is expected to reach 776 million by 2020.

Data from 2004 show that around 124 million children were enrolled in some sort of pre-primary education programmes, either formal or non-formal. This is a 10.7% increase over the 1999 figure. In the developed countries, the gross enrolment rate (GER) for pre-primary education in 2004 was 77%, while the figure was significantly less in developing countries with only 32% GER. Here there were huge regional differences: with the highest GER of 101% in Latin America and the Caribbean and the lowest in Sub-Saharan Africa, with 12.4%. Pre-primary education has seen noticeable expansion in East Asia and the Pacific between 1980 and 1990 and in South and West Asia in the 1990s and 2000s. There was a slight decline in East Asia, mainly due to trends in China. The Central Asian countries, where enrolments in pre-primary education declined in the early 1990s, have not yet recovered.

Figure 3 shows the global trend by region in pre-primary enrolment, a clear trend of steady increase in all regions, showing that, worldwide, the number of children in pre-primary education has tripled since 1970. However, regional differences remain. Participation is still very low in Sub-Saharan Africa, South/West Asia, and the Arab States.
In the Pacific, while the regional average GER for pre-primary education (for children aged three and over) was 72%—a 14% increase from that in 1999 (at 58%)—the GERs by individual country show huge variations, ranging from countries reporting near full enrolment, such as Australia, Cook Islands, New Zealand, Niue and Tuvalu, to countries where pre-primary education figures remain considerably low, such as Fiji at 16%, Timor-Leste at 11% and Tonga at 23% (see Figure 4).

**Figure 4** Gross enrolment ratios (GER) in pre-primary education (%) in the Pacific (1999, 2004)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Timor-Leste</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>Palau</td>
<td>64</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fiji</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>Kiribati</td>
<td>68</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tonga</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>Nauru</td>
<td>71</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Solomon Islands</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>Cook Islands</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Samoa</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>New Zealand</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RMI</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>154</td>
<td>Niue</td>
<td>97</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vanuatu</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>Tuvalu</td>
<td>99</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PNG</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>102</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: *GMR 2007*
Early childhood care and education in the Pacific

When it comes to gender parity in ECCE, the gap between the sexes is small in most countries. However, gender parity in ECCE needs to be treated carefully and the statistics should not be interpreted casually; they provide no reason for celebration.

The gender gap is small because pre-primary ratios are relatively low to start with and most children enrolled are from wealthier households, where the gender factor does not always strongly influence the chances of a child enrolling in pre-primary education.

Achieving gender parity is certainly a positive sign, but it carries the risk of reducing the urgency and level of attention on achieving gender equality. The general tendency of governments in many countries, particularly in East Asia and the Pacific, is to claim that they have no more gender issues in education once gender parity is achieved. Governments are often ignorant of the fact that gender parity in terms of gross enrolment in pre-primary education tells us only that there are equal numbers of girls and boys enrolled in the programme, and nothing more. It does not tell us how many children are not enrolled, nor does it reveal the gender stereotypes in the curriculum, or in teachers’ attitudes and expectations regarding the way girls and boys learn, develop and interact, which may influence the way in which children learn to perceive gender roles in their society.

The GMR 2007 also illustrates how countries are trying to expand and improve the quality of their ECCE provisions in order to meet the first EFA goal. For example, as more studies are made on the importance of mother tongue education and its positive impact on performance in the early primary grades, several countries in the Asia Pacific region, such as Cambodia, Malaysia, Myanmar, Papua New Guinea and Vietnam, have developed effective bilingual early childhood programmes. Slightly over half of the world’s countries, and in the Asia Pacific region, 26 of the 35 countries with data, now have at least one formal ECCE programme for children under three years old. This development is accompanied by improvements in the social welfare of working mothers, as about 80% of developing countries today have some form of legally established maternity leave, though implementation may vary. In the Pacific region, however, only two countries (Australia and New
Zealand) are reported to have a statutory duration of maternity leave, despite the fact that in many of these countries more than half of the labour force is female, but there is hardly any provision for the under-3s. In East Asia, eight countries have 8 to 20 weeks legal maternity leave.

