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Education outlook for South and Southeast Asia

Education is vital for social stability and economic sustainability, and to support the most vulnerable. Universal education programmes are the most effective way to decrease inequities, alleviate poverty, and support long-term and inclusive economic growth.

School closures during the Covid-19 pandemic are threatening 30 years of progress in South and Southeast Asia. School closures have increased dropout rates and negatively impacted learning proficiency skills such as reading and writing. The acquisition of these basic skills is essential for children, and our wider economies, to flourish.

Education budgets across the regions are falling further below minimum international benchmarks, which poses serious risks. When public spending falls, financial burdens for education increasingly fall on families, and marginalized children suffer the most. But the losses are felt more widely, as the associated loss of human capital with lower spending affects countries' economic potential.

There is an urgent need to re-double investments in education to address learning losses and promote sustainable and inclusive economic growth. This should be accompanied by deliberate attempts to improve efficiency and equity, with greater focus on pre-primary education, improved data collection at decentralized service delivery levels, and exploration of innovative education including the development of digital learning.



400 billion hours
of learning lost due to
school closures in Asia.



31.8 million children
are estimated to be out of school
across South Asia.



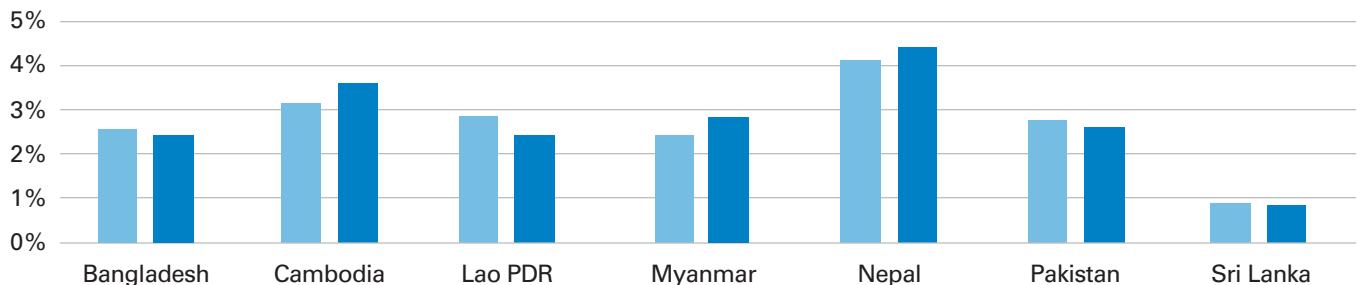
Nearly 45% of students
in half the countries in South and East
Asia still not meeting the minimum
proficiency level in reading at the end
of primary schooling.



55% of households
contribute to education spending in South Asia –
more than any other region in the world.

Education spending as a percentage of GDP (int'l benchmark 6%)

■ 2017 ■ 2021



Find out more from the EU and UNICEF's Where is the fiscal space for children? Review of social sector budgets in selected countries in South Asia, East Asia and the Pacific Islands: <https://www.unicef.org/eap/media/13231/file>

Find out more about the EU-UNICEF Public Finance Facility for South and Southeast Asia: <https://www.unicef.org/eap/eu-unicef-public-finance-facility-south-and-southeast-asia>