Still limited access

On the whole, despite progress documented in some parts of the world, access to ECCE is still very limited and factors affecting access are found to be multiple and complex. Many of these factors are the same as those found for the non-enrolment of children in schools, i.e. the lack of mother’s education; place of residence, with rural areas being at particular disadvantage; the absence of early childhood programmes/centres near the child’s home; and lack of birth certificates, which often results in marginalisation and discrimination of children in society. At the root of these factors lies poverty; statistics show a clear trend of higher attendance for children from richer households, compared to those from poorer households.

This is the dilemma, and a challenge that the sector continues to face, as it is the disadvantaged and vulnerable children who stand to benefit most from early childhood programmes.

ECCE, a diverse field

ECCE is found to be a diverse field, perhaps due to the very nature of its activities. It involves both public and private providers and can be formal, non-formal, and even informal. The status of policy development on ECCE varies widely across countries; some have no policy at all on early childhood, others have only a loose policy framework, and yet others have a highly comprehensive and sophisticated policy promoting holistic ECCE.

The levels of public and private provision of early childhood programmes can be seen in Table 3, based on 2004 data for 154 countries. In the Pacific, the role of the private sector in providing pre-primary education varied widely. For example, in Fiji all pre-primary education was run by private institutions, while in the Cook Islands, the Marshall Islands, Nauru and Tonga, the public sector predominated in the provision of pre-primary education, accounting for 80% or more of the total enrolment.
### Table 3 Private pre-primary enrolment as a percentage of total enrolment, 2004

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Number of countries according to % of private pre-enrolment as of total enrolment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Low</strong> (0% to 32%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sub-Saharan Africa</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arab States</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central Asia</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East Asia and the Pacific</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South and West Asia</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latin America/Caribbean</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North America/West Europe</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central and Eastern Europe</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: GMR 2007

**Issues and challenges in ECCE—a focus on the Asia / Pacific region**

It is evident that there are still many issues and challenges that need to be addressed in early childhood care and education, both at the policy level and the implementation level. The environment in which ECCE must be provided is already a major challenge in itself.

- Millions of children still live with no access to basic immunisation, clean water, adequate food and early stimulation that are needed for survival, growth and development, and ECCE coverage remains considerably lower for developing countries, with striking differences among and within the regions of Asia and the Pacific. There are large disparities in access to ECCE between the rich and the poor and between urban and rural communities.

- There is a serious lack of awareness among policy-makers that those who benefit the most from ECCE are young children who live in situations of extreme poverty, social exclusion, rural or remote areas, with mothers without education.
ECCE data collection is generally inadequate; as a result it has been difficult to monitor progress fully in developing countries, especially as providers, forms and delivery modes are so diverse.

With UPE high on the agenda for many donors, ECCE is not given priority among most donor agencies; allocations for pre-primary education are often less than 10% of the allocation for primary education. Given the limited resources available, ECCE is not a priority for many countries.

These are only some of the many challenges that ECCE faces today. The overall implication is that ECCE is not yet given the attention it deserves, despite the multiple benefits at all levels and aspects of educational, social and economic development.

**The policy neglect**

ECCE is the first goal of EFA, but it has not been the first priority for most governments. The fundamental cause of this situation is the policy neglect in ECCE, worldwide, but particularly in the Asia/Pacific region. This policy neglect can be attributed to a number of reasons, some of which are given below.

- The ECCE sector tends to respond more slowly to social and economic trends; the role of the family versus the role of the state is still very much under debate.
- Despite the diversity of the sector, few countries have a national framework or mechanism to coordinate ECCE programmes, so ECCE tends to function with fragmented plans and strategies, especially with regard to the educational and non-educational aspects of ECCE.
- Child development research results are not well known, and there is a lack of rigorous studies in developing countries.
- Government priority remains with primary education and is shifting towards secondary education in many countries in East Asia and the Pacific. International aid focuses on these education levels accordingly.
Programmes for 0 – 3 years: the neglected area

As emphasised earlier, a holistic approach to ECCE acknowledges that learning begins at birth and continues into the initial years of primary education, covering the 0 – 8 years age-group. In most countries, this wide age range is divided into three development stages of a child, namely 0 – 3 years, 3 – 6 years and 6 – 8 years, with the recognition and expectation that some form of corresponding programme and provision for each stage will be developed. However, as the GMR 2007 reveals, many countries in the Asia/Pacific region are found to have no or very few formal programmes and provisions targeting the 0 – 3 year-olds, the youngest and most vulnerable age group in early childhood. Earlier, this chapter referred to the fact that slightly over half the world’s countries today have some form of formal provisions for the under-3s as a positive development in ECCE. If we turn this argument around, it also means that nearly half of the world’s countries still do not have any formal ECCE programmes for the under-3s, as Figure 5 shows.

Figure 5 Percentage of countries with formal ECCE programmes for the under-3s

Source: GMR 2007
With a closer look at the Asia/Pacific countries, of the 35 countries with information on this, 26 countries reported having at least one formal programme targeting children under the age of three, while nine countries reported having none so far. Of the 18 Pacific Island countries, data are very limited and only two countries, Australia and New Zealand, reported having some formal programmes for the under-3s.

Table 4 Official programmes targeting children under three years old

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Countries with provision for the under-3s</th>
<th>Countries without provision for the under-3s</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>South and West Asia</td>
<td>India, Iran, Maldives, Pakistan (4)</td>
<td>Bangladesh, Bhutan, Nepal (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East Asia</td>
<td>Cambodia, China, DPRK, Indonesia, Japan, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Philippines, Korea, Singapore, Thailand, Viet Nam (12)</td>
<td>Macao, China (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pacific</td>
<td>Australia, New Zealand (2)</td>
<td>Fiji, Kiribati, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central Asia</td>
<td>Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Mongolia, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan (8)</td>
<td>Tajikistan (1)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: GMR 2007

Gender issues in ECCE

The gender issue in ECCE is a concern that continues to be neglected and understated, even in the GMR 2007 (although this is partly due to the lack of information and data needed to make a stronger case). The fact that the gender gap is small in ECCE actually creates more concern than celebration, as pointed out earlier. When a country achieves gender parity, that government is led to believe that there are no more gender issues in education—or in this case in ECCE.

If we look beyond the parity concern, it is easily observed that ECCE programmes are also often not gender-sensitive and responsive, and that gender stereotypes in the curriculum, learning materials and teachers’ attitudes and expectations continue to characterise many ECCE practices.
Gender issues in ECCE are also deeply embedded in the teaching profession, as ECCE tends to be a highly feminised profession. In most countries in the world, particularly in the Asia/Pacific region, more than 90% of the ECCE workforce is female. The feminisation of the ECCE teaching force occurs as it is a sector that is closely linked to the gender stereotyped societal value where caring for young children is traditionally associated with women as mothers; hence a general belief that female teachers are better than men in ECCE. This encourages the persistence of gender stereotypes in ECCE and gender-socialisation. Furthermore, the feminisation of a profession is often found to be linked to lower social status and remuneration of the workers engaged in the profession. This is true for ECCE workers.

The quality concern

There are a number of quality issues that need to be highlighted. One relates to teacher quality. In most developed countries in the west, two years of pre-primary education are widely offered and in some cases are either free or subsidised by the government. Children are taught by highly trained professionals, assisted by childcare workers and part-time volunteers. However, where countries have implemented policies to expand and upgrade the ECCE workforce, progress has been uneven. In developing countries, ECCE staff are poorly trained and poorly paid. Another issue concerns regulatory practices. There is a lack of regulation and minimum acceptable standards applied to providers of ECCE to ensure quality of services and provisions. Relating quality to equity, ECCE programmes in urban areas tend to have more trained teachers with better facilities and care. They are mostly private and cater for those rich families who can afford the fees.

The Way Forward

The compelling case for ECCE has been made globally and regionally with the GMR 2007. ECCE is the first goal of EFA and is also recognised as a requisite for achieving the other EFA goals, as children who have access to ECCE are more likely to enrol and stay in school, learn what is taught effectively and perform well. However, ECCE is a sector that still faces some resistance from the education sector and also, despite being the first goal of EFA, governments have a tendency
not to regard ECCE as part of basic education. With the challenges and issues identified earlier, it is high time the international community took action. The last part of this chapter suggests some critical actions that could be considered by countries.

a) Fostering strong ECCE policies
The first step in the right direction to expand and improve the quality of ECCE programmes and provisions is to foster strong and comprehensive ECCE policies that will capture the holistic and broad scope of ECCE, especially if a country is yet to have a policy on ECCE. A comprehensive ECCE policy will necessarily call for effective coordination of all stakeholders in ECCE and clearly define what early childhood means in a given country/local context. An effective and viable policy needs to state clearly the vision and missions for ECCE from a human rights perspective, and spell out a set of objectives that a government would be committed to achieve, such as:

- to provide healthcare, immunisation, feeding and nutrition
- to support parents through information-sharing and parenting education
- to create a safe environment so that young children can play and socialise with their peers
- to compensate for disadvantage and foster the resilience of vulnerable children
- to promote school readiness and prepare children for primary school
- to provide custodial care for children of working parents and for other family members
- to strengthen communities and social cohesion.

Developing the policy will also require the right political environment. Such an environment could have:

- strong political commitment and endorsement for ECCE at the top level
- multiple players in national early childhood policy grouping
- a lead agency to coordinate early childhood policies
- ECCE considered as an integral part of national development documents, such as periodic development plans and poverty reduction strategy papers.
An ECCE policy could address the following issues as policy elements:

- staffing, training and standards for all providers
- explicit provision for disadvantaged and vulnerable children
- partnerships: NGOs, the private sector and international agencies
- financing: higher spending, targeting and more aid.

Any government policy for ECCE must recognise that providing good quality ECCE is a human right of all children.

b) Finding a funding balance
In view of the limited resources available to ECCE, there is a need to find a reasonable balance, so that the limited resources can be allocated to the children in most need. ECCE is necessarily an enterprise where funding comes from both the public and private sectors. With the reality that less than 10% of public education spending goes to pre-primary education, and given the fact that even in OECD countries, parents’ share can run up to 60%, universal coverage of ECCE can only be realised if it is complemented by extra support to disadvantaged children.

Given the shortage of financial resources, governments need to introduce more targeted and prioritised strategies for funding and to expand ECCE provision by phases, as relevant and needed. Such a targeted approach to ECCE provision could be based on income or geographical location (e.g. remote areas, urban slums), or directed to specific groups, such as the disabled, ethnic minorities, girls, or those in emergency situations.

Whatever funding strategy may be adopted, the important consideration is to ensure equity of access and in the types and forms of programmes and provisions for all children and their families.

c) The quality concern
There is a need to recruit ECCE staff, retain them, and ensure better training and support for them. Some countries have started to introduce more flexible entry routes to higher education and teacher training but more measures need to be in place.
Whether the programmes are provided by the public sector or by the private sector, the government has the responsibility to develop a minimum acceptable standard applicable to all programmes, and to introduce quality regulations to all providers. Some countries in East Asia have started efforts to develop national quality standards for ECCE programmes and to assess the quality of programmes using a standardised instrument. In others, including the Pacific countries, even if quality regulations are in place, the lack of resources prevents sufficient inspection and monitoring of their enforcement.

d) Moving towards gender equality in ECCE

Gender equality must start young; early childhood is a period when perceptions of what is masculine and what is feminine take hold. Gender stereotyping can be addressed through pedagogy, teaching and play if curricula and learning materials are gender responsive and free of gender bias. Gender responsive ECCE can include, for example, a more gender balanced recruitment of teachers/care-givers. This can offer gender balanced role models for both girls and boys, challenging the assumption that the care of young children is the sole responsibility of women; men/fathers play an equally important role in bringing up children. Having more male workers and teachers in this field may also encourage more fathers to be involved in their children’s upbringing.

The availability of more gender responsive toys and having girls and boys play together is another example. If both girls and boys play with kitchenware toys, this will demonstrate to boys and girls that household work is the equal responsibility of both men and women. Such games will provide equal stimulation for both boys and girls, and will encourage the imagination and creativity without imposing any gender bias. Making ECCE programmes more gender responsive can have the additional benefit of relieving older sisters from caring for their younger siblings, a common barrier to girls’ schooling.

Gender stereotyping begins with the ECCE teachers themselves. Therefore, it is imperative to introduce gender training in all pre-service and in-service training of ECCE workers.
Gender-sensitive and responsive ECCE can thus lay a strong foundation for gender equality in later education and promote gender equality beyond education.

e) Inclusive ECCE is a must
EFA must, by definition, be inclusive and, as part of EFA, so must ECCE. The GMR, giving special attention to equity and inclusion in ECCE, repeatedly emphasises that policies and programmes to overcome exclusion in formal school settings through an inclusive approach are indispensable. The Report also implies that the impact of multiple benefits of ECCE can promote a broader concept of inclusive education from primary school onwards.

An inclusive approach to ECCE can help offset disadvantage and overcome exclusion. Inclusive ECCE means that programmes are planned to fit the children—not the other way around. They need to be child-seeking and child-friendly as well, while teacher-friendliness should not be overlooked. ECCE programmes need to take into account the mother tongue of the child, make available specific and targeted support for children needing extra assistance, ensure a child-friendly environment in the ECCE programmes, with learning and play materials that are appropriate for the child's physical and cognitive development.

f) Increased attention to the under-3s
As already mentioned, the issue of 0 – 3 year-olds is one of the key challenges in ECCE, particularly for the Pacific region. While there has been great progress in pre-primary education, access to ECCE programmes for younger children is limited in many countries in the region, which poses a challenge in meeting their basic health, nutrition, development and learning needs. There should be stronger emphasis on taking a holistic approach to ECCE in the region through effective partnerships among the different stakeholders, reminding ourselves that learning does indeed begin at birth.

g) Smoothing transition: family→ECCE→primary school
ECCE lays the foundation for successful transition to and completion of primary school. Child health and nutrition are closely linked to learning opportunities in early childhood and promotes later achievements in school and lifelong learning.
If ECCE prepares children for school, then schools also need to be ready to welcome children and facilitate the transition into primary education, and for this some suggestions are given below.

- Integrate ECCE more closely with primary school.
- Assure continuity in the curriculum.
- Recognise the role of parents and community and engage parents in school activities.
- Use the mother tongue in ECCE and continue in the early grades of primary school.
- Introduce measures to assure professional continuity between pre-primary and primary levels, through such things as joint training and equal professional status.

h) Ensuring coordination
Lastly, whatever the field may be called, the main concern should be to ensure that we are all talking about the same thing: a holistic approach to quality provision of care and education for the 0 – 8 age group. The development of a common language, name or terminology can be facilitated by having a shared vision, one that can guide us in meeting the significant challenges that ECCE faces.

And… ACTION NOW!
What is needed now is action—a compelling case for ECCE has clearly been made. The GMR concludes with a list of nine recommendations that warrant urgent policy attention and with which this chapter will also conclude.

1. Act on all goals: early childhood, literacy and primary school.
2. Act with urgency.
3. Emphasise equity and inclusion.
4. Increase public spending and focus it better.
5. Increase aid to basic education and allocate it where most needed.
6. Move ECCE up national and international agendas.
7. Increase public financing for ECCE and target it better.
8. Upgrade the ECCE workforce.
9. Improve the monitoring of ECCE.